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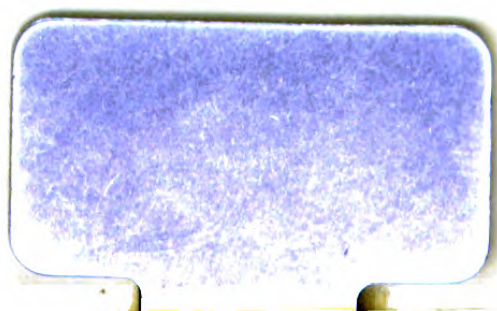
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THE
FIRST YEARS
OF CHRISTIANITY
AND
WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

By C. S.

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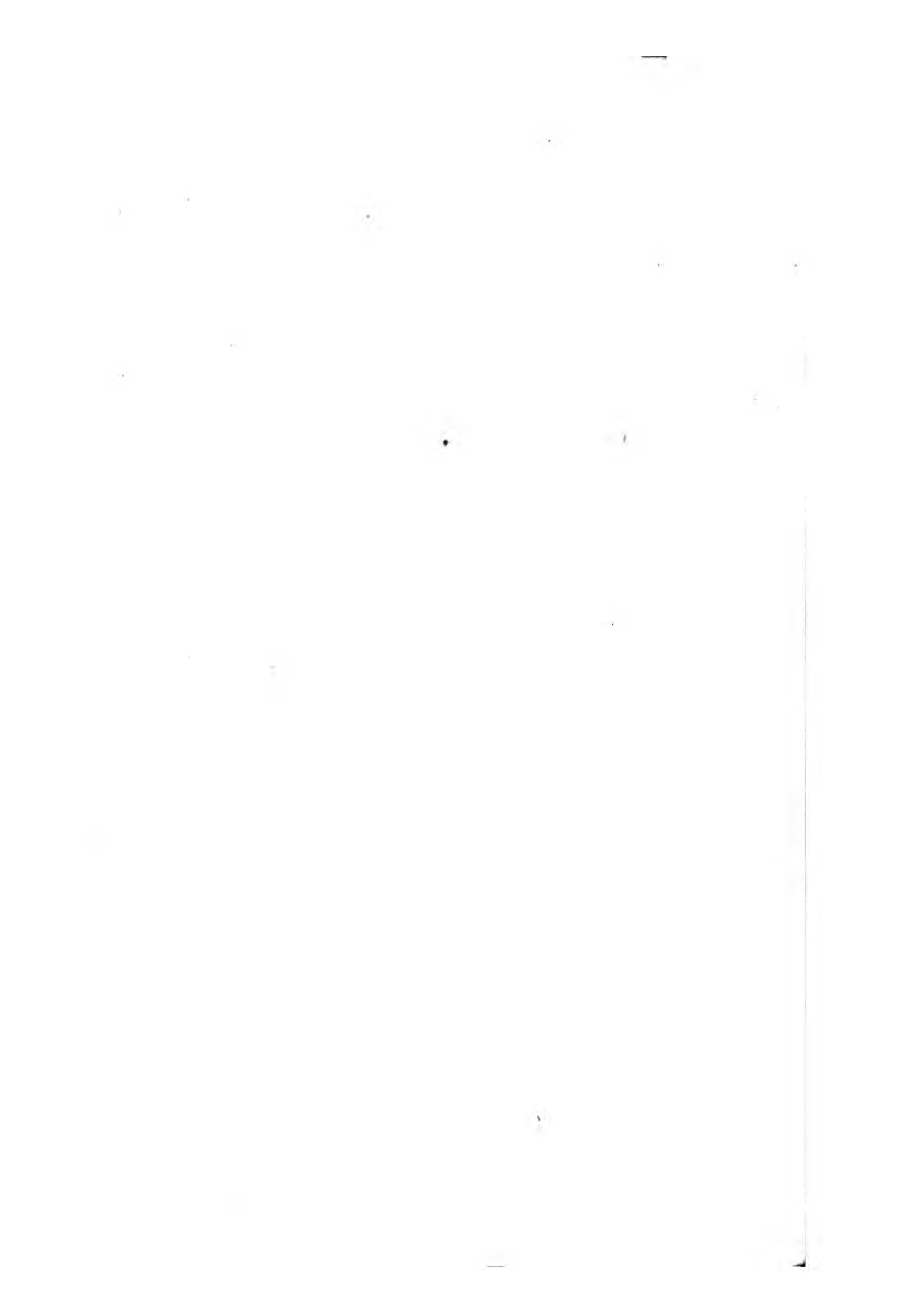
By C. S.



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THE FIRST YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY.

“THAT WHICH WAS FROM THE BEGINNING.”

FROM the holy inspired writings of John we see the vast importance of holding fast that which was from the beginning. He says, “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.”

These words do not refer to the past eternity, but the beginning of Christianity—to the manifestation of eternal life, the Incarnate Son of God in this world. If we go back to the beginning of all things, of the universe, that blessed Person was ever there. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” Distinct in Person, in eternity, yet truly God: with God, and was God. Ever *in* the beginning : never made or created ; for “all

things were made by him ; and without him was not anything made that was made." Life was not communicated to Him. "In him was life ; and the life was the light of men." (John i.)

He then created the universe, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Col. i. 16, 17.) Such is He of whom we now speak, brightness of the glory of God.

He was in His own Person the beginning of Christianity ; but Christianity did not truly begin until He died and rose from among the dead. This will be evident if we trace His wondrous history in the four gospels. He was truly man ; but oh, how different His holy sinless humanity from our sinful fallen nature. "Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke i. 35.) According to the prophecies, which holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, He was announced at His birth as the Messiah, yet as Saviour, Emmanuel, God with us. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke i.

32.) We shall find, however, that this forms no part of Christianity, and that His kingdom and earthly glory is yet future.

It is, however, important to see Him come in flesh, truly Man, and presented to Israel as the Saviour-Messiah—Jesus Christ. Let us be assured that not one jot or tittle of God's word shall fail. As the Messiah, the wise men from the east came to worship Him, "Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

But how contrary to Jewish thoughts: He came in deepest humility. See the Creator of all things laid in a manger. Yes, and we will bow with those divinely guided strangers from the east, and worship Him. Whether laid in the manger, or nailed to the cross, or seated on the throne of glory, worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou, that every knee to Thee should bow.

And when He was born, the glory could return to this earth. It was not in a palace, but in a stable, for there was no room for Thee, dear Lord, in this world's inn. This event was not made known by angels to kings or princes; but to those humble shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. It was to them the angel of the Lord came, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. Yes, to these poor fearful shepherds did the angel say, "I bring you good tidings of great joy,

which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Heaven bore witness to the birth of the Messiah: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

Born of a woman, under the law, the holy child Jesus, when the appointed day came, was presented to Jehovah in the temple. And the Holy Ghost had prepared a godly remnant to welcome Him, and own Him. "It was revealed unto him [Simeon] by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Hear the witness of this Israelite brought in by the Spirit at that very moment: "Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the eyes of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke ii. 26-32.)

But if heaven rang with praises, and the godly Simeons and the Annas gave this precious witness to the child Jesus, what a contrast in the growl of hatred from the powers of darkness. "And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her

child as soon as it was born.” (Rev. xii. 4.) The court of Herod is troubled at the tidings of the birth of the King, the Messiah. As the agent of Satan, Herod will surely seek to destroy the young child. The angel of the Lord directs the wise men to depart, and Joseph to arise and take the young child and His mother and flee into Egypt. “Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children of Bethlehem,” &c.

Such are a few of the circumstances attending this great wonder, the incarnation of the Son of God. “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.” He was the light of men. “That was the true light, which coming into the world lighteth every man.” “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.”

Behold Him “in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions,” at the age of twelve, “and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” Yet they knew Him not. Even His mother understood Him not, nor knew that He must be about His Father’s business. Nothing more is recorded by the Holy Ghost for many years of His holy life except that He was subject unto His mother and Joseph; and that He increased in wisdom and stature (or

age) and in favour with God and man. (Luke ii. 51, 52.)

And here may we be kept from all the deadly error as to His being the sin-bearer during those years, and obnoxious to the wrath of God. All this is blasphemy against the Holy One of God, whose favour ever rested upon Him. He must be shewn to be the perfect One, who knew no sin, before He could be made sin for us on the cross. This was shewn whether in the lowly place of retirement as the son of the carpenter, in sinless, perfect subjection, or, as afterwards, when presented to Israel.

Well might John the Baptist be surprised when the Son came to him to be baptised. "John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?" Yes, it was consistent for Him in deepest humiliation to identify Himself with the godly baptised remnant of Israel. We must notice, that this was John's and not Christian baptism. "And Jesus answering, said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

But had He sins to confess? Was He the sin-bearer then, bowed beneath the wrath of God? Such a thought destroys the true character of His future atonement for sins: no: "Jesus when he was baptised, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto

him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Such was He to whom John pointed and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world." He was spotless purity itself, the Lamb without blemish. The heavens were not more holy than He: they were open unto Him. The Holy Spirit of God could descend on Him. No spot or stain could the eye of God see in Him. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I AM WELL PLEASED." Blessed Jesus! may we share the delight of the Father in Thee.

The three temptations of the devil could find no response in Him. The Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is for the first time fully revealed at the baptism of Jesus, the Incarnate Son, anointed with the Holy Ghost. He is now led forth to meet the power of the devil. Let us never go forth to meet that fallen one, without the fullest dependence on the same Holy Spirit. It may be observed here, that all error is a denial, or an attack on the truth; yea, on Him who is the truth. To say that the devil is a mere evil principle, or our evil nature, would be to attack Christ, and make Him a fallen being with an evil nature like ourselves. No, the devil is clearly a real person, of great power and subtlety.

How distinctly truth is manifested in the word of God. We have the heavens opened to a man, and that man the Son, the beloved Son. The Father speaks from heaven to Him. The Spirit descends on Him. Behold the second Adam. The devil overthrew the first Adam in paradise: he has no power to overcome the last Adam in the wilderness—yes, truly man, and in grace entering into human circumstances of fasting and hunger for forty days and nights.

With a *doubt* the devil attacked the woman, and a presentation of something good to the eye. Very similar the first temptation to our Lord. "If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread." Is it possible? canst thou be the Son of God, and in such circumstances as these? so faint and hungry? Put forth Thy power, and at my bidding command these stones to be made bread. The devil pretends to seek the good of this hungry sufferer. Alas, we might have suspected no devil, and no sin behind this plausible temptation. Yes, we might say, That is a good thing, let us use our power to turn stones into bread, and thus relieve our sufferings. Mark, this was not a question of the ten commandments. The obedience of Christ consisted in only doing the Father's bidding, He must have, as the obedient man, a word from God His Father for all He did. The holy scriptures of God have now their place. Jesus answered the

devil, "*It is written*, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Yes, the devil may tempt Jesus, to meet His need by His own will and power; or to do some great thing to become popular, and to shew Himself the Son of God, at the devil's bidding: or he may present the world to Him; but "*It is written*" is the answer of the Lord to every temptation. What an amazement would Christendom be in to-day, if even every Christian was to inquire if it be written for everything he is doing. Suppose we try it, beginning on a Lord's day and look to Him, that we may do nothing for which we cannot find an "*It is written*." Now as this stands so prominent in the very opening of His ministry, let us next inquire how the Lord regarded the holy scriptures.

HOW THE LORD JESUS REGARDED THE SCRIPTURES.

WE have seen how the Lord answered the devil's common temptations entirely by the scriptures, as the word of God. And it is striking that as to similar attacks of the devil, men generally use their own reason, power, and will, and never

think of turning to the word of God for an "It is written." It is also further remarkable that in each of these cases the Lord turns to the writings of Moses, as the word of God—the very writings especially attacked by modern ignorant infidels. These far-seeing men in darkness tell us they are not the writings of Moses, but were written hundreds of years after him. Let us hear Him of whom God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" He who alone could say, "I am the truth."

To the healed leper He said, "Go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded." (Matt. viii. 4.) He appeals also to the words of Moses in the matter of divorce: "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female . . . for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh?" And what these words of Moses teach He regards as of God. "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," &c. The whole context proves that the Lord owned the words to be of, and by Moses. And the Pharisees acknowledged the truth of this, Matthew xix. 3–8. See also, Mark i. 44, "And offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." "For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother," &c. This Jesus regarded as

the commandment of God. (Mark vii. 9, 10.) To the Pharisees on another occasion He said, "What did Moses command you?" (Mark x. 3.) "Have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham," &c. (Mark xii. 26-31.) "They have Moses and the prophets If they hear not Moses and the prophets," &c. (Luke xvi. 29-31.) "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Thus Moses and all the prophets are declared to be the scriptures by the risen Son of God. "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which was written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." (Luke xxiv. 27-45.) Do we need any clearer proof than the plain teaching of Christ? "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John i. 17.) Let us agree with Philip, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write." (Ver. 45.)

Jesus constantly refers to facts recorded in the books of Moses. He says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." (John iii. 14.)

“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: *for he wrote of me.* But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John v. 45–47.) “Did not Moses give you the law? Moses therefore gave you circumcision,” &c. (John vii. 22.) Such is the uniform teaching of Christ. Thus the puerile attempt to repudiate the true authorship of Moses, or the inspiration of Moses (the law), the psalms, and the prophets—as God truly speaking to us by them—is a wicked attempt to make Jesus a liar and a deceiver. My soul, be thou found with Him, the light and life and the truth; and not lost in the wanderings of modern thought.

The teaching of the Holy Ghost, in the Acts and the epistles, is equally decisive. “For Moses truly said unto the fathers” and the words of Moses are the covenant which God made with those fathers. (Acts iii. 21–26.) “Which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

Can we say of any other writings that God hath spoken to us by those writings? No, assuredly no! This is the true sense of inspiration. God hath spoken to us in the holy scriptures—and Moses is spoken of first. “For Moses truly said unto the fathers,” &c. This is what we must understand by inspiration: God using men to convey His very words to us. What a

privilege to be thus brought into direct contact with God.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by [or in] his Son.” (Heb. i. 1, 2.) Thus all scripture was in the beginning owned as the very word of God; as such it was quoted by the Son of God; and as such was always regarded by the inspired apostles. Hearken to Paul, “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak: not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thess. ii. 4-13.) So he exhorts Timothy to continue in the things which he had learned. “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Therefore the closing words of Paul to Timothy are these, “Preach the word.” For the time would come, and now is, when they will not endure sound doctrine.

Peter also says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." It is not merely of man's ability. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man : but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter i. 20, 21.) Oh how dignified then was the Lord's answer to the devil, "IT IS WRITTEN."

Let us then beware of appealing to any authority, but to the word of God. Now, as God did not speak to us in our own tongue, it is of the utmost importance that we should have the best and most literal translation—and that we should not add, or take from, for even one word would often alter the entire sense. There can be no compromise on this question. To give up one verse, or one thought, which God has spoken to us, is to give up all, and set up ourselves as God. In no other way can we meet the attacks of the devil than by appealing by faith to "It is written," in the word of God.

It is also important to remember, that the New Testament is regarded equally as the word of God with the Old. (See 2 Pet. iii. 16 ; Rev. xxii. 18, 19.) Also Paul says to the Corinthians, "What ? came the word of God out from you ? or came it unto you only ? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that *I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.*" Where can

our souls rest with calm security amid the confusion and contradictions of these last days, if we could not go back to that which was in the beginning, to the very words of God to our souls?

To bring down the inspiration of the scriptures then, to the level of Milton, or Shakespeare, or any mere man, is to reject the revelation, which God in richest grace has been pleased to give us. Our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles quote the whole Old Testament, as the word of God. And as to themselves, the inspired writers of the New Testament, John sums up all in a few words, "We are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." (1 John v. 6.) However men may in these days of "development" reject the word of God, or treat it as a mere human imperfect book, or books, it is most certain that in the beginning every Christian received it, as it is the very word of God. If a man did not, he was not of God, but of the spirit of error. Is it not so now? By this simple test then we know, that whoever questions the divine inspiration of holy scripture, is himself assuredly in error. All this may seem a long digression, but since our only appeal will be to "It is written," how vast is the importance of being well grounded in the fact, that what is written is the sure word of God.

