

# GOD'S PRINCIPLES OF GATHERING.

Worship,  
Ministry,  
Service, and  
Christian Living.

BY  
GEORGE GOODMAN.



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# Foreword

TO SECOND EDITION.

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**I**T is with gratitude to God I have heard, that these lectures have been made useful to many and have thus served the purpose of their issue.

In some cases I learn copies have been kept in store by those exercising godly care over Assemblies, given, as occasion served, to young people connecting themselves for the first time with the people of God, so that they may have the truths set forth in the lectures before them in a form easy for reference and comparison with the Holy Scriptures.

The First Edition was quickly exhausted, but the reissue was prevented by the difficulties caused through the war.

This new edition contains several additional lectures, viz., "Christian Liberty," a subject much exercising the hearts of young people; "The True Nature of Worship," and "The Baptism of Believers."

There has been little change made, as the truths are believed to be stated in a way entirely Scriptural, and have stood the test of the kindly criticisms that such publications demand.

In sending forth this Second Edition my prayer is

O teach me more of Thy blest ways,  
Thou Holy Lamb of God,  
And fix and root me in Thy grace  
As one redeemed by blood.

GEO. GOODMAN.



# List of Lectures.

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|                    | PAGE |
|--------------------|------|
| REASON FOR .. .. . | 9    |

## LECTURE I.

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES, .. .. | 13 |
|------------------------------------|----|

## LECTURE II.

### THE SIMPLICITY THAT IS IN CHRIST.

A Review of Church History and "Church"

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Making down the ages, .. .. | 23 |
|-----------------------------|----|

## LECTURE III.

### CHRISTIAN LIBERTY—

|   |    |
|---|----|
| In the Individual and in the Assembly, .. | 43 |
|---|----|

## LECTURE IV.

### GIFTS AND GOVERNMENT IN THE ASSEMBLY.

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| A study of 1 Corinthians 12, .. .. | 48 |
|------------------------------------|----|

|  |    |
|--|----|
| POSTSCRIPT—Brother Demanding Oversight, .. | 60 |
|--|----|

# LIST OF LECTURES.—*Continued.*

## LECTURE V.

### THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT IN WORSHIP AND MINISTRY.

PAGE

A study of 1 Corinthians 14, .. .. 61

## LECTURE VI.

THE TRUE NATURE OF WORSHIP, .. .. 74

## LECTURE VII.

### “THE LORD’S TABLE” AND “THE LORD’S SUPPER.”

A study of 1 Corinthians 10. 15-23, and  
11. 20-34, .. .. 80

## LECTURE VIII.

### THE BAPTISM OF BELIEVERS,

With an Examination of “Household  
Baptism” Theories, .. .. 94

## LECTURE IX.

### THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

A study of Revelation 2 and 3, .. .. 101

CONCLUDING WORDS, .. .. 114

INDEX, .. .. 116

# God's Principles of Gathering

Worship, Ministry, Service,  
and Christian Living.

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## Reasons for the Lectures.

THE lectures were undertaken at the request of some who were exercised in heart before the Lord for the spiritual welfare of the young people growing up among the Assemblies and of others who were not instructed in the Scriptures upon the great truths dealt with in them.

It was felt:

1. That sufficient attention and care had not been given to the teaching of Church truth, and that in consequence many remained uninstructed upon the subject.

2. That there was a tendency on the part of many believers to neglect and disregard the subject. Such were satisfied with the assurance of their own personal salvation and the diligent pursuit of holiness of life and conduct, but overlooked the fact that He who called us by His grace to salvation and holiness, called us also *unto fellowship*; that there were privileges and responsibilities as members of the body of Christ, the Church, which could not be overlooked without grieving the Holy Spirit, by whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

3. That many were at a loss, owing to the prevailing confusion, to know what to think or do with regard to Church life and responsibility, and this for want of plain teaching upon the subject.

The Scriptures are clear and emphatic, and the mind of God may be known, notwithstanding the fact that con-

fusion is around us on every hand. God is not the Author of this confusion (1 Cor. 14. 33). It has resulted from disregard of the Word of the living God.

It will, perhaps, be asked: Are you then the people? Do you suggest that you alone, among the many professing Christians, form the Church of God?

To this I reply with an emphatic "No! God forbid." All who are Christ's form His Church. These lectures will make that abundantly clear.

Nevertheless a bold claim is made—the claim to be standing on that ground upon which the Churches of the saints should stand.

Suffer an illustration. An army is drawn up upon a certain ground. A spirit of independence and disregard of orders spreads among the regiments, with the result that each regiment forms its own organisation and plans and goes its own way. There is left a small but faithful band standing on the ground. Do these feeble few claim to be the army? "No," they reply; "we are not the army, but we occupy the position and ground upon which the army, had it retained its allegiance and obedience to authority, would have been standing. We refuse to disobey. We are here because we will not rebel."

I believe these lectures set forth the Scriptural principles, in other words the mind of God, upon these matters. Some are seeking to fulfil them, and while acknowledging much grievous failure in practice, they desire in these things to confess and seek to obey the will of Him who is the Head of the Body.

They disclaim the name "Open Brethren," often given to such as seek to carry out these principles. Perhaps their reason for doing so could not be more carefully and precisely stated than in the following extract from the

**Parliamentary Report on the Census, 1851,**  
which included, in the volume on "Religious Worship,"

a review of the various denominations. The following definition was given of "The Brethren:"

"Those to whom this appellation is applied receive it only as descriptive of their individual state as Christians, not as a name by which they might be known collectively as a distinct religious sect. It is not from any common doctrinal peculiarity or definite ecclesiastical organisation that they have the appearance of a separate community, but rather from the fact that, while all other Christians are identified with some peculiar section of the Church of God, the persons known as 'brethren' utterly refuse to be identified with any.

"Their existence is, in fact, a protest against all sectarianism, and the primary ground of their secession from the different bodies, to which most of them have once belonged, is that the various tests by which, in all these bodies, the communion of true Christians with each other is prevented or impeded are unsanctioned by the Word of God. They see no valid reason why the Church (consisting of all true believers), which is really one, should not be also visibly united, having as its only bond of fellowship and barrier of exclusion the reception or rejection of those vital truths by which the Christian is distinguished from the unbeliever...The 'brethren,' therefore, may be represented as consisting of all such as, practically holding all the truths essential to salvation, recognise each other as, on that account alone, true members of the only Church. A difference of opinion upon aught besides is not regarded as sufficient ground for separation."

### What is in a Name?

The name was used in the title of these lectures in order that there might be no misunderstanding, and lest I should be charged with attempting to conceal the true character of them.

## 12      GOD'S PRINCIPLES OF GATHERING.

A name is a convenience in general conversation, so long as the manner of its use is made clear, as in the present case.

“What’s in a name. That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Years ago an old yokel carefully examined one of the village caravans, and inquired diligently as to what it was. Was it church? Was it chapel? Receiving replies that did not quite satisfy him, he turned away with the following philosophical remark: “Well, arter all, it ain’t exactly what ye call it. It’s what it *are!*” I regard his conclusion as sound.

GEO. GOODMAN.

16 FRANT ROAD.  
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## LECTURE I.

**The Church and the Churches.**

**A Study of "The Church which is His Body,"  
and "The Churches of the Saints."**

Read Ephesians 1. 17-23; 2. 11-22; 3. 4-11; 4. 3-16;  
5. 22-32.

**T**HE Church of the Living God" (1 Tim. 3. 15) is the glorious title given to the body of believers known as "the Church."

What is the meaning of the word Church? It is in Greek "ecclesia," a word formed from two common Greek words, "*ek*," "out of" or "out from;" and "*kalein*," "to call." Thus its meaning is "a calling out," a people called out for a special or definite purpose, or from a common cause.

It was not originally a specifically Christian word, for we find it frequently used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made, nearly three hundred years B.C. For example, in Job 30. 28, we read Job's complaint: "I went mourning without the sun: I stood up, and I cried in the congregation" ("ecclesia").

In Psalm 22. 22 and 25, we find: "In the midst of the congregation ('ecclesia') will I praise Thee," and "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation" ("ecclesia"). In 1 Kings 8. 22, 55, and 65, we find Solomon's great gathering at the dedication of the temple called the "ecclesia." As also in Ezra 10. 1, and Nehemiah 5. 13.

Nor is the word used in the New Testament exclusively of the Church of God, but other gatherings and secular assemblies are called by the same title. For example: In Acts 7. 38, the great company of the children of Israel

in the desert is referred to as the "ecclesia" in the wilderness. In Acts 19. 32 the riot at Ephesus is described, and the assemblage in the theatre is designated the assembly ("ecclesia"). In the 39th verse the Town Clerk offers to have the dispute determined in a lawful assembly ("ecclesia") and finally (verse 41) he dismissed the assembly ("ecclesia").