Now let us for a moment suppose the Bible to

be withdrawn from this world, and every ray of light borrowed from the Bible. If such a thing were possible, what would be the condition of mankind? How would you answer the thousand questions that rise in your mind? How came this world, or this universe into existence? We see in its existence proofs of infinite wisdom and power: but how came the things we see to exist?

Then what contradiction to that wisdom, and power, in the overwhelming scene of misery and death which covers the globe on which we live. How came this to be so? What could man say, except "I don't know!" What means, and what is that terrible thing we call conscience?—that terrible remorse of the human mind, for having done the things it hates, or loves, which leave such a poisoned sting? And what is the remedy, and where is it to be found? The poor dark mind could only reply, "I don't know." Will death end it? "I don't know." Is there a future after death? "I don't know." What is the future of this world even here? What is your future? On all these subjects, and thousands more, take away the holy scriptures, and man is left in total darkness. No God of love to speak to him. No Saviour from the terrible despair. No comfort, no help here, or heaven hereafter. The only thing such a man could do, would be to say, with Voltaire, "I wish I had never been born." Nevertheless, God did not leave the heathen without

a manifestation of Himself, as we learn from Romans i.

Oh young man, think of the end and aim and development of modern thought. Let it once get possession of you, and in the wretchedness of despair, as I have seen it, you may long in vain to be delivered from the poison you have imbibed in the writings of modern unbelief, which after all is not modern. No, it is as ancient as the words of the tempter, "Yea, hath God said?"

God hath spoken in His holiness, we will rejoice. Yes, He who said, Let there be light, hath spoken. What would this globe have been without light? Just what it would have been morally if God had not spoken. Oh the mighty power, oh the eternal blessedness of the word of God. I have known a dying man, by five words of Jesus, turned from a blaspheming infidel, to a happy believing child of God here, and in a few hours in heaven. Those words were, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." God grant that the reader may never reject that book of books, that treasure of all treasures. Well do I remember singing, when a youth fifty years ago—

"The word of God, the word of truth,
Instruct our childhood, guide our youth,
Uphold us through life's middle stage,
And be the comfort of our age."

Praise be to God I have found it so. No, fellow

believers, let us earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. It may possibly be asked, How am I to know what was the faith once delivered to the saints? Let us then turn to the sure word of God. May He grant us grace to reject everything concerning which we cannot, with our Jesus, say, "It is written." What is written then let us turn and see.

THE FOUR GOSPELS.

WE have already dwelt a little on the incarnation, baptism, and temptation of Jesus, the Son of God. What then is the character and teaching of the four gospels? And what is not the scope of their teaching? Four persons are used by the Holy Ghost to relate the life, words, and miracles of the incarnate Holy One. These four gospels do not present Christianity fully, but the Person and work of Jesus Christ our Lord, the foundation of Christianity. It is important to see this. Take the ministry of John the Baptist. He is the forerunner of the Messiah, and yet points Him out as the Lamb of God; and as the Lamb of God He is the foundation of all blessing. But mark, John does not say one word about the church (the assembly of God). He came as a

Jewish prophet, preaching only to the Jews, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. But not because the assembly was at hand; that great truth was not revealed to John, but "For the kingdom of God is at hand."

The kingdom of heaven, the reign of Messiah, was the burden of the Old Testament prophecies; but they never once named the church. That mystery was hid from them, and hid from John. No doubt repentance was requisite, equally for the foretold kingdom (Ezek. xxxvi.); and also, as we shall see, for the forming of the church. (Acts ii.) But what was the teaching or preaching of Christ? Most profitable would it be to study the four gospels in their distinctive character. But this would fill a volume. Whether as the righteous Jew, in Matthew; or the Servant, in Mark; or as the Son of man, in Luke; and still more wondrous, as Son of God, in John—perfect in each, perfect in the whole. If you will examine each, you will find in the first three Jesus preaches the coming kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God. He does twice name the church, or assembly, but only as a future thing, "I will build my church." (Matt. xvi., xviii.)

In the word of God everything is found in its place and time. The presence and teaching of Jesus on this earth, is the last trial of man. God who had sent His prophets, had now sent His

Son—God manifest in flesh. He came to His own people, the Jews, and His own received Him not. To them there was no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. He was truly God, yet perfect man; absolutely perfect in every relation, whether to man or to God. John says, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Oh how wondrous to have in these gospels the invisible God revealed. Surely every word demands our study with profound reverence. We cannot conceive the profit, and deep untold joy we should have in becoming more thoroughly acquainted with each gospel, in its own peculiar character.

All is pure grace, yet there is truth in every line. Man's true condition is set forth in each gospel. The presence of Jesus amongst men is like the rising of the sun on a dark world. Take just a little sample of man's need and condition as illustrated in Mark i., ii. Jesus enters a meeting-room of religious men, the synagogue of the Jews, at Capernaum. What does His presence reveal? Man under the power of an unclean spirit! The demon is in the synagogue. But here is One with power to deliver; and all that were brought to Him were healed. "And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out demons."

Then there came a poor leper to Him, the

very picture of sin in the flesh. Does He spurn him? No, with tender compassion He heals him. Then a helpless man, sick of the palsy, let down to His feet. He saw their faith; and they heard strange words from the lips of a man, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." To scribes this was blasphemy. Yes, that which man needs first, above all things, the forgiveness of sins, was blasphemy to them! But He who forgave sins had power to say, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." Whether man knows it or not, these miracles truthfully set forth man's real condition. He is under the power of demons, and cannot free himself; he is full of the leprosy of sin, and cannot heal himself; he is utterly without power to walk in the holy commandments of God; he needs forgiveness and power to walk, and there is only One can meet his manifold need, and that One is Jesus. Has He met yours? None other can.

Take one other parable, Luke xv. Man is lost. The blessed Shepherd seeks the lost until He finds: and takes the lost sheep safely home. Then the lost piece of silver is sought until it is found. This gives joy. Then the lost son comes to himself, repents in the confession of sin. But oh, the joy of the Father! His great delight to receive, forgive, clothe, bring into His own presence! The work of the Son in redemption; the work of the Holy Ghost in seeking the

redeemed ; the unspeakable joy of God the Father in receiving the redeemed sinner—what a revelation of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost !

We might dwell for ever on the life, teaching, and miracles of the Lord Jesus, as a Jew in the midst of His Jewish disciples. But the time drew near when the passover must be killed. He set His face for the last time to go up to Jerusalem. He must needs suffer and rise again, or Christianity could never begin, or the kingdom be hereafter set up.

He fully exposed the wickedness and hypocrisy of the priests and Pharisees, who were pretending to righteousness by the law. God had provided a great supper, but men made light of it, and rejected it. (Matt. xxii., xxiii.) He then spoke of the immense change close at hand. Their house was left desolate, and would be destroyed ; and Jerusalem, the future metropolis of the earth, would be destroyed, and long trampled under foot. (Luke xxi.) Very strange was all this to Jewish ears. All this implied a total change, and an entire setting aside of the ancient religion of the Jew, with all his privileges ; and all of which came to pass. He was presented to the Jewish nation for the last time in the flesh as Messiah, and utterly rejected. His last passover came. See Him sitting with His disciples, " With desire I have desired to eat this passover with

you before I suffer." After the supper He took the place of the paschal lamb. "This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. . . . This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Yes, a far greater redemption was about to be accomplished than the redemption from Egypt, which they had just commemorated. But as yet they understood not. He was about to be "reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end." (Luke xxii. 37.)

What a night was that! What words did Jesus speak to His beloved disciples. "Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father; having loved his own which were in the earth, he loved them unto the end." We must, however, remember that as yet they were only disciples, just as John had had disciples. They had been drawn to Him as a centre, and yet He was alone; they could not be members of His body, neither was that wondrous truth as yet revealed. Wondrous was the truth He had revealed to them, for He had shewn them, under the figure of the corn of wheat, that He must die or remain alone. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John xii. 24.) No words can express the importance of this great truth, that

until He should have died, been buried, and had risen from the dead, Christianity could not begin. He, until then, must remain alone. Nothing then could be more false than the error that the incarnation of Christ is salvation, or the improvement of man. His holy life and heavenly teachings could not have imparted full help to man, lost man. He must needs suffer the atoning death of the cross ; and even that death is not the *improvement* of man, but the end of man in death.

But all this was evidently utterly unknown to His disciples ; and how little known now. What God had made known by all the holy prophets was, that one like the Son of man should come in the clouds of heaven, deliver His people, and reign over the whole world. This the disciples expected just as they were. There were also other prophecies which spoke of the sufferings of Messiah ; of His bearing the sins of His people ; and of His awful death, forsaken of God. (Isa. liii. ; Ps. xxii. ; and many others.) And had not every sacrifice, with all the blood of beasts, shed from the days of Abel, pointed on to Him, the Lamb of God ? But as yet they knew not and felt not the need of this. Never had it dawned on their minds that He must bear the wrath, and be forsaken of God for their sins. And how few really know this now. Do you ?

Well, the time had come that instead of re-

ceiving the long foretold kingdom, He must suffer such treatment from man, and bear the whole weight of God's wrath against sin, as never was and never can be borne again. And thus He must be turned out of, and depart from, the world He had made.

We must then read this wondrous discourse, John xiii. to xvii., as anticipating the very period of His rejection on earth, and His presence in glory above all heavens. He knew it all, all we should need. "Clean every whit," as born of God, and as a new creation in Him; yet we have still to contend with an evil world, and the flesh in us, though reckoned dead. It is His blessed service to wash our feet, to restore our souls to communion by the word, during His absence, exalted as He is above all heavens. (John xiii.)

He knows all the sore difficulties of the path during His absence. We shall not see Him now; but we may believe in Him, as we believe in God. Could He have said this if He had been only a man? He is as truly the Object of faith as God the Father. And now, being so near His departure, He tells them that of which no man had ever heard before. He lifts up their thoughts far above the earthly kingdom of Israel, and He says, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive

you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." They do not seem to have understood this in the least. Do we? What would a place in this world be to us, if we really grasped the wondrous grace revealed to us in these words, that He who loved us, and gave Himself for us, is gone to prepare a place for us in the glory; and will come Himself for the one special purpose, to take and have us with Himself? Is this the love of that Man in the glory, at the right hand of God? Oh, child of God, canst thou say, He loved me, and is coming for me, to have me with Himself? Does He not thus say to us, "Let not your heart be troubled"? Remember, there had not been a word of all this in the Old Testament, or in His teaching, until the night of His betrayal. The nearer He approached the terrible hour of darkness and wrath, the sweeter the savour of Jesus as the meat-offering. In all things, and in every way, He was only proved to be a sweet savour to God: without spot, blameless. Holy, holy One of God. How well did He know the need of His church during the long period of His absence. Let us inquire whom did He appoint and promise to take care of her until His return?

THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

IN departing from this world, how tender Christ's care and love for the church. He says, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter [or one who shall take the entire charge of you], that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." The world, not knowing the Spirit, may appoint its emperors, kings, queens, and its high dignitaries, to take the place of head and caretaker of a church. But our blessed Lord named none of these. No, the world would persecute His church, or those who were His. In the world they should have tribulation. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." (John xiv., xv.)

And still more fully, instead of setting up the

long-promised kingdom on earth, He says, "I tell you the truth ; it is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Then He fully describes His work.

His presence will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment : " of sin, because they believe not on me." There needs no further trial of man ; the world has rejected and killed the Prince of Life. It is proved and concluded under sin.

" Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more." If the world is proved under sin, there is righteousness in heaven. The righteous Father hath received His Son.

" Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." This world's very prince and god is judged. Execution then of judgment is sure to him, and all that are his, though God's long-suffering tarries still.

Now mark the work of the Spirit during the absence of Christ. " Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth : for he shall not speak of himself ; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak : and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me : for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." Such is the infinite provision Jesus promised before He

departed from them: for the whole period of His absence. We shall see shortly how all was fulfilled. He then opens His heart to them, and tells them of His departure. (John xvi.)

Surely He felt His rejection; did He not weep over Jerusalem? Though just about to be cut off, and have nothing of his earthly kingdom and glory, He could now lift up His eyes to heaven and say, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." Though He well knew the extent of the world's rejection, yet His tender heart felt its deep joy in those whom the Father gave to Him. How much He gives them, how much He asks for them! How often He names to the Father those whom the Father had given to Him, and all on the ground of His finished work. Yes, this was His full blessed title, as man, He had finished the work which was given Him to do. "And now, O Father, glorify thou me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Yes, in the beginning, in eternity, however many myriads of ages this world may have been hung upon nothing, and rolled in space—yet, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was WITH God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning WITH God." Truly God; He WAS GOD: distinct in Person, WITH GOD; in eternity, the eternal now. Yes, immediately before He crossed the

brook Cedron to offer Himself the infinite sacrifice for sins, He could thus look up to heaven, though rejected and cut off on earth, with the righteous claim as man to be WITH God, as He had been with Him in eternity. Could any created being claim such a place? This scripture, with many others, affords absolute proof that He was very God, and truly man.

Now see Him humbling Himself, and voluntarily giving Himself up into the hands of sinful men. All power in heaven and on earth was in His hands. They were made to feel it and fall to the ground. But He who made all things, gave Himself to be bound, to be mocked, to be scourged, to be crucified. A robber was preferred to Him in whom was no fault. The wicked representative of Gentile power was compelled to say, as judge, "I find no fault in him." He was made a curse, hanging on the accursed tree, for the very people that gnashed their teeth with rage as they watched Him die.

It was in the end of the ages, every age of the trial of man, that He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb. ix. 26.) Then "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever [or in continuance], sat down on the right hand of God for by one offering he hath perfected for ever [in continuance] them that are sanctified." "Who his

own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Peter ii. 24; iii. 18.) All scripture from Genesis to Revelation bears witness to the true propitiation, the bearing and meeting the wrath of God against sin, and the true substitution of Christ for His people's sins. We need no learned and profane theory of the atonement, but with adoring hearts worship God for His great love to us in thus giving His Son to be lifted up. It is only on that cross we learn what our sin really is in the sight of God. Blessed Jesus! it was for me Thou sufferedst thus.

"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." (1 Cor. xv. 1-15.) We shall see more of this when we come to the faith held in the beginning.

Christ died for our sins, and was buried. But then all appeared to be lost. The disciples were filled with sadness. They had looked for very different things, even the redemption of Israel from the Roman yoke. The only righteous One was laid in the grave—the end of all hope for man as a child of Adam—the end of man. The only righteous Man had died the accursed death of the cross, and was laid dead in the grave. Now just suppose this were all, then every ray

of hope is extinguished. All is under death and judgment. If Christ is not risen there is no hope, and no good news possible for man. That high-day sabbath, when Jesus lay dead in the grave, was the end of Judaism, with all its sacrifices and temple service. The veil was rent; what a change !

How blessed to dwell on that resurrection morn, that first Lord's day, the first day of the week. If we may use such words, one eternity ended when He lay in the grave, the other began when He rose from the dead. Judaism was left desolate—the new creation began. Who can tell the exceeding greatness of the power of God to usward, when He raised Jesus from the dead ? (See Eph. i. 19–23.) The consequences to us of that resurrection are infinite and eternal.

We cannot but linger over the results of His resurrection, even before we go on to the forming of the church or assembly of Christ. "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise from the dead." Very blessed the instruction, whether in reference to the future kingdom as in Matthew and Mark, or as preparatory to the formation of the church as in Luke xxiv. and John xx. What a change, and the disciples knew it not. There was the proof that He had risen from the dead ; but the disciples, even Peter and John, went away to their own home.

Not so Mary Magdalene. She had already been delivered from great misery; for seven demons had been cast out of her. She has little intelligence; indeed, she seems to think He is still dead. But she lingers at the sepulchre as if He were gone: she had nothing left. There she lingered, her heart deeply attached to Jesus. And is the tender love of Jesus changed to His sheep now He is risen from the dead? He is close to the weeper, and asks, "Woman, why weepest thou? She supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus said [one word], Mary." O what a thrill of joy to that desolate heart! "She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master." He was, however, no more to be held or known as Messiah. "Touch me not." He must go to the Father to receive the kingdom and return. He sends her with the joyful news of Christianity begun.

CHRISTIANITY BEGUN.

"Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." He had wrought redemption. They were no longer merely Jewish disciples, but for the first time He calls them His

brethren. They were in the same relation to His Father and God in which He stood Himself—one with Him in resurrection. These were their true christian privileges, the true standing now of every believer, whether he knows it or not, for they knew it not. At that moment they had very sad hearts. Mary came and told the glad news. They were gathered together the same day at evening. They did not yet form the church, but they were the persons, and were together a striking figure of the church, as we shall soon see.

Being together, the doors being shut for fear of the Jews, "came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." What a picture of the assembly, as Jesus had said, "For where two or three are gathered together to my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. xviii. 20.) He had made peace by the blood of the cross—peace now flowed to them from the heart of God, from the lips of Jesus. Let us not forget this, the first word of resurrection, "Peace." This characterises Christianity—peace with God, through the finished work of Christ. "He shewed unto them his hands and his side." "It is finished," He had said, and died. "Peace unto you." He is risen from the dead. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." There could be no question as to whether it was the same Jesus. His hands and His side

proved that. If we know how much was involved in His resurrection, surely we may well be glad also. Oh blessed beginning of Christianity! First words of the risen Saviour, "Peace be unto you." Still He speaks. Do you hear Him? Do you believe Him? Are you glad?

But mark, He speaks again. "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." As His missionaries, His servants sent forth, the very first qualification is "Peace." This is a true mark of one sent of Christ, "Peace"—the peace of God, even as Jesus served and suffered in perfect peace, peace with God, and the peace of God. Thousands of ministers made by men are strangers to "peace;" but no man is a true minister of Christ without it. And as the new creation had now begun, "he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Another qualification in order to go and proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

Luke continues the inspired narrative in the Acts. Forty days did Jesus remain, shewing Himself to His chosen apostles, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, commanding them not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard from Me. They were to be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. At that time they had no idea of the church, or this

present period of grace to the Gentiles, but were looking for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He opens up quite another work for them—a work that they never fully understood or performed.

After the Holy Ghost should have come, He says, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” How little they, how little we, respond to the heart of Christ ! And now instead of setting up the kingdom in Israel, “While they beheld, he was taken up ; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” There was the cloud, emblem of the divine presence, and He was taken from them. And whilst they gazed up into heaven, two heavenly witnesses assured them that, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” Thus, if we think of Christianity as a kingdom, it is the kingdom in mystery, for the King is in heaven ; hence, Matthew calls it the kingdom of heaven.

As a kingdom, whilst the King is in heaven, there are in it both wheat and tares ; the children of God, and the children of the devil. In the kingdom is seen the work of man, and the work of Satan. But the church, the body of Christ, is quite another thing. What He builds shall stand for ever. Jesus says, “I will build MY church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

(Matt. xvi. 18.) Let us keep these two things distinct, as we now enter more fully on "That which was from the beginning." The greatest possible mistake is to presume that, that which man builds, is the same as that which Christ builds.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." Everything was now ready for the descent of the Holy Ghost, that the church might be formed. He could not be thus given until Jesus was glorified. If the church had been an earthly society, seeking salvation, it might have been formed whilst Jesus was here. But redemption must be accomplished. Jesus must be raised from the dead and received up to glory, before He, the Spirit, could be sent to form the church. People have no idea what an entirely unknown and new thing the church was. There had been for centuries Jews and Gentiles, but now a third company is formed. The disciples then were all together in one place, when a mighty rushing sound from heaven was heard in Jerusalem, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And they were all, not merely the apostles, but they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and a marvellous miracle bore witness to the presence of the Holy Ghost. They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. The Jews who came together, who were present

in Jerusalem from various nations, heard them speak in their own tongues the wonderful works of God. There was great amazement and wonder.

Peter, an unlettered fisherman, then stood up, and preached such a discourse as had never been heard on this earth. Fifty days before, this very Peter knew not the scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead. He now opens the scriptures, and preaches Jesus of Nazareth, the risen and exalted Lord, and Christ of God. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This, then, is the first great truth, according to the promise of Jesus: the Holy Ghost is now come and convicts of this dreadful sin. They believed not on Him, but crucified and killed Him, whom God had sent from heaven. He whom this world has murdered, God has raised from the dead, and made both Lord and Christ. Conviction of this terrible sin seizes their hearts, and makes them cry out, "What shall we do?"

Is the reader unconverted? Do you know that you also belong to that world which has killed and rejected the Lord Jesus, now seated at

the right hand of God? And what must they do? "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The very enemies, and murderers, must become the very disciples of Jesus, and they must fully confess this discipleship in baptism. What a complete and confessed change of mind, what self-judgment, for that is what the word translated 'repent' implies. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptised; and the same day there were added about three thousand souls." They were deeply convicted of sin, they believed, were completely changed in mind, and shewed it by being gladly baptised as the disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus, whom they had so lately rejected and murdered. All this was real matter of fact, confessed, and seen of all men. They were not ashamed to own Him Lord and Christ. Their sins were forgiven. They were gathered, and by the Holy Ghost added to, and formed the assembly of God. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and

breaking bread from house to house [or at home]; did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," or were being saved—that is, from day to day. All were added, but to what? evidently to that which the Holy Ghost was forming, not to different bodies or churches of men, but to the one only church of God.

It is important to notice the connection there was between repentance and baptism: so the Jews must have understood it. John preached, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And great multitudes went out to him, "and were baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt. iii. 1-6.) "John did baptise in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for [or unto] the remission of sins," &c. (Mark i. 4, 5.) Confession of sins was the scripture ground of forgiveness from the days of ancient Job. "He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light."* We see how this was in the end produced in Job. He says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine

* The marginal reading is still more striking: and considered more exact.

eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. And it was so." When Job was brought to that point, instead of seeking to maintain his own righteousness, he now counted himself vile, completely changed his mind, in dust and ashes. There God met him in unhindered blessing. (Job xxxiii. and xlii.)

Was not baptism the outward profession of this entire change of mind? On the day of Pentecost there was a vast multitude of Jobs, so far as seeking to maintain their own religiousness, or righteousness. With astonishment they were convicted of the greatest sin a creature is capable of. They had rejected and murdered the Holy and the Just One. See how Peter, or rather the Holy Ghost, pressed this. In chapter iii. He says, "But ye denied the Holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you: and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." And then, after shewing them that all this was what God had made known by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, he calls upon them to repent, to entirely change their minds from the mad course they were pursuing; and as many as believed and did thus change their minds were baptised, and this was the evidence, or proof, of confession of sins. In the preaching then of Peter to the Jews, repentance, baptism, and forgiveness were most

intimately connected in the name of Jesus. And they thus became the disciples of the crucified and risen Christ.

And when preaching the gospel to Jews, Mahomedans, or heathens now, these things would be the same. We could not admit the repentance of a Jew to be genuine if he refused to be baptised.

It is somewhat different in an already baptised country. There is little or no connection there between repentance and baptism. Unconverted parents, who never have repented, bring their children to be baptised, but this is confusion. They are in the nominal profession of Christendom, and as such they must be dealt with in preaching. Practically they are much like circumcised Jews. But repentance there must be, and a repentance so deep as to set aside all hopes of improvement in self. Self must be counted vile, abhorred. But then this true repentance is scarcely known. It is most probable, from the subsequent history of Peter himself, that he may not have fully understood the repentance of a Jew, and his baptism unto a DEAD and risen Christ.

The death of Christ was the complete end of Judaism. Christ had been a Jew in the flesh. But now dead and risen He was a Jew in the flesh no more. Paul shews that we know Him no more as such. But then Judaism was God's trial of man. Just so, but that trial was over in the

rejection and murder of Jesus. The whole administration of that system of law, and trial of man, was over, abolished, and in every way a new thing had come in. Yes, so new that it is spoken of as new creation. If we only understood this, we should see how strikingly the figure of baptism shews the end of man, the first man in the death of Christ.

It was most important to shew this first in Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism, and to man under law. God in grace bore with the disciples, still clinging to the temple and its service. But now the great High Priest had passed into the heavens, of what value was the temple priesthood? And now the one sacrifice, offered once, in continuance perfected the worshipper, what was the value of all the blood shed in the offerings of the law? Jesus was dead. There was the end of the ages of trial of man. The first man, under the most favourable circumstances at Jerusalem, is set aside for ever. A new order has begun—a new creation, that which had been hid in God. The one purpose of His heart was now an accomplished fact.

These were the first days of the church. What a wonderful description we have of it in Acts iv. 23–34, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with

boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all."

FIRST STATE OF THE CHURCH.

WE have seen the formation of the church or assembly; its united prayer; the place shaken where they were assembled; and all filled with the Holy Ghost. The word of God was spoken with boldness. All that believed were of one heart and soul; the apostles with great power gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all. Such was the assembly in the beginning. Alas, what a contrast now!

And yet the true heavenly character of the new assembly was not then fully, if at all, revealed. The man, who was the chosen vessel to make known the church, was not even yet converted from Judaism. This man, Saul of Tarsus, was a mad persecutor of the disciples, the great enemy of Christ. As he was on his way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,

suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven, brighter than the noon-day sun. The mad persecutor fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Amazed at these words, he said, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." What a revelation; and what a revolution in this man!

The Jesus he persecuted was the Lord of glory. But most wonderful: this Lord of glory owned every disciple, every true believer, as part of Himself. What was done to them was done to Him. This contained the mystery—stupendous fact, that every believer now on earth was one with the Lord of glory. Many years after this we find it written, "As he is so are we." How little had Saul thought, that what he did to the feeblest disciple he did to Jehovah Jesus, Lord and Christ. What a repentance, what a change of mind! Trembling and astonished, he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He was directed to Ananias, a devoted disciple in the city. Ananias was greatly afraid of this terrible persecutor. The Lord calmed his fears, and said to him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel."

Such was the effect on Saul of this revelation, that for three days he was blind and could neither

eat nor drink. His eyes were then opened, and he at once proved the reality of his repentance, or change of mind, by being baptised, and took his place with the disciples as those whose sins were washed away. The full account of his commission to preach and teach in the name of the Lord Jesus we find in Acts xxvi. 12-23.

It must be observed that, as the sample minister of Christ, he received his commission and authority to preach direct from Christ Himself: not from man, not from the church. He takes great pains, in Galatians i., to prove that this was from God. Never did he go to Jerusalem, to the apostles even, to receive authority to preach. He was only recognised by them. "When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." (Gal. ii. 9.)

It may justly be asked, if the apostles or the church never assumed to give authority to preach the gospel, or teach in the first years of Christianity, how is it that those who profess to be the successors of the apostles do so now? That is a question for them to answer. They will tell you, they have derived that power and authority to appoint and ordain those who alone shall be set apart to preach the gospel, and

administer the sacraments. And yet in the beginning there was no such power or authority in the hands of these very apostles. If there was, let it be shewn. Paul was most jealous to disown all such authority.

The subject of the christian ministry is a deeply interesting one. Does that which assumes to be that ministry now, correspond with what it was in the beginning, or is it a totally different thing? Men are now ordained or authorised by men to preach and teach. But we must honestly own, that there is nothing in the New Testament account that corresponds to this. There was the one church of God or assembly of God; and all Christians formed that one assembly. There was the church of God at Rome; but there was no church of Rome at any place but Rome. There was no distinction between the assembly in Greece, and in Italy, or Syria. There were no denominations. If you had spoken of the church of Rome, or church of England *in* Scotland, or *in* Ireland, not a man on earth would have understood you. Then, if there were no denominations or national churches of the world, there could be no ministers of such churches. Now since this is assuredly, manifestly, the case, it follows that people may be members of such human churches, and not be members of the one body of Christ at all. Quite true, you will say, no doubt millions are so at this day. Then does

it not equally follow, that men may be ministers of such churches and not even be Christians, and not ministers of Christ—in a word, that the christian ministry, and the vast denominational ministry, are two very distinct things? There is one thing perhaps above all others that marks this distinction.

The true christian ministry owned and had the guidance of the Holy Ghost where to minister. The ministry, which is of man, is solely appointed by man, and scarcely dares truly to recognise the presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost. Let us turn to the word. We will first take Peter. Christ appointed him (John xxi. 15–17) and gave him the special ministry to open the door of the kingdom to Jews and Gentiles. (Matt. xvi. 19.) As to any other appointment from men he had none. Human education, none. He was an unlettered man. (Acts iv. 13.) Could the Holy Ghost come down from heaven and use such a man? What a question! Let the preaching in the mighty power of the Holy Ghost answer (Acts ii., iii.), and how distinctly he had the guidance of the Holy Ghost. (See Acts x.)

Then let us take the ministry of Paul. Sometimes Acts xiii. 1–4 is quoted as authority for ordaining a man to be the minister, preacher, and pastor. This scripture is doubtless a most important one as to ministry in every way. It gives us the most distinct view of true christian

ministry that we could have. Here is the assembly as seen in the first years of Christianity: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers: as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen and Saul." Mark, all these were prophets and teachers. They were the chosen gifts of the ascended Lord. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Let us then take Saul. We read at his conversion that he "was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." This gave great amazement to all; but his authority to preach and the power were alike from Christ alone. Then Barnabas took him to Jerusalem, and told the apostles how he had preached at Damascus. "And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians," &c. He is then sent to Tarsus. (Acts ix. 18-30.)

Then again in the formation of the church from the Gentiles at Antioch, Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Saul: "And it came to pass that a whole year THEY assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people."

(Acts xi. 21–26.) Indeed, this scene at Antioch (chap. xiii.) is after the collection had been sent by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, and after their return. “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry,” or charge. (Chaps. xi. 30; xii. 25.) So that there is no sense whatever in quoting chapter xiii. as authority for doing the very opposite of what the Spirit did here.

Now look at the assembly gathered together at Antioch. There is no man as *the* minister of that assembly, but the prophets and teachers. *They* minister to the Lord. Where is this the case now? Is there no president? Yes, the Lord by the Holy Ghost. And where He is, there need be no other chairman or president. They so own the presence of the Holy Ghost that they have His very guidance as to the persons He appoints for a special mission. Here is the secret of the power of the first years of the church. And there is only power now, in proportion as we truly own the Holy Ghost. He is the power.

In all the great gatherings of Christians, can you tell me of one that answers to this assembly at Antioch? Is not the Holy Ghost as truly here now as then? Assuredly, but men put a man in His place, and then pray for the Holy Ghost to come!

Is it not incredible that there should be such

darkness as to quote this scripture, when men appoint a man to be *the* minister over a church? The Holy Ghost did not say, Separate me one of these teachers for this special work, but He sends two; and we see this principle throughout. And in the preachings it is Paul and Barnabas speaking boldly, though Paul was the chief speaker. (Chaps. xiii. 43-46; xiv. 12; xv. 35.) "Preaching the word of the Lord with many others also."

And after the separation of Paul and Barnabas, it is the same with other companions, Silas and Timotheus. (Chap. xvi.) And how the Holy Ghost guided their steps as to where to preach. For the time they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia; but they were guided to Europe, and from place to place. (Chap. xvi. 6-9, &c.) How distinctly also the Spirit guided Philip to join himself to the eunuch, sitting in his chariot. "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him." (See Acts viii. 26-40.) But we look in vain for a single instance of human ordination of a minister over a church to preach or to teach. It is said of Apollos, when he began to preach the gospel, "When he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace." (Acts xviii.