From these quotations it will be seen that the word bears no mystic meaning; it stands for a gathering, an assembly of people who have been called out, or brought together with a common purpose.

### WHAT, THEN, IS THE CHURCH OF GOD?

In reply let us first repudiate the common and popular mistakes made by the ignorant:

**1. It is not an ecclesiastical building** of bricks and mortar or stone.

When Paul wrote to Timothy that he might "Know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church" (1 Tim. 3. 15), he did not refer to the ordinary gathering place or building, but to that Assembly of the Saints dignified with the name, "The Church of the Living God."

But the error is a common one, and it was this that led George Fox, the Quaker, to refuse so to call any building, and to designate them "steeple houses," because of the superstitious reverence given to such places.

**2. It is not an order of men**, such as the "clergy" or any other ministerial caste.

We hear of a young man being trained "to go into the Church," by which is popularly meant becoming a clergyman or priest.

The distinction of clergy and laity is unknown and unrecognised in Scripture, and ministers are never distinguished as the Church from their fellow-believers.

**3. It is not a system or establishment**, such as that called "the Church of Rome," or "the Church of England."

If there is a gathering of believers in Rome such assembly may justly call itself "a Church in Rome," but Scripture has no warrant for "the Church of Rome." Where, as in Galatia (1 Cor. 16. 1; and Gal. 1. 2), several gatherings existed, they were called "The Churches of Galatia." So "The Churches in England" would be Scriptural, not "The Church of England." Systems of this kind have no right to the title, as we shall see in a later lecture.

All these pretensions we must refuse.

*But God has a calling out.* From Jews and Gentiles alike He is taking out a people for His Name (Acts 15. 14). Each one foreknown and predestinated; in due time called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8. 29, 30). These form together the "ecclesia" of God, His Assembly, His Church. What a gathering is this!

Every sinner saved by grace through faith in the precious blood of Christ is a member of that "out-calling," the "ecclesia."

So soon as he believes in Christ, he is numbered among that great company.

### "The Church of the Living God"

then is the great company of sinners redeemed unto God by the blood of Jesus Christ, out of every tribe and kindred and nation.

Let us look at some Scriptures that deal with the subject.

*First*, let us consider our Lord's own reference to His Church in Matthew 16. 18.

He had asked His disciples: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" And then more personally, "But whom say ye that I am?"

To this Simon Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

This was a stupendous assertion. Think what it involved. A poor man—of whom men said, “Is not this Jesus, the carpenter,” a man despised and rejected of men—to be designated “the Christ” and “the Son of the Living God!”

Had Peter weighed his words, or was it mere enthusiasm? No! The Lord tells him: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven.”

The fact was too immense for the unaided mind of man to grasp. No one could have discovered the fact that “Jesus of Nazareth” was “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3. 16), “God the Son,” and “Son of the Living God,” unless God had revealed it.

Yet this is the foundation fact of Christianity. Apart from it the whole faith falls to the ground. Jesus of Nazareth is either a created being or Eternal Uncreate—“God over all, blessed for ever” (Rom. 9. 5).

Such was the confession of the essential fact, and of the Divine Person, to which Peter that day gave expression, and which is

### **The Foundation of all our Faith and Hope.**

Therefore the Lord added: “Thou art Peter (Petros, masculine) and upon this rock (petra, feminine) I will build My Church.”

Is not His Assembly a company of those who, like Peter, have the great fact and the Person revealed to them—who confess that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, and whose faith rests upon this Rock?

John in his epistle tells us that this is so. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5.1).

And each one so born of God becomes, *ipso facto*, a member of the Church which is the body of Christ—a living stone built into the Holy Temple, of which He is the Foundation, the Rock.

We need not trouble ourselves with the attempt that has been persisted in to make Peter the rock. Paul denies it in 1 Corinthians 3. 11, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Peter himself (who should know) says that Christ is the Living Stone, "chosen of God and precious," upon which we "as living stones are built up a Spiritual house" (1 Peter 2. 4-7).

But the Church of the living God is set before us in the Scriptures under other figures than that of a Spiritual house built upon the rock. In Ephesians 1. 22 the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as "The Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all;" and in chapter 5. 23, "Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body." It is from this Head, which all the members hold, that "all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2. 19). The same figure of the body, formed of Christ the Head and His members, is enlarged upon in 1 Corinthians 12, as we shall see in a subsequent lecture.