27.) Surely this is an important scripture for our guidance now.

But, if such was the christian ministry in the first years of the church, as seen in the Acts, and fully borne out in the epistles, where is that same true christian ministry now? It is quite true that the various divisions of modern Christendom each has its ministry. But what have all these in common with the ministry of Christ, or christian ministry, as seen in the word of God? It is high time to search the scriptures to see what is of God, and what is of man. The apostolic appointment of elders and deacons was quite another thing. These might, or might not, be the gifts of Christ to teach or preach. The elders were appointed to care for and guide the assembly in spiritual matters, and the deacons to care for the poor in temporal things. The apostles could also delegate a Timothy or a Titus, but very few would assume that we have apostles now. Let us then, in dependence on the Holy Ghost, turn to His inspired epistles, and inquire what was the church, what its ministry, and what the doctrines taught in the First Years of Christianity.

THE CHURCH, ITS MINISTRY, AND THE
DOCTRINES TAUGHT.

WE have seen in the Acts that the church, or assembly of God, as distinct from the Jew and the Gentile, and yet composed of both, began on the day of Pentecost by the descent of the Holy Ghost; and that all through the Acts, all that were converted were added to that one and only church. Every local assembly, as Jerusalem, Antioch, Thessalonica, &c., formed the one assembly of God. These were gathered *out of* the world from Judaism or heathenism—they were not of the world, but formed a new company, by the Holy Ghost. And there never had been such a company before. There had been individual believers, as Noah, Abraham, &c. There had been a nation, in a certain relation to Jehovah, as Israel. But the church was not a nation, but all the saved ones out of the nations.

What, then, is this new company thus formed by the Holy Ghost? In the Romans there is very little said on this: the church is not its theme, but the righteousness of God is the great subject of that epistle; man before God, and how God is righteous in justifying them that believe. We do however learn this, that “as we have many members in one body, and all members

have not the same office : so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (Rom. xii. 4, 5.) And then all gifts, service, and work, is in accord with this entirely new position. This "*one body*" is IN Christ—every member of the one body is in Christ.

Now this could not be, as He tells us, until the grain of wheat had died. Until His death and resurrection He must remain alone. (John xii. 24.) The believer is in Christ, who has died and for ever put away his sins, and condemned his sin; and is now risen from the dead, and ascended on high. The ONE BODY of Christ is in Christ as risen from the dead. We are to minister to one another as members of the glorified Christ in heaven. We are to walk on earth as those who are risen with, and now in Christ, on high. We shall see more of this ONE BODY in other epistles. What a subject! And yet men can despise, and even deride it. Such seem to be given up to judicial blindness.

We are also told that the mystery was kept secret since the world began. (Rom. xvi. 25.) And this is a fact, that there is not one word in the Old Testament about this "*one body in Christ*." Now it is revealed in the New Testament scriptures, we may see figures of it in the Old, as Eve was the one wife of Adam. And it would seem that since the first days of the church until

these last days, the mystery of the "*one body in Christ*" has been almost lost. And many believers even now have no idea what the church, the one body, is.

Many have a strange thought, that all sects form the one true church. But are all sects *in Christ*? Are all the millions of the Greek, Roman, and Protestant sects in Christ, risen from the dead and glorified? Are all these without condemnation, *in Christ*? No man would venture to say so.

But may there not be some individuals in all sects, or divisions, of Christendom *in Christ*? Surely this may be so. Then are not those individuals, if in Christ, justified from all things? Do not they form the *one body in Christ*? They do; that is the very thing I want to shew clearer. Thus, if the reader is *in Christ*, risen from the dead, he is a member of the one body, in Christ. But though he may be a pope, cardinal, archbishop, clergyman, or minister of any so-called church, yet if he is not in Christ risen, he has no more to say to the one body of Christ, or the true church of God, than a Mahomedan. But if that be so, it is of very little value to belong to any of the so-called churches—Greek, Roman, &c. Just so. The question is this, not are you in the Church of Rome, or the Church of England, but are you in Christ?

And it does seem to me an important question,

Does the Lord approve of my belonging to any division of Christendom? We shall find an answer to that question in 1 Corinthians i.-iii. You will notice this epistle is addressed to the true church of God, and also shews the responsibility of all who profess the name of Christ. And do not forget the test, the only test, *in Christ*.

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified IN Christ Jesus, called to be saints [or, saints by calling], with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, both theirs and ours.” (1 Cor. i. 2.) The church of God is composed, then, of those who are separated from the world, sanctified IN CHRIST JESUS; and all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus are responsible to hear. If, then, you are not sanctified in Christ Jesus, if you are not holy as in Him by calling, you have no part in the church of God, the one body, in Christ.

God permitted sectarianism to begin in those first years, so that He might speak His mind by the Holy Ghost on the subject. “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions [or schisms] among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. . . . And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto

spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ . . . for ye are yet carnal : for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and *divisions*, are ye not carnal, and walk as men ?” (1 Cor. i. 10 ; iii. 1, 3. See the whole context.) Thus we may even boast that we do the very thing that God in His word condemns. Did you never meet a man that boasted that he belonged to the Church of Rome, or of England, or some other division ? God says, I beseech you that you do not.

If we really know what the one body of Christ is, and that we are in Christ, in the one body, we really could not belong to any other body, be it Roman, or Protestant. The Lord restore this great truth to our souls more clearly. If the fact of divisions proves even Christians to be in a carnal or natural state, acting as men of the world, and forming schools of philosophy ; and, as we have seen, all this is thoroughly disapproved of by the Holy Ghost, then, for the comfort of every believer in Christ, does the same word of God settle the question—that each and all believers in Christ form the one body in Christ. To put it still a little plainer, as God disapproves of all divisions, they cannot, as supposed, form the true church, or one body in Christ. Can I, then, if I am in the risen Christ, be assured that I am a member of the one only true body of Christ ?

Let us hear the answer. “For as the body is

one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit ARE WE ALL baptized 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," &c. (1 Cor. xii. 12 to end.) If, then, you are in Christ risen and glorified, you are baptised by the Holy Ghost into the one body of Christ. This is a stupendous truth, and if known, error will drop off like autumn leaves.

Let us now pass on to the epistle to the Ephesians. In chapter i. 1-18 we have the purpose of God ; chapter i. 19 to end, and chapter ii., how that purpose has been accomplished. In chapter iii. the administration of that mystery committed to Paul ; chapter iv., the church, the body of Christ ; chapter v., the church as the bride of Christ.

But mark again how all this is limited to those only *in Christ*, to the faithful *in Christ*. (Chap. i. 1.) They are blest with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*. They were chosen *in Him* before the foundation of the world. (Ver. 4.) God predestinated them unto the adoption of children unto Himself. It was His good pleasure, His delight, to have them to Himself. In Christ, the beloved, they are brought into favour. God said, as it were, I will have them in the same favour as my beloved Son. *In Him* they have

redemption, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Yes, this was our God's eternal purpose, and such is every saint *in Christ*. God accomplished this purpose by raising up His beloved Son from among the dead, and set Him, as Son of man, the new risen Man, at His own right hand in the heavenlies. Not now as Messiah on earth, but far above all principality and power. And all this as Head over all things to the church, which is His body : "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Chap. i. 18-23.)

Then is revealed to us the riches of His grace in taking us poor sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, and, in pure love, grace, free favour, giving to us, whether Jews or Gentiles, the very same place as His beloved Son, "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*." All this is far beyond anything ever made known or promised before. Thus in the church, all distinction between Jew and Gentile was broken down ; peace was made by the blood of the cross, and peace preached to all both far and near. Oh, the depths of His mercy, the riches of His grace !

The assembly—all who are in Christ—are the true saints of God, "And 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 an holy temple in the Lord : *in*

whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Have we been raised from the dead with Christ? If not, we are not stones in this heavenly building. Thus it is nothing to be members of man's churches, but everything to be *in* Christ.

Now the administration and revelation of this mystery was given to Paul. (Chap. iii.) It was hid from ages, and never made known: "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the joint body, and partakers of his promise *in* Christ by the gospel."

This did sorely perplex the Jews, and fill them with hatred to Paul. It perplexed them, because every promise in the Old Testament, the word of God, gave them a distinct place in the time of the kingdom; the coming time of this earth's blessedness. They knew not of this period of mystery whilst their Messiah is cut off and has nothing.

Every word to them, as a nation, shall surely be fulfilled, but in its time, not now. It wounded their pride to hear that there was no distinction—that in the boundless grace of God, beyond all thought, Jew and Gentile formed the one new joint body of Christ. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the assembly the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which he purposed *in* Christ

Jesus our Lord." What must the church be in the sight of God, and in the sight of all angelic hosts! Is there any wonder that Satan should seek to deface it with all the divisions of Christendom?

Now Paul had very fully put before them what it is to be in Christ risen from the dead. Without this no soul is a member of "the one body *in* Christ." But there is another thing equally important, and without which we cannot comprehend this wondrous purpose of God. For this he prays.

Our being in Christ is evidently all of God. And it is to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ that Paul prays in Ephesians i. 17. Now he bows his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He longs that we may comprehend the subject before us: therefore he prays unto the Father, knowing the delight that the Father has in Christ and in us. He prays "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory." The glory given unto His Son, and unto us. (See John xvii. 22.) According to this glory, that we might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."

So great is this mystery, this eternal purpose

of God as to the church, that it is not enough to know what Christ has done for us, and what it is to be in Him risen from the dead, we need also to be strengthened with the Spirit, that Christ may dwell *in our hearts* by faith. We are lost in the infinity of the purpose of God. "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Oh think of this amazing place of privilege: the risen Man in the glory of God. "He is the head of the body the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." It pleased the fulness to dwell in Him. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." And we are in Him, and He dwells in our hearts by faith. And all is grounded in love, the love of Christ unclouded and unchanging, filled with all the fulness of God. Well might the apostle bend the knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that we might comprehend all this. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages"—to the ages of ages.

Such was and is the church. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Yes, every believer in Christ, in every land. He may be down in

some dark mine, or in some ship far away at sea, on a distant island, or in the centre of a continent: he may know it or not, yet it is true. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." And just as with the human body, if members of the body joined to the head, we are members one of another. What a strange mistake to suppose that all sects compose this one body. We must see that it is only those who are *in Christ*. And mark, Christ is in heaven; the church, then, His body, is not an earthly society, but joined to Him in heaven, though as to our persons we are on earth. A heavenly people on earth, but our politics are in heaven, and we are waiting for Him to come and take us there. Paul was a prisoner of the Lord for this very truth; had he circumcised the heathens who believed, and thus incorporated them with the national system of Israel, the offence of the cross would have ceased—the high priest might have become the pope.

But according to the eternal purpose of God, the church is separated from every worldly thing unto Himself. It is one, and its absolute unity excludes every imitation or competition. Is it a light matter to be treated with indifference? Paul says: "I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Mark, it is not a question of mere agreement in opinion; but

the entire state of soul: lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance. Lord, give us more of this. It is not a human organisation, but "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How important, then, to be quite sure that the unity we are seeking to keep is the unity of the Spirit. How am I to know this? What are the marks, the facts? These are the facts, the marks, the circles of unity:

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." One body excludes the idea of many christian bodies, just as one Spirit excludes the idea of many Holy Ghosts. The idea is repugnant in either case to scripture. There is one body; we have not to make it, it is formed, it exists. How this has been forgotten. This one body is the first circle. "One body in Christ," as we have seen. Then

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism." "One Lord" excludes the many lords of the heathens. "One faith" excludes all schools of mere human thought. "One baptism" excludes the many baptisms of the law. The believer professed discipleship to the one Lord, by one baptism.

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The unity of the Godhead excludes all idolatry. One Father excludes all so-called holy fathers: and what need of them? How Satan has sought, by the

help of men, to deface and to deny the unity during the dark ages of departure from the truth, as held in the first years of the church. But does not the truth remain the same? Do not the facts remain the same? We must remember that these three circles of unity refer to the true church of God as seen in the beginning.

Can the eternal purpose of God fail or change, as to the church? Can the love of Christ cease to His church? "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. v. 25-27.) If you are in Christ all this is certain to you as a member of His body, the church. Is it not most blessed? Though all unworthy in yourself, yet in Christ you are the object of the Father's love, even as Christ—the unchanging object also of the love of Christ.

Just think, you are part of Himself, member of His body, the church for which He gave Himself to die, ever applying the water of the word. He says "I come quickly." As Eve was presented to Adam, the figure of Him that was to come, so surely shall the church, the heavenly Eve, be presented to Christ.

We will now inquire a little more fully as to what was the christian ministry in the first years of the church. We know how men are educated and ordained by men now for the various churches of men. Was it so in the beginning? Assuredly not, for there were no such churches then. There was the one body of Christ, the church. And we may now look at Ephesians iv. as to the ministry Christ gave for His church. Verse 8 is a quotation from Psalm lxviii. 18. And this is the ascension of Christ as man, victorious over the enemy. Hence, in the Psalm it is, "Thou hast received gifts in the man." (Margin.) That is, Christ has received gifts as man, having accomplished redemption* and ascended up on high; so that true christian ministry dates from the ascension of Christ. That poor rebellious sinners can thus be used of Christ, is a proof of the complete efficacy of His redemption work. As man on this earth, He descended into death and the grave for us; and now, as ascended in victory over Satan and sin and death, He gave gifts in men.

Individuals are His gifts. "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." These are not the sign-gifts of the Holy Ghost; but permanent gifts for the growth and edifi-

cation of the body, the church. The apostles and prophets remain in their inspired writings, and, revelation being completed, we need no more.

There are two distinct gifts which remain, and are needed: the evangelist for the conversion of sinners, and adding to the building; and the pastor and teacher, which would mostly be the same gift, for building up, feeding, and nurturing the body of Christ as here below. These are the abiding gifts of Christ; but not for any denomination or national organisation, but "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." And not only this ministry, but that ministry was so exercised that we "speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Such then was ministry in the beginning. If a man was a gift from the ascended Christ, he was a gift for the body of Christ wherever he was. This did not hinder, but help and give opportunity for the manifestation of the Spirit, to be given to every man in the assembly used by Him. "Dividing to every man severally as he will." (Read 1 Cor. xii.) The Spirit does not now work

by the gifts of healing and miracles, which were for signs and witness in the beginning; but all that is needed for the increase and edifying of the body of Christ remains. We have seen the specimen of church order and ministry in Acts xiii. Let us then remember that the same Holy Ghost still remains to the end. He is as really present now as then, but we do not own Him—imperceptibly man takes His place, and some Christians are not ashamed to elect a president to take the very place of the Lord and of the Holy Ghost. Who can conceive the loss this is to modern Christendom. Some are so ignorant of His real presence on earth, that they pray for Him to come; others regard Him only as an influence. But who owns Him as acting here for the Lord, who is as truly present and acting by the Spirit, as if we saw Him?

It may be asked, but if confusion comes in, and many are found to speak to no profit, must we not have order, and appoint a minister over the local assembly, so as to avoid confusion? Is not all this fully anticipated? What will not man abuse? Very early in the first years this very confusion did actually come in at Corinth. Did the Holy Ghost appoint a minister over that assembly to correct the confusion? Never. No, the same order that we see in Acts xiii. 1-4 is directed to be carried out; "Let the prophets [such as speak to edification] speak two or three,

and let the other judge. . . . For ye may all prophesy one by one that all may learn, and all may be comforted," &c. And Paul regards these things which he thus writes, as "the commandments of the Lord." Now if this was the order of ministry and worship alone pleasing to the Lord, the very order He set up by the Holy Ghost in the first years, has He ever altered His mind for the church?