How apt a figure this is will at once be seen when one considers one's own body; how every member is in vital touch with and guided by the head, and all working harmoniously together under its sole direction.

JOHN NEWTON, speaking of the persecution of the Church by Saul of Tarsus, says: "He hurt the body on earth, and the Head complained from Heaven, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?'"

**Who, then, are the Members of Christ,**  
of His body the Church?

Christendom answers: "All baptised persons."

To this we can agree if the words are allowed their Scriptural value and force.

In 1 Corinthians 12. 13, we read: "By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body."

This is the true baptism, that of the Holy Spirit into Christ, of which water baptism is but the figure. The figure alone can accomplish nothing; it is intended to be the outward confession of a great fact, our union with Christ by faith, "for we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3. 26). If we are in this sense baptised into Christ, then we are members of His body the Church.

### **When do Such Join the Church?**

They join so soon as they join or are "joined to the Lord," that is, immediately they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

No form is necessary to make one a member of the Church, or to welcome one as such, not even the form of water baptism.

An unbaptised believer is as much a child of God and a member of the Church as one who has been through that ceremony, whereas a baptised unbeliever has no part nor lot in the matter (Acts 8. 21). By his new birth he becomes at once a member of the household of faith, just as a baby born into a family is by its birth a member of that family.

### **FIGURES OF THE CHURCH.**

There are many figures used to illustrate the union of Christ and His members, and to help us to understand the nature of the Church of the living God—that great company of sinners redeemed from every tribe and nation.

Let us look at some.

1. In John 10 the Lord speaks of the "sheepfold." Now God has only once built a fold upon the earth, the Jewish fold. A people separated from other nations by a "wall of partition" contained in ordinances. Circum-

cision was the essential rite of entrance to that fold, and by this door the Shepherd of the sheep entered into the fold (ver. 1). Once in the fold He calleth His own sheep by name ("for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel," Rom. 9. 6) and leadeth them out (ver. 3), going Himself before them. But He has other sheep not of that fold (ver. 16), sinners of the Gentiles, aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2. 12), who are of the election, the calling out of grace, them also He must bring, and they shall hear His voice, and *there shall be **One Flock*** (ver. 16, R.V.), *one Shepherd*.

The middle wall of partition is broken down, and from Jew and Gentile alike He calls His own sheep by name, and they follow Him.

Thus the Church of God is not a fold enclosed by ordinances, but a flock gathered around a Shepherd.

The Lord is in the midst of His people, they gather around Him. He is enough to hold them together in the unity of love and peace. That which ordinances could never do He, the living Lord in their midst, does.

So the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep, gathers His blood-bought ones around Himself. This is the calling-out, the Assembly of God.

2. We have already referred to another figure of the Church, a **Temple built upon a Rock**. We find this in Matthew 16. 18; Ephesians 2. 19-22; and 1 Peter 2. 4-8. Each member is a "living stone;" coming to Christ, such are "built up a spiritual house" upon that "Chief Corner Stone, elect, precious."

Thus the building "fitly framed together groweth into an Holy Temple in the Lord."

This Temple is "for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

3. So also we have seen that the Church is set before us under the figure of a **living body**.

"The Head is Christ" (Eph. 4. 15), every child of God is a living member of His body. The whole body is "fitly joined together" (Eph. 4. 16). One body, but many members (1 Cor. 12. 12), the body of Christ and members in particular.

4. Again, the Church of God is likened to a **household**. It is called "the house of God" (1 Tim. 3. 15). "The household of faith" (Gal. 6. 10), and the "household of God" (Eph. 2. 19).

The Lord Jesus is four times designated "The Master of the House" (Matt. 10. 25; Mark 13. 35; Luke 13. 25; and 14. 21). In this house there are vessels unto honour and vessels unto dishonour, some of gold and silver, others of wood and earth. We are bidden to purge ourselves from evil that we may be "meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. 2. 20-21), and are warned to be watching and ready, for we know not when the Master of the house is coming.

5. The relation of Christ to His members is figured too under the likeness of a **vine and its branches**. "I am the Vine," the Lord said, "Ye are the branches" (John 15. 5).

The fruitfulness of the branches depends entirely upon their union with the vine.

Israel had been set forth in the Old Testament as a vine taken out of Egypt, but had proved a degenerate plant (Jer. 2. 21), but the Lord Jesus is the True Vine, fruitful in and through the branches to the glory of the Father (John 15. 8).