We must admit that episcopacy, or a man-elected minister over an assembly, is the very opposite of the order of ministry here described in the beginning. Then when afterwards did Christ set up that episcopacy, or one-man ministry? Can a single text be found for it in the New Testament? Is it not a great mistake? Is there any wonder, then, that what men call the christian ministry is leading the church to idolatry and infidelity? Can that be christian ministry which is *not* of Christ? The Lord lead us back to His word.

THE DOCTRINES TAUGHT.

We have already looked at the starting-point, THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, inspired in the full sense of God speaking to us, "Thus saith the Lord." It must be evident, then, that without this starting-point, we have no basis. If God has not spoken, all is blank uncertainty. But since

God has spoken, we need no man, or church, to tell us, that what He has said is true. What then were the doctrines taught?

Let us begin with the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. What was that death to the apostles, and the early church, as seen in their inspired writings? We read, "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." (1 Cor. xv. 3.) The more we meditate on these words, the more wonderful they seem. Think how those scriptures of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets, bring before us this great fact, that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. What victims had been offered in sacrifice, from Abel downwards to the lamb that must be killed, ere Israel could be redeemed from Egypt! There was no escape from judgment and slavery until that lamb was killed. Then what blood had to be shed to make it possible for man to be kept in relation with Jehovah in the wilderness, and in the land! There was no approach to God but by blood.

The faith of Abraham was expressed in those wonderful words, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb." Yes, Jehovah Jireh, the Lord, will see, or provide. The faith of the early church was, that the Lord hath seen to it: God hath provided His Lamb. "Behold the Lamb of God that beareth away the sin of the world." Behold the living Person of the Son of God,

God's Lamb. God has seen to man's deepest need: God has provided. The doctrine of the First Years of Christianity, all centred in Him, God's Lamb. Not man's Lamb; not man's providing, but the sent One of God. The Holy One was delivered for our offences, and was raised from the dead "for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice, all was divine certainty. The whole church of God had peace with God; and this peace was made by the very blood of Christ. "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself: by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight." (Col. i. 20-22.) Thus they HAD peace with God; and that peace was made by the blood of the cross. They had not one thing to do to make their peace with God. Jesus had made that peace by His own blood; they had been enemies, but they now were reconciled. What was the object of Jesus in dying, as to all believers? Through death to present all believers holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable in His sight.

Such was the value of the atoning death of Christ to all believers in the First Years of Christianity, and such their knowledge of God. And they had such certainty as to the value of the redemption blood of Christ, that they could so peacefully give thanks. Just hear them. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Col. i. 12-14.) Oh, what precious certainty they had in those First Years! How seldom do we see anything like it now. What a separate people they were from the dark, doubting, guilty world around them. They were meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, in whom, in Christ, they had redemption. Sins were all forgiven. Ah, it was something worth while to be a Christian in those First Years. What completeness, was it not? As it is written, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."

In those years they had a very exalted conception of the glory of the Person of the Son of God, as giving infinite value to His atoning sacrifice. "Who being the brightness of his

[God's] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." (Heb. i. 3.)

That is the starting-point in the Hebrews—the finished work. He has done the work on the cross that puts away our sins for ever. The proof of this is clear. He SITS, His work being done, on the right hand of the Majesty on high. There is very little notice taken of this in these last years. It is very important to remember this, when we think of priesthood, or of worship. God has seen to it, God has provided His Lamb. The work that puts away our sins is done. God has accepted that work, and that Person who has done it to His own right hand. What rest to the soul this gave in those First Years.

Another thing was then revealed: that whilst the offerings of the law could never rend the veil, and bring poor sinful man into the presence of God, Christ having come, by the one offering of Himself on the cross, the veil was rent; sins were purged. The way into the holiest was then opened, and all this was eternal: not for a year, but for eternity. This is all opened up to us in Hebrews ix. For this purpose He appeared "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

No person bearing the name of Christ ever thought of questioning the purpose of the atoning

sacrifice of Christ, the bearing the real judgment of God on sins. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. ix. 27, 28.) Thus the true doctrine of the First Years was this, That Christ came in the end of the world, or at the end of all the ages of the trial of man; that He undertook to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. This will be yet seen in the new heavens and the new earth, that He undertook and bore the judgment of divine wrath due to the sins of many: for this purpose He was offered, the sacrifice for sins. When He appears a second time, there will be no question of sins for those who wait for Him.

All this is abundantly confirmed and applied in the next chapter, Hebrew x. God could never be satisfied with those many sacrifices of the law which could never purge the conscience from sins. The Son of God says, "Lo I come to do thy will, O God." The Son of God came, He offered Himself once the sacrifice for sins, and then in continuance sat down on the right hand of God. Now what was the effect of this one sacrifice to all believers as revealed in the First Years of Christianity? "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." This fact is of such immense importance, that we

read further, "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us," &c. It was very blessed when men believed this witness of the Holy Ghost; that God in infinite love had sent His Son, in the body prepared for Him, that He might put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; that the Son had done this, and that as to all charge of sins against the believer, the Holy Ghost was Himself a witness, that all believers separated to God by the death of His Son, were perfected for ever, or in continuance. Ah, when men no longer believed the witness of the Holy Ghost, then they invented masses, penances, fresh sprinklings, &c., until the witness of the Holy Ghost as to the efficacy of that one sacrifice was forgotten.

Oh the folly, with such scriptures before us, of again offering sacrifices for the living and the dead, that can never take away sins. If we would enjoy peace with God, we must turn away from all these inventions of men, and go back to that which was in the beginning. What folly it is if you are in the dark, to think you must have a priest as dark as yourself, to offer a mass. There was no such priest, and no such mass in the First Years of Christianity. No, then it was distinctly understood that God said, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." As many as were in the light had fellowship with one another. They

knew the whole matter of sins was settled for ever, that the blood of God's dear Son cleansed them from all sin.

It is manifest from the very opening chapters of the history of the sons of fallen Adam, that there could be no approach to God most holy but by the death of a Substitute. Thus Abel came before God through the death of the lamb. Thus did Noah worship God as he stepped out of the ark. Thus did Abraham also through the sacrifice on his altar. Thus only could Israel be redeemed from Egypt by the death of the lamb. It must be killed and its blood sprinkled. And thus for forty years was the lesson taught in sacrifices in the wilderness: that without the shedding of blood was no remission. Yea, for fifteen hundred years this great truth was set forth in every sacrifice on the brazen altar, that death alone can put away sin. And yet all these sacrifices could not in themselves put away sins. All pointed forward to that one Sacrifice that puts away sins for ever.

In the prophets they read of a person who should be wounded for transgressions, bruised for iniquities; a Person on whom Jehovah would lay iniquities: One whom the Lord should bruise. (See Isa. liii.) That Person they distinctly taught was Jesus, the Son of God. (Acts viii.) In a word, the one only foundation of the church of God, then was that "we have redemption

through his blood, the forgiveness of sins;" and that this redemption was not for a time only, but was eternal redemption. (Col. i. 14; Heb. ix. 12.) This great foundation truth runs through the Epistles. All believers then could say, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Soon all the redeemed will be gathered around the Lamb in the midst of the throne; yea, and all angelic hosts will say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

Reader, are you quite sure you have that "redemption through his blood" here? Then you may be assured you will sing His everlasting praise there. But if not, to whom can you look for forgiveness of sins?

THE DOCTRINES TAUGHT—THE RIGHT- EOUSNESS OF GOD.

"God is love." But the question was, How could God deal with a creature like man, whose very nature was hatred and rebellion against the blessed God, who loved him even in his enmity? The law had been given to Israel for fifteen hundred years, God's righteous rule for man—a law which brought out man's rebellious nature, in open transgression. The rest of the world had been given up to their own will and lusts, they having given up God and

His truth, as set forth in His eternal power and Godhead. (Rom. i.)

The Gentile world had sunk to the lowest degradation, worshipping demons, and being led by them into every form of gross wickedness. Yet "God is love." Israel, on the other hand, was no better. With every privilege, having the oracles of God, yet they did not keep the law; and, what was far worse, so blind were they that they were seeking to attain to righteousness by that very law which God had given to manifest man's sin in open transgression.

All this may be read as the distinct teaching of the Spirit of God in Romans and Galatians. Yet "God is love." However bad man may be, and he cannot be worse than he has proved himself to be in murdering the Son of God, yet "God is love." But then God is also a holy God; and "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Rom. i. 18.)

You say, Is this a proved fact? Surely we need no greater proof than the word of God: Thus it is written. The wrath of God is a fact—wrath against sin. Let us look at one fact in proof of this—the penalty of breaking the first command to man: "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," or "dying thou shalt die." At the moment

you read this, there are not less than 3000 children of Adam within one hour of death. By sin came death, as it is written, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. v. 12.) Yes; every day of this dying death—every twenty-four hours—near 100,000 of the family of that man by whom sin entered, pass away in death, and many in great agony. Have you ever read of an infidel who escaped the doom of sin? Now if such a visible stream, such a terrible river of death and anguish flows from sin, and all along its course such suffering, and pain and anguish of mind and body, poverty, sickness, guilt, and wickedness, flowing from sin, even in this world—what may you and I expect if God deals with us, in righteous wrath, through all the ages of eternity? Can we count the number of our sins? Ah, well might He say, who bore them in His body on the tree: "They are more than the hairs of my head."

And the doctrine in the First Years of Christianity was this, that all were guilty, Jews and Gentiles—not a single exception. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Every mouth stopped; all the world guilty before God. (Rom. iii. 9-20.) And still you say, "God is love." Yes, and God from all eternity, from before the foundation of the world, has chosen a people that shall be holy,

and without blame before Him in love. Now tell me, reader, how do you expect to attain to that happiness? just tell me, how do you, a guilty sinner, hope to be able to stand before God, justified from all things, accounted righteous? Perhaps you say, "By attending a place of worship: there I am taught the law of God: indeed, it is hung up for my eyes to see it. There I am taught to keep that law. And I hope to so keep it, with the help of God, that I may at last attain to righteousness, so as to be able to enter heaven at last. Is not this the right way to heaven?" Millions expect the same as you do. It was this very way that led the Jews to reject the righteousness of God. Being ignorant of that they went about, just as now, to establish their own righteousness. See Romans ix. 31 to x. 4. Ah, those verses are dead against the fashionable religion of the whole world.

But the doctrine of the First Years of Christianity was the very opposite of all this. It was plainly this: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified IN HIS SIGHT: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. iii. 20.) Have you not found it so? How old are you—forty? And if sincere you have been trying to keep the law over thirty years, are you fit for heaven? Are you righteous *in His sight*? Are you awake? Is your conscience awake, or hardened? Look back!

Look at the present—this day! Remember, God tells you, if you break one commandment you are guilty of all. You have longed to be holy, pure, sinless; but sins, sins, sins. . . . Have you ever been overwhelmed, not able to look up? But you say, “I am eighty years of age.” Worse still, eighty years of sins instead of forty. Ah, they stare upon you now every day of your life. Not a single day have you loved God with your whole heart. And with eternity before you, and all your efforts miserable failures, is it not enough to make you gasp? The most righteous thing you and I can do is to judge ourselves guilty before God. On the ground of any righteousness of our own we are lost. Past, present, or future, we have no hope of attaining to righteousness by works of law. We are undone.

Now for our question: with the wrath of God against sin before us, as we have seen, in Adam’s transgression, and our own sins—with the absolute certainty that sin must be punished, as that stream of agony and death even in this world fully proves—how is God to be righteous in taking such ungodly sinners as we are, and declaring us justified from all things? How is His eternal love and infinite abhorrence of sin to be revealed, in perfect, consistent harmony?

What is the righteousness of God, as revealed in the First Years of Christianity? Oh the im-

portance of having again the gospel as then preached: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed." (Rom. i. 17 and context.)

This is fully explained in Romans iii. 21-26: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Mark, this is God's righteousness, apart from law, though surely witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, by faith of Jesus Christ. We thus look by faith away from ourselves, and law, and every thing else, to Jesus Christ. And what we find there, is unto all and upon all them that believe. Let us fully own that all have sinned, you, I—all, and come short of the glory of God. God points us then to Jesus Christ, as the revelation of His own righteousness, and to the work of propitiation which He has wrought. God

declares His righteousness, both for the remission of the sins of Old Testament believers, and also His, God's righteousness in justifying now "him which believeth in Jesus." This is a vital question for us. And mark it well, this is entirely of God: "Being justified freely by his grace." This is the free favour of God. By what means is God righteous in doing this, accounting the believer righteous before Him *freely*? The answer is very simple: "Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

But you say, 'sin must be punished.' We have seen this verified, as to God's government in this world, by the black river of death, and in the judgment that is to follow; but how has God dealt with all believers' sins and iniquities? If they must be judged according to all **that** God is, has that been done? This is exactly how God has both commended His love to us, and revealed His inflexible righteousness. Yes, God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son for this very purpose. And we believe God, "that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences." Oh, behold, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, once delivered for our offences. Ah, He only knew what it was to be delivered to bear that wrath of God due to sin, as God sees it; to endure the punishment according to God's holiness, and abhorrence of sin. Such was God's love to

us, that it pleased Him to bruise His Son in our stead. Yes, He who said, "Lo, I come to do thy will," sank beneath the dark billows of the wrath of God. Such was the price of our eternal redemption. And did God in righteousness accept the ransom price? This is the very thing we believe, that God raised Him from the dead "for our justification," in view of our justification, for that very purpose. So that God is our righteous justifier. Who shall condemn?

Oh, reader, reject this redemption, and you must suffer in your own person the just wrath of God against your sins, throughout an unending eternity. But now, thus believing God, we are accounted righteous before Him, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. Thus God has acted in perfect consistency with Himself and toward all created beings. The sins of the believer have been borne, and sin judged on the infinite Person of the Son of God, according to the eternal purpose of God—according to all that God is in His holiness, majesty, and love.

It was this great truth, the righteousness of God revealed—displayed by the atoning death of the Son of God, proved by His resurrection and ascension to heaven, borne witness to by the descent of the Holy Ghost—that gave absolute

peace with God, in the First Years of Christianity. And however men and demons have sought to defeat it, yet it remains the same—the only safe foundation for the sinner's soul to rest upon. There is no other foundation on which my soul can rest. God has settled every question for me in absolute righteousness, so that now we can say with certainty, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

God is thus revealed to us. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There is nothing on our part but sins—no work of our own in this matter, all is free grace. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness without works. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin." (Rom. iv. 4–8.)

Do you know God thus as your Justifier? Are you this blessed man? Not of or by any works of your own; but freely by His free favour, through the redemption you have in Christ Jesus. Now if we see the kindness of God in making all this so plain to us, and His own

righteousness in justifying us, all fear and doubt will be gone, and we shall do as they did in the First Years of Christianity, as Paul says, "We also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation." May it be so with the reader.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY.

WE shall better understand the wondrous character of the gospel of the glory, as preached in the First Years of Christianity, if we dwell briefly on the gospel of the kingdom, which preceded it, and which, when the church is gone to glory, will succeed it on earth.

In the preaching of John the Baptist, the heavens were only opened to one Person, the Son of God. He was the beloved Son, in whom the Father was well pleased. The heavens were opened to Him, and on Him the Holy Spirit could descend. (Matt. iii. 16, 17.) John's testimony was the last and greatest of the prophets to Israel. It was the axe laid to the root of the trees—to all Jewish prejudices and self-righteousness, and was a solemn call to repentance and confession of sins; and finally he announced the Messiah. There was no opening into the heavens

for sinners, but only for the one Man who came from heaven.

In the preaching also of Jesus to Israel, it was not the gospel of the glory, but of the kingdom. Several bright gleams shone forth: shall we say in the *prophetic* vision on the Mount, foreshadowing the coming glory? There were two men with Him in the glory. During His last night before His death there were wondrous words from His lips, both to the disciples and to the Father. He spake not of Jerusalem, nor this earth, nor the kingdom on the earth, but of the Father's house, the many mansions, and of His going to prepare a place for them; and He said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

And He said unto the Father, when about to be with Him, in the glory that He had with Him before the world was, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." (John xvii. 24.) Yet even after His resurrection the apostles did not understand this. They were still occupied with the promised kingdom to Israel. (Acts i. 6.)

It is also very remarkable, that during the forty days Jesus remained with them, we do not read that He spake *to them* about the church, or the gospel of the glory, "but being seen of

them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." When the Holy Ghost had come down, Jesus having ascended up into heaven, and the new company of believers having been baptised by the Holy Ghost—the church being thus formed—the preaching even then was chiefly what characterises the kingdom. Very distinctly so in Acts iii. 17–21. Peter unlocked the door, so to speak, by repentance and baptism into the kingdom of heaven—the kingdom on earth, whilst the King was away in heaven. The preaching went thus far, the apostles saying, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (Acts v. 29–31.)

As yet the preaching is limited to Israel, and to the promises made to their fathers—very much, indeed, to the kingdom to be set up on this earth. Not a word yet of the gospel of the glory. Jesus was gone up into heaven, and He would come again. But the gospel preached did not reach up to heaven opened to man.

In Acts vii. there was an immense change. Israel, in the murder of Stephen, committed their final sin as a nation, in rejecting the Holy Ghost. All is now over with them *for the present*. All is over as to restoring the kingdom to them now ;

and at the same moment the heavens are opened to man, to the believing dying Stephen. Full of the Holy Ghost, he "looked up stedfastly into heaven, AND SAW THE GLORY of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Alas, from that day they have stopped their ears.

From that moment, though the earth has rejected the Son of God, the heavens have remained open to man, to every one who believes. That day there stood near a young man, at whose feet were laid the clothes of the murderers. We shall hear of him again. That young man, Saul, was consenting unto his death; that young man was the chosen instrument to go to the nations and proclaim the gospel of the glory.

In Acts ix., xxii., xxvi. we have another most remarkable advance. This very young man, Saul, mad with persecuting rage, was on his way to Damascus, with authority from the chief priests to bring believers bound to Jerusalem. A stream of glory shines right down from heaven. He says, "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me." And he says, from that heavenly glory "I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" What amazement

seized that young man! Heaven was opened, and the glory descends, comes down to man, to man the sinner, the enemy. And that voice from heaven, from the brightness of the glory, speaks to the sinner mad with persecuting rage, and asks a question, which implies that those believers whom this young man persecutes, are one with Himself, who speaks from the glory. Astonished he asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" Who can this Lord of glory be? And he hears the wondrous reply, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Now it was from the glorified Jesus, Saul received the commission to go forth as His chosen witness and heavenly messenger, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." You will see that this was greatly in advance of all that had gone before. The gospel of the kingdom of God to be set up on this earth, most true in its time, was altogether different from this gospel of the glory and the heavenly vision. Discipleship by repentance and baptism was most prominent as the entrance into the kingdom, in John's preaching, in the Lord's also, in Matthew and Mark. But Paul was not thus sent. Indeed, as we have said, his preaching was far in advance of that

of the twelve, as seen up to Acts ix. He is sent from the vision of the heavenly glory to both Jews and Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light. It was to take out a people for heaven, from the power of Satan unto God. And what he preached was not what man *must* do, but that Christ *must* suffer, and “be the first that should rise from the dead, and should SHEW LIGHT unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” And he could say, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”

Now whilst the twelve preached Jesus as the crucified, dead, risen, and exalted Lord and Messiah, Paul at once proclaims Him the Son of God. There was now nothing more to be expected from man. It was no longer what he must do, but what Christ must have done who had appeared to him in heavenly glory. Thus he opened the scriptures : “opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” To him it was the Son of God who had thus died for him, who had been made sin for him, who had put away sins by the sacrifice of Himself, and had sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Could he doubt the perfection of that work which Christ must do, and had done ? No, He who had once been crucified for him had appeared from heaven in brightest glory—in light beyond the

Eastern noon-day sun. God had raised Him from the dead, who had been delivered for our offences, and raised Him for the very purpose of our justification. Thus he preached, and thus, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he wrote. This was his gospel of the glory. Let us hear him.

He says, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not. So that the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine forth for them Because it is the God who spoke, that out of darkness light should shine, who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. iv. 3-6. Lit. Translation.) Thus the gospel of the glory of Christ shines down from heaven on a lost and guilty world. All is darkness here. Man is darkness. Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving: he presents every form of false religion and dark superstition to hinder the rays of heavenly glory shining into the poor dark soul of man.

Has the radiancy of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ever shone into your soul? Has that risen and glorified Jesus ever spoken direct to you? Can you say, I have

heard His voice speaking to me ? What a colour the heavenly vision gave to all the preachings of Paul, that once fiery young persecutor ! When he preached forgiveness of sins to guilty sinners, it was straight from the glory. Nay, the inspired writings of Paul will be all fresh and new, and heavenly, if we read them as in the First Years of Christianity, in the warmth and brightness of the heavenly vision. They will indeed be like a river of water of life, and light from the throne of glory, of God and the Lamb. Let us remember the power of that vision of the glory which attracted Paul from everything under the sun. May it be so with us.

FACTS AND FRUITS OF PAUL'S GOSPEL.

WHAT did Paul preach ? What produced such marvellous results ? Did he preach what man must do ? Or did he preach what Christ had done ? Did he preach baptism as a means of regeneration, or of salvation ? No ; baptism had no place in the gospel he preached. (1 Cor. i. 17.) Did he preach that all men were under the law, and that they must be justified by either keeping the law, or by some one keeping it for them, any way that they must be justified on the principle of the law ? No ; we do not find such a thought.

Let us keep close to the facts—his preaching as commissioned from the heavenly vision, by the Lord Himself, and by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in his epistles. You will notice in his manner of preaching that there was not one word of what man was required to do. Men were treated as *lost*, and Paul had a message from God for them : “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” Not a word about all men being under the law and that Christ must needs keep it for them. The very Jews of the synagogue, who were seeking to be justified by keeping the law, needed an entire change of mind, repentance ; and the facts that Paul preached produced that repentance. The mass of them rejected this gospel and these facts with scorn, just as those now who say they are Jews, that is under law, and are not, will reject these facts of the gospel, which were told out in the First Years of Christianity.

Study these three facts : 1st fact, “Christ must needs have suffered.” 2nd fact, “And risen again from the dead.” And the 3rd fact, “That this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” These three facts formed the base or foundation of all Paul’s preaching. And they were not hearsay facts : he had not been taught them by others. But he had seen this very crucified Jesus

in that heavenly vision of glory above all created light.

It is no little privilege to have the true gospel thus direct from the man who received it in the heavenly vision—a man who could not be mistaken. In 1 Corinthians xv. he gives an account of the gospel he preached to them: it is as ever the same: “How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” And that others as well as himself had seen Him after His resurrection: “So we preach, and so ye believed.” If Christ was not risen, then he was a false witness, and they had believed in vain, and were still in their sins.

These were not doctrines, properly speaking, or much less theories, but simple facts. All else in the world were doctrines and theories of men. Here were facts that fully revealed the righteous character of God; that met all God's claims on the guilty sinner, and gave him the absolute assurance that all was met and settled to the glory of God; for the full glory of God shone in the face of His beloved Son, the Man who had done it all; and who declared, in the plainest terms, that all who believed God were reckoned righteous before Him. All this was clearer and brighter than the Eastern noon-day sun.

Now, is not this just what man needs to know

with certainty, so that he may have perfect peace with God, in the full radiance of His glory? Perhaps nothing has more tended to hide this clear gospel of the First Years of Christianity than the Galatian heresy, the determination to put all men under law. Not the openly giving up of Christ, but making our justification to depend partly on Christ, and partly on law. Even Peter utterly failed in this matter, and the beloved Barnabas was carried away with the dissimulation.

The Spirit of God, by the Apostle Paul, takes this ground, that since Christ "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God our Father," then to mix up the law, that is, the principle of what we ought to do to God, would be quite a different gospel from the gospel given to him. (Gal. i. 4-12.)

And Paul shews the real folly of this, for the Jews who were under the law had to give it up, "That we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by works of the law shall no flesh be justified." To do it would be to build again the things which he had destroyed. As to himself, as a responsible man once under the law, he was dead, "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ." Now a dead crucified man is not under law, but

is dead to it. He says : " Nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." " I do not frustrate the grace of God : for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

No, nothing could be more sad or foolish than the giving up the truth, as held by Paul and set forth in this epistle. It has leavened all Christendom, and brought in the utmost confusion. Sometimes the soul believes God, and then is happy ; then seeks to attain to a little more righteousness by *the law as a rule of life !* and then, is almost in despair. Where is there one who has not suffered by this confusion ? Are you perplexed, and say : " Why, I have been taught from my childhood that all men, Jews or Gentiles, were under the law, and all had transgressed it, and all were under its curse, and that even the believer is put under it again, as the rule of life ?" Yes, this is exactly what men teach now. Is it what Paul taught in the First Years of Christianity ?

As this letter to the Galatians was one of the very first of the first years, do prayerfully read on. What do you find in chapter iii. ? He tells us that Abraham was justified long before the law was given. He believed God, and *IT* (faith) was reckoned to him for righteousness. He tells us :

"*As many* as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." Then if all are now of the works of the law, all are still under the curse. He tells us that the law is not of faith. Speaking of Jews, who had been under it, he says: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He tells us that the covenant confirmed of God in Christ, which He promised to Abraham, was 430 years before the law. He explains why the law was given. It served to bring out transgressions; that it was a schoolmaster until Christ.

In chapter iv. there is the most marked distinction betwixt those under law, and those under grace: the one in bondage, the other in the liberty of sons. And under the allegory of Agar and Sarah, or Ishmael and Isaac, the two principles of law and grace cannot go on together. Ishmael must be cast out. Oh, how we, like Abraham, plead that he might live. How we struggle that the flesh under law might live, when God tells us to reckon it dead. It seems so desirable that there might be some good found in us, and the work of Christ to make up the deficiency. To take this ground is to be in bondage. Ah, you know this, though you thus cleave to and plead for Ishmael. Oh that my old "I" could live and be better. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Read every word that follows in chapter v. Remember, if you take the ground of the law, "Christ shall profit you nothing."

What solemn warnings follow, and how little heeded. The only power for a holy walk, and we need no other power, is this, the power of the Holy Ghost. And notice this mark: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Then also you find the great truth, that neither the law, circumcision, nor lawlessness, uncircumcision, availeth anything, but a new creature. A truth of the utmost importance! Man must be born wholly anew. The law only brings out the sin in his nature in open transgression. This is most fully brought out in the larger letter on this subject, the Epistle to the Romans. Oh, that we could go back to the first years, and read that epistle as the very words of God. All are proved guilty: both the Gentiles, which have not the law; and the Jews, which had the law. For until the law, that is, until the time that it was given, from Adam to Moses, sin was in the world, though not reckoned as transgression.

And there is no thought in that epistle of man being justified on the principle of law. This was impossible, since man was guilty. Why should we seek to be wiser than God? He deals with the facts of man's condition. The fact was, the Gentiles without law were guilty of the grossest sins, and the Jews under the law were no

better. So that the glad tidings could not be in any way what man was to God, for he was only guilty and under judgment, and had no strength to be better. God could not be righteous then in justifying the guilty on the principle of law.

Then shone out the righteousness of God in justifying the sinner, entirely apart from law, exactly as Paul had received the gospel of the heavenly vision. Jesus must suffer the atoning death of the cross. He must die for our sins. He must be delivered for our offences, whether Jews or Gentiles. He must rise again—yes, God raised Him again for our justification. Now what had the law to do with this, or to say to this, except in the types of the sacrifices? You will thus see that both the righteousness of God in justifying, and our eternal salvation, rest not on what we must do, or law: but solely on what Jesus must do, and what He has done—done once for all, never to be repeated.

For God, who raised Him from the dead, had been glorified by His death and suffering wrath for our sins. So that God could in perfect righteousness raise Him from the dead, for the express purpose of our justification. And as the work of Christ can never lose its value for us, we see the everlasting proof of this—Jesus in the glory. The very Jesus who took the entire responsibility of our guilt and sins, is without spot in the presence of God for us. So that we are in

the perfect righteousness of God, justified from all things, and for ever. And for ever we have peace with God. Jesus must suffer, and rise again. Jesus has suffered and risen again. This being the case, the effect of believing God in all this must be immediate forgiveness, and justification from all things. Such always was the case in the First Years of Christianity. And why not now? Repeat this verse until God give you to rest in the certainty of His word: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

THE EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL.

WE have dwelt on the facts of the Gospel in Acts xvii., so very contrary to all human plans and theology. As Paul opened the scriptures, it was not to shew what man must do, as in the law of old, but what Christ must needs do: that Christ must needs suffer, and rise again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom he preached is Christ. Let us now see what was the effect of this singular preaching. Did you ever hear preaching of this kind—not a word about what you must do, but all about what Jesus has done?

Let us go back to those early years when Paul, fresh from the heavenly vision, having seen the

glorified Jesus, who must, and had died for his sins according to the scriptures. No doubt the certainty in his own soul carried great weight with it. He was sure he had the authority of God.

Three poor men arrive in the rich, populous, wicked heathen city of Thessalonica. They had been treated as dangerous vagabonds at another city, and were sore with stripes; and so poor and friendless they seem, that they have to labour night and day to get bread.

They had no authority from man nor from the Roman state. They were the disciples of a Man who had been executed in the most degraded and cruel manner. There was a Jews' meeting room, or synagogue, in that city in those days, in which the law of God was read. There was often speaking in that synagogue, but always teaching what man was to do to attain to righteousness; not one speaker or hearer had ever been known to attain to righteousness before God.

For three sabbath days these poor men went into that synagogue. Never had such preaching been heard in that city before. It was a strange contrast to all that had ever been heard there. It was not what they must do, as we have seen, not one word of the kind; yet it was just the thing needed. Many felt they needed salvation first, and fruits would follow. All that is said,

however, is that they believed the preaching, and consorted with Paul and Silas—a great multitude. These poor men soon had to flee for their lives as usual from the cruel hatred of the Jews, who could not endure such doctrine. They would rather seek after righteousness by their own works.

God ordered that an inspired letter was sent by these poor men to all these believers, as soon as they had heard from them. And as this is just a sample of the effect of the preaching of Paul, and others with him, in the First Years of Christianity, it is a great privilege to have such an inspired letter, shewing the immediate effects of the true gospel in those days. This assembly at Thessalonica does not seem to have had any further human help until Timothy was sent to see how they did. (1 Thess. iii. 2.)

So that all we read of are the effects of a few weeks' preaching in a heathen city, given up to demon worship. We shall also find in this letter a good outline of the teaching of the apostle to such as are saved.

The first thing that strikes one is, that all these believers are at once brought into the position of the assembly in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. This assembly was gathered out from Jews and Gentiles by these few weeks' preaching. This, as we see elsewhere, was the work of the Holy Ghost. There are no jarring

sects or parties, but the one assembly in that city, and in such a blessed relationship in the Father and in Jesus Christ. And their condition was such that Paul could give thanks to God always for them all, making mention of them in his prayers.

And what was the effect of this singular preaching as to good works? He says: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." It must be right seed that produced such fruit as this. There could be no uncertainty as to their election of God. For the gospel he preached, so different from anything ever heard before, was not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Now this is never the case where a mixture of law and grace is preached, but it is always a vague hope, and all is uncertainty. No such uncertainty accompanied the true gospel in those first years. The full assurance of salvation in the power of the Holy Ghost always leads the happy believer to long to make it known to others.

Thus, though the apostle had to leave them, yet the word of the Lord sounded out from them over a larger district than all Yorkshire. And mark another effect. These poor heathens were turned to God, from idols, "to serve the living

and the true God." Was not this wonderful? Did not God set His seal to His gospel in this marvellous result?