Thus, under many figures, is the Church set forth that we may understand its close relation to the Lord, "who 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*" (Eph. 5. 27).

### **The Expression of the Church.**

But we have yet to speak of the manner in which the Church has its expression on earth.

Not in great worldly systems, but in simple gatherings of those who, having been redeemed by precious blood and joined to the Lord, are "called saints" (Rom. 1. 7). "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst." These are the words of the Divine Head of the Church, and such an Assembly of the saints is a Church.

Such companies met at first in private houses, thus we read of "the church that is in their (Aquila and Priscilla's) house" (1 Cor. 16. 19), and that in the house of Nymphas (Col. 4. 15).

But wherever the children of God are thus gathered together in the Name of Christ, there an Assembly is, and there is a Church of the saints.

Just as one drop of water is like the ocean in its nature, though infinitely smaller, so each Assembly of the saints is like in its nature to that great "General Assembly and Church of the firstborn which are written in Heaven" (Heb. 12. 23).

It remains but to say a few suggestive words as to

### **The Purpose and Destiny of the Church.**

In Ephesians 2. 22, we learn that it is builded together for *an habitation of God through the Spirit*.

No longer does God "dwell within curtains," or "walk in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7. 2 and 6), that He might dwell among His people as He was pleased to do in the wilderness, nor does He dwell in temples made with hands, but He abides by His Spirit in His Church.

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What those purposes are and how He will make known His wisdom we do not fully know, but it will be by the Church. The Church which He loved and bought with His own blood, which He nourisheth and cherisheth (Eph. 5. 29), cleaving to it as a husband to the wife whom he loves (Eph. 5. 31-32), He purposes to present to Himself, "holy and without blemish," and He has promised to come again and receive His redeemed Church unto Himself.

Thus while it is on earth it is "the vessel for the display of God's glory, not only nor chiefly to those on earth, but to those in Heaven," and hereafter it will be caught up to meet Him in the air to behold His glory and share His blessedness throughout eternity.

## LECTURE II.

**The Simplicity that is in Christ.****A Review of Church History and "Church" Making  
Down the Ages.**

"I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11. 3).

**T**HE Churches of Christ (Rom. 16. 16), which are also called the Churches of the Saints (1 Cor. 14. 33), are marked in Scripture by a great simplicity: "Where two or three are gathered together in (or unto) My Name there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18. 20); such is the simple definition of "an Assembly of Christ," or "an Assembly of the saints."

They are a people gathered around a Person—a living Person—who is Himself the Head and the Lord of the Assembly. Those so gathered are in personal touch with the living Head, "Holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

Every such gathering is an Assembly, a Church, and is governed by Him around whom each Assembly is gathered. He is Head and Lord, they confess and acknowledge His Lordship and His alone.

The important question arises: Are these Assemblies, or Churches of the saints, to be organised by other means and to acknowledge other lords over them, or is the union with their

**Living Head and His Lordship**

in the midst of each sufficient to maintain them all in the love and unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace?

*Let us solemnly protest that we can acknowledge no other Lordship than that of Christ, and need no other union than that of the Holy Spirit who holds together in the love of Christ all who are actually in touch with the Head. To be "Subject to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men" is forbidden (Col. 2. 20-22) by that same Scripture that bids us hold the Head. The Lord Jesus is seen in the Revelation walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks; that office He still exercises, and has delegated it to no man.*

On the other hand, Christendom presents the spectacle of

### **Great Amalgamations of Assemblies**

(they would in the business world now be called combines), under systems and governments as varied and diverse as the mind of man can invent, held together by creeds, articles, ordinances, and commandments, admittedly "of men," many of them making no distinction between regenerate and unregenerate, but admitting all who care to join them. These amalgamations are called "Churches," but the word, if it is to be allowed its Scriptural value, cannot rightly be used of such systems.

Many of the Assemblies forming parts of such amalgamations are no doubt true "Churches of the saints," but the system—the amalgamation itself—cannot rightly claim that name, nor that of "the one body."

The head of one of these great systems is blasphemously called the vicar of Christ, is elected by a body of Cardinals subject to a veto by the Emperor of Austria (in consequence of the exercise of which the present Pope got his throne).

That in England called the Church of England acknowledges the King as its head, and is governed by a constitution given to it by Act of Parliament.

There are governments by Synods, Presbyteries, Conferences, Unions, Central Meetings, and other authorities, all regulated according to their respective constitutions,

creeds, trust deeds, confessions, and other such devices.