But were there no worldly advantages held out to these first Christians? Not a single earthly advantage, but the very opposite. It was "to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." They, as everywhere, received the word in much affliction and persecution, and with only one hope before them, the return of the Lord Jesus, the coming of the Lord. Nay, Paul himself had no other hope, as he says: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"

Oh, those first years: how different from these last days! One marked difference was this: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God," &c. Is it not generally the opposite of this now? Doctrines are believed, because certain men teach them. What should we think of a child, if a father sent him a letter, and he said, "I will believe it if the servants say it is so"?

Let it not be supposed from the gospel preached—of salvation entirely through what Christ had done—that when these hearers were

born again, were saved, were justified for ever from all things, that they were not then taught to walk as children of God. No, Paul says: "As ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." As he says elsewhere: "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works," &c. (Titus iii. 8.) The order is this: first, the grace of God bringeth salvation to all men; secondly, this teaches us to lead a holy life; and thirdly, to look for the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord. See Titus ii. 11, 12, 13. How simple this was in the first years.

Such was the order, and such the effect in Thessalonica. First, the free sovereign favour of God, bringing salvation; all accomplished by Christ, not a word of doing or law-keeping. Secondly, they were, when saved, exhorted to walk worthy of God, who hath called them unto His kingdom and glory. And thirdly, they were separated to God to wait for Jesus from heaven. And the power of the truth was so great that it spread in all directions.

The more we study this epistle to these young converts from Jews and Gentiles, the more wonderful we see the effects of the gospel Paul

preached. Just a few weeks' preaching, and a multitude of believers was the result, and every one of them in holy separation to Christ. Is there any town or city now on this earth, that answers to this? With all the vast machinery and privileges of these last days, can we find even a village where ALL the believers are separated, gathered to Christ; with no sect or party in it, but all under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, all enjoying the full assurance of faith, all waiting for Jesus from heaven? Where shall we look for the Christianity of these first years? How many cities may be found where there is not one believer really separated to the name and Person of Christ, and not one really waiting for Him from heaven; where it would be difficult to find anything that really answers to the first years? We must own the truth of this.

The Holy Ghost has not left on record the manner or order of their meetings for worship or teaching. We may, however, learn from Acts xvii. that soon after their conversion, Paul and his companions had to escape by night. (Ver. 10.) Neither do they seem to have had the least help from any other servants of the risen Christ, except the visit of Timothy. (1 Thess. iii. 1, 2.) Yet there were those amongst themselves "which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." And they were to esteem them very highly. And they were enabled to

edify one another. (Chap. v. 11-14.) We shall find this in keeping with other epistles we may shortly notice.

Thus though we have not an exact description of a meeting for worship and edification, yet they had both, without the arrangements of modern Christendom. And it would be a most important inquiry, to examine the Acts and the epistles, to see what we can learn as to the way in which the assemblies came together in the First Years of Christianity. Have you ever done this, beloved reader? We are so liable to take for granted that what each of us has been brought up in is the right and scriptural thing, without ever comparing it with the word of God. At present our inquiry is more connected with the effect of a full unconditional gospel such as Paul the apostle preached. We have seen the effect to be marvellous.



THE ORDER OF PREACHING, WORSHIP, AND EDIFICATION.

FIRST, as to preaching the word. This evidently varied according to circumstances. The first day, the Pentecost, was ushered in by the descent of the Holy Ghost. A vast multitude was called together by the rushing sound from heaven. The assembly of God on earth was formed by

the Holy Ghost. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spoke with miraculous power. Peter was then used to preach the crucified and risen Christ. The result is a new company is formed at Jerusalem. That company is called the church, or more properly translated, "the assembly." The word thus translated always means an assembly. It is so used to describe the nation of Israel in the wilderness. (Acts vii. 38.) It is the same word in the Greek used to describe a crowd in the theatre at Ephesus (Acts xix. 32, 39, 41), and it is properly translated assembly.

But what is this new company called "the church," or "the assembly"? That it is a new company is clear. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." (1 Cor. x. 32.)

Does this company, "the church of God," ever appear in scripture before Pentecost? (Acts ii.) Never, except in two passages, and there as a future thing. Matthew xvi. 18, xviii. 17: "I will build my church," "Tell it unto the church." Peter preached at Pentecost, but the Lord by the Holy Ghost formed this new assembly. It was not that He formed what we see now, hundreds of sects, or denominations. He did not form the Greek, or Roman, or Anglican churches, &c., but "the church of God." It is of immense interest to inquire what this was, and what it is. Did you ever do this?

It was composed of all saved persons. "The Lord added [together, or] to the church daily such as should be saved." This new company then was composed of such as should be saved. The true church of Christ was only composed of the saved, or such as were being saved. All that were saved were added together, and formed the assembly of Christ. To this agree the words of Paul, "Unto the assembly of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling," &c., and again, "Unto the assembly of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia."

Compare 1 Thessalonians i. 1, and 2 Thessalonians i. 1. Thus it is most certain that no person belonged to the church of God, in the First Years of Christianity, except the holy ones, the sanctified in Christ Jesus. Be not deceived, if this is not your case, you have no part nor lot in the church of God, be you pope, emperor, king, or bishop.

This church is also the body of Christ, "and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 22, 23.) And mark, this body is not a body of Christians organised by men. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised

into one body." (1 Cor. xii. 12.) This body, this one body, is composed of all true saved believers, and is formed by the Holy Ghost. Dear fellow believers, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Such is the church, the body of Christ. "And God hath set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healings," &c. (1 Cor. xii. 28.)

Mark, this is all of God. He set what He pleased in the church, and what He pleases still remains. Do not be too sure that what you call the church is the church of God, but search the scriptures. Only of this be sure, that if you are not saved and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, whatever other church you may belong to, you do not at present belong to the church of God.

Now as to the preaching and ministry of the word of God in the First Years of Christianity, we must notice the difference between individual responsibility to Christ, and ministry in the assembly. Individually they had the guidance of the Holy Ghost as to where they should go, as Paul in Acts xiii. He and Barnabas were sent by the Holy Ghost. And they had the fellowship of the assembly at Antioch. And we find them preaching Christ, and declaring the glad tidings at Antioch in Pisidia. Then Paul and Silas are directed to Philippi, by the river side. See the

same guidance at Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth. In Ephesus we find Paul for two years daily in the school of one Tyrannus. (Acts xix.)

So that it is evident the evangelist or teacher is responsible as guided by the Holy Ghost to preach the word wherever the Spirit opens a door for him. These should also be commended and helped on in their work by the assembly. (3 John.)

It is, however, astonishing how little we find as to the assemblies' meetings for worship and edification, that answers to modern Christendom. Suppose you look through the Acts and the Epistles, do you find anything in the least like the mass? Is there any priest to offer a sacrifice for the living or the dead? It could not possibly be, since all the worshippers were for ever perfected by the one sacrifice of Christ, and there is no more sacrifice for sin. (Heb. x. 1-18.) To break bread in remembrance of that death through which they had redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, was done by the disciples on the first day of the week. (Acts xx. 7.) To offer another sacrifice would be to deny the eternal efficacy of the one sacrifice which had been offered. Do you find the disciples ever did this?

That all true believers were worshipping priests is evident. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,

that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Heb. xiii. 15.) "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter ii. 5.)

What kind of places of worship had they? Had they churches, or chapels, or temples? Had they consecrated bells, or buildings? These abound now, but do we find a trace of such in the New Testament? Not a trace. We find them in an upper chamber in Acts xx. 8. Wherever the saints were gathered together to Christ, there was, and there only, the true church or assembly. Was it not so?

Worship was spiritual—in spirit and in truth and in the holiest. (Heb. x. 19.) This was the very immediate presence of God, the third heavens. The tabernacle or place of worship of Israel was a figure of this. There is the atmosphere; the starry heavens; and the dwelling place of God, the third heavens, the holiest. And in spirit the whole church had holy boldness there as worshippers. But as to buildings, so-called places of worship, we do not find one even in imperial Rome. Read the last chapter in the Epistle to the Romans, and all must admit that all we find are assemblies in houses. Thus the place was nothing. The Father had found worshippers to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

But when gathered to the name of the Lord

Jesus, do we find the order of worship and ministry described in the word of God ?

Concerning this matter, we find the Holy Ghost present. (Acts xiii. 1-4.) And whatever the diversity of gifts present, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." (1 Cor. xii. 7.) Mark, this is in the assembly. But no man could take the place of the Spirit of God, and no man could take the place of the Lord. But if confusion took place, did they not appoint a man as the minister over the assembly ? We never find such a thing. Confusion had come in 1 Corinthians xiv. Do we read that one man therefore must take the lead or the whole service ? No, we read, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge." Read to the end of the chapter 1 Corinthians xiv. 29-40. It is quite true that human arrangements have set all this aside. But such was the Christianity of the First Years. The presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost was a reality. And Paul says, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (Ver. 37.)

Now whatever men may set up, it is most certain that when the assembly is gathered together for worship and edification, it is the will of the Lord that there should be this holy liberty, for two or three to be used of the Holy

Ghost in ministry. Surely we have lost that deep sense of the Lord's presence which was in the assemblies in the early days of Christianity. A mere imitation, however, of this true order of ministry in the assembly, without real heart subjection to the Holy Ghost ever present, would be utterly powerless, and would soon degenerate into radicalism or self-will.

If, on the other hand, human pretensions have usurped the place of the Spirit, and human organisation has entirely displaced scriptural primitive order, let us not boast, but humble ourselves, and ever remember the apostolic commendation is to God and the word of His grace, and not to any party or denomination of men. And though Christendom has ceased to walk according to the commands of Christ, yet we are warranted in expecting to find some who desire to own Him who is the holy and the true. To such Jesus still says, "I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and HAST KEPT MY WORD, and hast not denied my name." And further, to such He says, "I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev. iii. 7-13.)

Beloved reader, is the Lord's word nothing to you? Is it quite enough for you to go on with the stream of modern profession? Is it nothing to you what name you bear in Babylon? Or,

whilst conscious of much failure, is it the desire of your heart to answer to what the Lord so graciously approves in the above scripture, indeed in all scripture ?

May the Lord use these few remarks on the First Years of Christianity to stir up our hearts, to seek to walk so as to have the testimony that what we do in these last days of Christendom may be pleasing in His sight.

Many of the readers may say : Would it not be most profitable to look into the scriptures for an answer to this question—

WHAT IS THE CHURCH ?

We will look to the Lord to enable us to do so.



WHAT IS THE CHURCH ?

THE word "church" is used in so many ways that it is difficult for many to understand what the church of God really is, as spoken of in scripture. "Feed the church of God." (Acts xx. 28.) "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." (1 Cor. x. 32.) Thus in the New Testament there are three classes on this earth: the Jewish nation, the Gentile world, and the church of God.

Do we ever find these three classes in the Old Testament? Never; neither in Moses, the Psalms, nor the prophets. Is that a fact? It is. Then what did Stephen refer to when he spake of "the church in the wilderness"? (Acts vii. 38.) If you read the context, you will see that it was the children of Israel, or the nation of Israel gathered out of Egypt in the wilderness. It was one of the two things then on earth, and not the third thing, called in the New Testament "the church of God." That is quite clear.

I should like to ask, When was it first named in scripture? It was *first* named by the Lord Jesus in Matthew xvi.; but as a future thing. He said, "Upon this rock I *will* build my

church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is generally supposed that all saved persons, all believers, from the very first, say from Abel downwards, belong to the church. Do we not read of the Jewish church ? Yes, but not in scripture. Only in the books of men who are guided by custom, and who do not examine scripture for what they say.

Then again we hear and read of the church of Rome, church of England, Wesleyan, and Presbyterian church, &c. Is this a correct way of speaking ? Well, men understand what they mean. But our Lord did not mean any of these when He said, "I will build *my* church." No, He did not say, "I will build the church of Rome," or any of the churches that men have built. If any one of these was "*the* church" that would exclude all other believers in the other churches from being saved, as "the church" is also the "one body," and also the bride of Christ. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body ; so also is Christ. 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." (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13.) "There is one body." (Eph. iv. 4.) Who are meant by those that are baptised by the one Spirit into this one body, the church of God ? "Unto the

church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." (1 Cor. i. 2.) Is it not evident from these scriptures that all true Christians form the one body of Christ, the church of God ? So that if Christ meant any of those bodies of men which claim to be the one body, the church of God ; or, to put it very plainly, if Christ meant that He would build the church of Rome, and that therefore it is the church of God, this would undoubtedly prove that all outside the church of Rome are not Christians at all.

These remarks would be equally applicable to any other church which assumed the position of being the church of God. As the church is the *one* body of Christ, you cannot be a saved Christian if you are outside that *one* body.

Would it not then be foolish work to spend our time in trying to prove which of the many churches of Christendom is the true church, since to do so would also prove that all other true Christians were not members of the body of Christ ? This is not our object, but simply to inquire what is the church, the one body of Christ, who is the Head of the body in heaven.

What is God's thought of the church ? We have already said that the church is not once

named in the Old Testament: was it, then, an afterthought of God, on the rejection of the Messiah by Israel? Far from this: we shall find that it was the first great purpose of God in giving His Son to accomplish redemption. And though this His purpose was never revealed, but kept hid for ages, yet we have most striking types of the church, the bride of Christ, in the Old Testament. We will take three of these types or pictures of the church, the bride of Christ. No doubt the Holy Spirit will teach us by these pictures, and help us to understand the New Testament scriptures better.

The first will illustrate the work of our God and Father; the second, the work of the Holy Ghost in gathering this bride; and the third will bring before us the Bridegroom Himself, and very precious details as to how the bride is redeemed and brought to Himself. We refer to Eve, Rebecca, and Ruth. Bear in mind, that we do not seek to prove the doctrine of the church by these types, but use them to help us to understand the doctrine as taught in the Acts and the Epistles.

First, then, as to Eve. In Genesis ii. we have the first Adam as a figure of Him that was to come. God placed him in paradise, the garden of Eden. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." How wonderfully this re-

veals the thought of God in eternity : His purpose that the Last Adam, now in the paradise of God, should not be alone. We then see how God formed the creatures, and brought them unto Adam, and how Adam gave them their names. But there was not a help meet for him in paradise ; not one suited to him ; not one like him ; not one of the same nature that corresponded to him. The animals were with him in paradise, companions we may say ; but there was no real correspondence. No creature was of his nature meet for him ; no creature meet to be ONE with Adam.

Mark, this was absolutely the case until "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept : and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof ; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man." It is quite true we could not have seen this hidden type of Christ and the church, if the Holy Ghost had not revealed it in Ephesians v. 30. Now all is clear.

There was no Eve until Adam had been laid in the figure of death : the deep sleep. Until then he was alone, though in the midst of all creation. The Lord Jesus tells us the very same thing : speaking of Himself, He says : " Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone :

but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John xii. 24.) He was there with His disciples, or in heaven in the midst of angelic hosts ; but, as to His nature, He was and must be for ever alone, unless He die, and be raised from the dead.

The moment Eve saw Adam she was like him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. It will be so with the second Eve, the *one* bride of Christ: when she shall be presented to Him she will be glorious; yea, the moment we see Him, we shall be like Him. (Eph. v. 26 ; 1 John iii. 2.) There was no Eve until Adam in figure died and rose again. Then she corresponded perfectly to Adam: was part of himself. There was only *one* meet to be so. And the New Testament carries all this out fully as to the church, the bride of Christ. To faith all is now sure; but the presentation in the perfect likeness of Christ has not yet come. Surely all this should prepare us to find something marvellously new and different when Christ, the last Adam had died, and had risen from the dead. And that something is new; that new creation is the church of God, one with Christ, the Head in heaven. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be *one* flesh." Thus was Eve meet to be Adam's companion and a help meet in the paradise of Eden. And all this was the work of God, according to His own purpose.

And is it so, are all believers, according to the purpose of God, made meet for the paradise of God? Yes, we can all give "thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. i. 12.) As this is the first figure of the church, it is well to note how all is of God. And this answers to Ephesians i., ii.

Just as Eve was one with Adam, blest in and with him with every blessing in the earthly paradise, it was God who thus blessed her, and thus placed her the one bride of Adam, who had been dead in figure and was alive again: all was of God—so now of all the saints of God; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. But all, all is of God. Did God raise Adam from his deep sleep? Then "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenlies. . . . And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 19-23.)

And then the same blessed God hath raised us up from the dead: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," &c. (Eph. ii. 5, 6.)

Yes, the first thought of God in giving His Son, was that He might not remain alone, the Man in the glory of the heavenly paradise; but that He should have a bride, the church, in His own perfect likeness. Sins and sin for ever passed away, she should share in His glory for ever with and like Him—having His own sinless perfection, His own very nature. Oh what will it be to be the companion of the last Adam in eternal glory, in every way corresponding to Him, as Eve to Adam! No other creature in the universe is to have or can have this place. We will next go on in our meditations to the second figure or picture of the bride of Christ. Can you, reader, recognise the hand of God (as in the picture we have looked at for a moment), in your new creation? Then dwell on the purpose of God as to your eternal future.

REBECCA. GENESIS XXII. TO XXIV.

If we turn to this inspired account, we notice that Isaac had no bride until after that remarkable event in his history, his being offered up on

the altar, and his being received in figure from the dead. It is written of Abraham, after he had offered up his only begotten son, that he accounted that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure." (Heb. xi. 19.) Until this event, until in figure Isaac was raised from the dead, we do not hear of the bride of Isaac. This in our illustration then is the foundation of all that follows. "God will provide himself a lamb."

Was not this so in the great antitype ? When God gave up His only begotten Son unto the actual death of the cross, and until that work was finished on the cross, and God had raised up His Son from the dead—until then we have not one word of the church, the bride of Christ, as an existing thing. So far then the illustration is in keeping with the New Testament account of the formation of the church.

Then, in the account in Genesis, it is after the receiving of Isaac from the dead, that Sarah dies, and is buried. It was after the death and resurrection of Jesus that the Jews were set aside and for a time buried among the nations.

But still more striking is the fact, that after the death and resurrection of Isaac, the father, Abraham, and the risen son, Isaac, send the third person, the steward of the household, from Canaan (figure of heaven) for the specific purpose of

fetching the bride, Rebecca, for Isaac the son. Could anything be more striking as a figure? It was after Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, had died, and was risen from the dead, and had ascended up to heaven, that the Father and the Son sent the Holy Ghost from heaven to this world,—the Jews having rejected the Saviour-Messiah, and all the promises to Israel for a time being set aside, buried, as it were, for the present. Oh, that this were understood. The specific object of the descent of the Holy Ghost, as we shall see when we come to the Acts and Epistles, was to form the bride, and take her to meet the Bridegroom. Let us look at this picture.

Eliezer then is a figure of the Holy Spirit come down from heaven. He comes, sent of the father, Abraham, for a bride for Isaac. He does not come for all Mesopotamia. And at this time Jesus does not ask for the whole world, but for those whom the Father hath given Him, and who will compose the bride.

Mark, he comes in pure grace, giving freely his gifts, but giving first to the bride. Like Jesus at the well, he desires a drink of water from this stranger. For the Holy Spirit, as the Shepherd, also has joy in finding the lost one. (Luke xv.) But He brings all to her: the jewel for the forehead, and the bracelets for the hands. And not as the world, He giveth all first. Such is the way of the Holy Spirit in taking of the things

that are Christ's. It is the righteousness of God *unto* all, and the jewel upon the forehead of every one that believeth, and where the righteousness of God is on the forehead, everlasting love clasps the hands. This free favour touches the heart of Rebecca. There is room enough for the camels to lodge in.

It is free favour, everlasting love, that opens the heart to Christ, and the Spirit then dwells there for ever. The heart is won for Christ. Mark this second type brings out the work of the Spirit in fetching the bride. Precious lessons for every servant of Christ. It is ours to seek this divine guidance, and when we have found it, to bow and worship. And now he brings out "Jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and **GAVE** them to Rebecca; he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things." Yes, the Gospel sent by the Holy Ghost is *giving*. Every other gospel is asking something from man, who finds he has nothing to give.

Which gospel do you hear? Giving in pure free favour, like our picture here; or asking like the law, and giving nothing? But thus the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ for the bride. The precious realities of redemption are figured by jewels of silver, and divine righteousness by the figure of gold. All is from the risen Son, the heavenly bridegroom. But when thus clothed, and made meet to be the bride of Isaac, is there

nothing more? no question of responsibility for the bride? Yes, there is the question of all questions: "Wilt thou go?" Have we heard that question? The Holy Ghost will never ask you that question until He has shewn you and given you all that makes you perfectly meet to be the bride of Christ. Ah, then your heart longs to be gone. "Yes," she said, "I will go." "And the servant took Rebecca and went his way." Yes, she is gone from all she held dear in that land of idolaters. SHE IS GONE to meet the bridegroom. She sits on the camel with her back on her former home and her face toward the bridegroom and her future home. Which way do you sit, my reader? Is your back on all you once held dear in a sinful world? Is your face toward your waiting Bridegroom and your eternal home above? The true attitude of the church is to go out to meet Him she loves. This was her first love. Yes, she turned her back on all below, to meet Him she loved. The journey was long, in dependence, at every step, on the guide who came to fetch her.

But the next event, after she left her old home, was "Isaac came," "and Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming." And to this agree the words of Jesus, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that

where I am, there ye may be also." Yes, as Isaac came out in the fields of Canaan to meditate, so Jesus is now meditating in the fields of glory. Oh that the bride may now lift up her eyes and see Him, as Rebecca lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac. May we, like her, dwell on all the Spirit has to tell us of the Man that cometh out to meet us. Oh yes, it is His delight to tell us more and more of the Man that cometh out to meet us. "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 which 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. 16, 17.)

Yes, as the call of Rebecca brings before us the work of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, to form and fetch the bride to meet and be for ever with the Lord, this lovely picture will enable us to detect all that counterfeits His blessed work.

Let us try it. Here comes a very large company, led by a wonderful person. You will find his name and character in 2 Corinthians xi. 14, and his company in verse 15. But how is this? They are all going the wrong way. They have all their backs on the coming of the Lord. They all say in their hearts, "My Lord delayeth his

coming." They are full of hatred to Rebecca, and would like to smite her. They say, "We are the church, and all that do not belong to us are damned, or shall be, both in this world and the next, so soon as we have power."

Well, they seem very much in earnest ; they seem to have an object before them. If it is not Christ coming from heaven to meet them, what is it ? Ah, if you could but get it out of them you would not forget it.

Ask one or two. Well, try this one—the Rev. So-and-so. Kindly excuse me, do you not profess to be a Christian, and this company with you, does it not bear the name of being "the church, the bride of Christ ?" "Yes, quite so. And we are the only church ; all others are heretics, and will be lost for ever." This is strange. Did not the church of Christ in the beginning go out to meet Him ? And you are going the wrong way, with your backs to the coming of the Lord, and your faces on what ?

How many would say, if they spoke up, "I have no time to think about such things as the coming of the Lord, I am seeking a good living in the world. We want possession of all Mesopotamia, and divide it into parishes for priests."

And here comes another. He might say, "I am not so foolish as to give up the world. I delight in tennis, football, and all the dancing and carousing of Mesopotamia." Poor things !

When they think of eternity, they need a good amount of what they call pleasure to make up for the awful despair of eternity.

To another, the one like an angel of light is whispering, "What, give up Mesopotamia, my beautiful world ? (2 Cor. iv. 4.) Come and join me in my politics, and let your hope be the improvement of Mesopotamia !"

Far more than this is true of that company who assume to be the only church on earth, but alas, they are travelling the wrong way. But what a test for the writer, and every reader of these lines ! Are we being led by Satan, or by the Holy Ghost ? Is the world your object, or mine ? Or is the object of our hearts the Bridegroom of the church ? Have we received the free-grace gifts of the Holy Ghost ? Christ our redemption ; Christ our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our all ? Have we been won to Christ ? Have we said, "I will go ?" What have we gone out from to meet the Lord ? Is He, the coming One, the object of our hearts ?

Before we look at our third picture, let us meditate on this question : Which way are we travelling ? If not to meet the Lord, our name is not Rebecca. In this picture then we see that the purpose of the Father, and the work of the Holy Ghost during this time, is to gather and present the bride to the risen Son. This alone is the present work of the Spirit.

RUTH.

We have looked at the creation of Eve as illustrating the purpose and work of God, in the new creation of the church, the bride of Christ.

We have also seen the work of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to form the church, the bride of Christ, in the call of Rebecca.

Now we would behold the Bridegroom-Redeemer in the Book of Ruth—the attractions of Christ, and the way the desolate stranger is drawn to Him and becomes the redeemed bride.

We get also the exercises of heart through which each soul passes, more or less, that is brought to Christ. Just as each, whether Jew or Gentile, is found dead in sins, children of wrath in Ephesians ii.—yes, each of those raised up with Christ to occupy the place of highest blessings in Him in the heavenlies—so it is in our picture. Ruth is one of a people outside, under the curse according to the law. (See Deut. xxiii. 3–6.) Just as in Ephesians ii. 12, “Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

Such is our condition by nature. Such was the position of Ruth, the Moabitess. And death was written upon her. All hope was gone as to her husband, he was dead, and his brother was dead; Elimelech their father also was dead. This is the place where grace finds her. For

from first to last "by grace ye are saved." God can use whom He pleases in that work of grace.

She who was "Naomi" (pleasing) in the land of Jehovah, has become "Mara" (bitter) when away from her God, and is stirred, for she hears of blessing when in the land of Moab far away, "how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her." Thus the work of grace begins apparently in both Ruth and Orpah. And so it is, often the work seems to begin in two persons, and they travel on together for a time. And there is the same outward love for a time to the feeble messenger of that grace. Thus it was with Orpah as well as Ruth. Orpah wept and kissed Naomi, and then went back to her demon gods. 1 Corinthians x. 20, "I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils [demons] and not to God."

How many Orpahs have we known, who once professed to have left the world, and started for the heavenly journey? Such have sacrificed themselves and their children to the worship of fashion and pleasure. Not so where there is a real work of grace: "Ruth clave unto her." She says, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," &c. There must be uncompromising decision for Christ.

Nothing could more strikingly illustrate the soul's first meeting with Christ than Ruth ii. She gleanes in the field of the bridegroom, the kinsman-redeemer. What grace he shews her! She is welcome when thirsty to drink, and at meal times to come and eat; and handfuls are dropped on purpose for her. Still she was only a gleaner. Many remain in the fields of our Boaz, happy to get blessing, and sharing those blessings with others, as Ruth did with Naomi, and never seem to reach the true ground of rest.* "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" said Naomi to Ruth.

We notice, that the only way to find rest, is to seek it at the feet of the Redeemer-kinsman, as seen in chapter iii. We must know Him as the Redeemer-Bridegroom; just as Ruth took that place at the feet of Boaz in his sleep, picture of the death of Christ. Spread thy sheltering protection over me, for thou art One that hath right to redeem. There was another relation before Boaz, and Ruth had to wait until the morning. Yes, we must be brought to the death, of the cross of Christ. But mark it is not there we find rest, the rest of redemption. If the morning of the resurrection of Christ had never broken the silence of the tomb, we could never have found

* Many more of these details may be seen in a tract, "Ruth," to be had of G. Morrish, London.

eternal rest. He must rise again, or there can be no redeemed bride. We must call attention to this point in this beautiful illustration. The church as such had no actual existence until Jesus arose from the dead. Ruth has not to glean now, but to sit still, "for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

Chapter iv. is the question who is to be your husband and redeemer ? Man, as represented in Israel, was placed under law, as the old husband. That relationship existed. The question then was, could the law bring man into resurrection-redemption ? It could not. It could go no further than the land, that is, the government of God in this world. It could not redeem the guilty. The first kinsman could not redeem Ruth, one of the accursed race, and give her a place in resurrection. Very strikingly is all this brought out in this chapter. He must relinquish all claim and pretension, "So he drew off his shoe." What he could not do, Boaz did ; he says, "Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance."

In like manner, what the law could not do Christ has done ; as it is written, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church," &c. Oh what

love was this, the eternal Son, the creator of all things, to humble Himself so low as to become the Redeemer-kinsman of poor lost sinners under the curse of sin, to pay the purchase of their redemption ; and, as risen from the dead, to take them into everlasting oneness with Himself as His body and His bride.

Very briefly let us now see how all these pictures or types of the church have been fulfilled in the church, the bride of Christ. In Ephesians we see the church as the workmanship of God, according to His own purpose, which answered to the creation of Eve. God raised Christ from the dead. The new creation of the church was consequent on His death and resurrection. The church is to be presented to Christ, the last Adam, and be joint heir with Him over all things in the paradise of God in the heavenlies.

Then after the death and resurrection of Christ the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven to form the church. This work of the Spirit is going on still, and will go on until that moment when the church complete is presented to Christ, as Rebecca was to Isaac. The day of Pentecost was the first day of the work of the Holy Ghost in forming the church ; and soon the last will have arrived. See the Acts for the full account of the formation of the church. And though the Satanic counterfeit goes on to Babylon's apostasy, yet the work, guidance, and care of the Holy

Spirit never ceases; and daily now, as at the beginning, such as are saved are added to the Lord, as truly as on the day of Pentecost. And as the church or assembly included all who were saved then, so now it is quite true there is no salvation outside the pale of the true church; simply for this good reason, that all that are truly saved are baptised into the one body, the church.* "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are WE ALL baptised into one body," &c. (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13.) The Holy Ghost never makes or baptises different bodies of Christians. For it is as true that there is but one body, as it is that there is one Spirit. Christ is the head of His body the church. "And there is one body." (Eph. iv. 4-6.) The Lord grant that we may hold this important truth firm to the end. For whatever is not truth is not of God, but of the father of lies.

There was one Eve, one Rebecca, one Ruth. In each figure, is only one. One bridegroom, Boaz; one redeemed bride, Ruth. There were different local assemblies, but only the one assembly, the body of Christ. All believers formed that one assembly. All believers now form the one church or assembly of God. That one assembly is about

* This is not water baptism, but by the one Spirit.

to be caught up to meet the Lord, and to be for ever with Him, and all the varied imitations of men or Satan will be left behind. The blessed hope of the church may be seen in 1 Thessalonians iv. 15-18, and the judgments that will follow in chapter v. 2, 3: "And they shall not escape." "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.)

How terrible the judgments about to be poured on apostate Christendom as revealed to us in Revelation xvii., xviii. Then, when the great harlot is for ever judged, the bride of the Lamb will be the true second Eve, the Rebecca, the Ruth. Then will be heard the voice of the great multitude in heaven, saying, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." (Rev. xix. 7, 8.) Read also the description given of her in chapter xxi. 9 to end. "Having the glory of God, and her light [or shining] was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." Such is the sure destiny of the church of God, them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling. The church of

God is composed only of such. All pretensions as to being the true church will soon be tested. May every reader of these few lines be tested now. Rest not, beloved reader, until you are quite sure you belong to the redeemed church of God—until you know that *you have* redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins. To-morrow may be too late ; the church may be gone to be for ever with the Lord, and you, if unsaved, for ever left, shut out. Oh think of those words, “ Too late ! ” What infinite mercy that it is not too late yet. “ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Oh the precious grace that invites you so sweetly, even unto the last moment. Have you tried the pleasures of this world, its sins, fashions, and its follies—and still you thirst ? Oh come to Jesus, come now. He says, “ And let him that is athirst come.” Do not say, “ I am too bad for such scenes of glory and holiness.” No, He says, “ Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” He is the truth—He will not deceive you. Oh, come. And to you who have come, can you look up to Jesus in the heavens and say, Come ? Who can say that He will not come the day you read these words—nay, even before they are in print ? C. S.