We find none of these things in Scripture, and while we do not deny that many who remain in these systems "hold the Head" and gather to the Name of their Lord and ours, yet the confederations, amalgamations, and systems themselves are contrary to the mind of God, and subversive of the government of the living Lord whose place and authority they usurp, and those in them are correspondingly deprived, in measure, of the liberty, unity, and blessedness, they might and should enjoy.

Some are so wedded to their systems that they are unable to understand

### **The Simplicity that is in Christ.**

For example:

The "Bishop" of Southwark is reported to have given expression to the following sentiment:

"He could understand and appreciate the position of any Christian who saw in the Pope enthroned at Rome one to whom to look up, one from whom order and authority proceeded; whereas, he was unable to respect that evangelicalism (represented in its extreme form by the Plymouth Brethren) in which there is no directive force or ability to rule."

One asks in astonishment, "In what is a Pope enthroned at Rome superior to the Lord enthroned in Heaven?" We see neither, but know each only by faith. The one gives his encyclicals; the other is present with us by the Holy Ghost, and makes His will known through His all-sufficient Word.

We need have no hesitation in choosing to which we will turn and whom we can confess as Lord. That some ecclesiastics cannot understand this simple and Scriptural position is but an illustration of

### The Darkening Effect of Sectarianism.

But the illustration is an apt one. It puts the issue plainly. Are we to have other lords over us? Shall we elect us a papal head, or a king, as Israel did? Or shall we continue in the simplicity that is in Christ, and hold the Head from whom all the body is nourished and knit together, who is to-day, as at the first, the living One in the midst of the Churches. The result of the formation of these confederations or amalgamations, this "Church making," is bound to be—as it always has been—disastrous. There are

### THREE CRYING EVILS.

engendered by it, indeed *inseparable in their nature from it*. They are:

1. **Sectarianism.** Directly such an amalgamation or confederation of Churches is formed, being in the nature of a ring or combine, it, *ipso facto*, cuts itself off from those who do not see their way to join it.

For example, the Roman Hierarchy at the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545, continued with interruptions to 1563) definitely pledged itself to many absolutely unscriptural and anti-Christian propositions. Those who dare not, as they value their souls and feel their responsibility to receive and obey the Word of God, associate themselves with these evil things are called schismatics, and are told that their schism is a deadly sin.

The reply is simple: You cut off your amalgamation from other believers by your man-made ordinances, thus dividing the Churches of the saints. We have been guilty of no such schism. The Churches of the saints form together the body of Christ; if you have separated part of them by a man-made amalgamation, bound by ordinances, you are guilty of schism: we stand where the Churches of the saints should stand, gathered around

our Lord, refusing all Lordship but His, and all commandments but His Word in the all-sufficient Scriptures.

The same is true of the English Episcopacy. It has pledged itself to a Common Prayer Book, and to a Baptismal service containing things so contrary to Scripture that simple saints cannot and dare not submit to them.

They are therefore "tolerated" with much show of condescension; and even told that God's grace may perhaps overflow its recognised channels and reach them, but they are guilty of

### The Deadly Sin of Schism.

Those who reject these things ask: "Who built up the Prayer Book that separates us? Who appointed the cast-iron liturgy, with its beautiful generalisms? Who authorised your lords bishops? We did not."

"Your system and constitution separate you from us, cut off part of the body of Christ from the rest, but we were not guilty of the cutting off or the division. Let us worship together without your man-made ordinances and we shall be happy; we do not desire, and have not built up, nor sought a 'middle wall of partition contained in ordinances.' If there is such *it is your work not ours.*"

The second great evil arising from these systems and amalgamations is:

2. **Bondage**, and the loss of the liberty wherewith Christ had made us free.

One great system seeks to impose on each Assembly of the saints a man with stern authority who shall be the only one allowed to minister. He does so in Latin, a tongue unknown to the gathered people, in forms of pious, high-flown language, antiquated and hackneyed, bearing little or no relation to the needs of the hearers; and the system extends its restrictions to every department of life, until the so-called priest is dreaded as a spy and a cruel taskmaster.

Where is the simplicity that is in Christ, the liberty of the Spirit of God? It is no exaggeration to say that the system has crushed out the liberty, and often the life of those who submit to it.

In the same way, but in varied degree, do all these amalgamations restrict the liberty of the children of God and gender to bondage.

"Why are ye subject to ordinances?" is the earnest cry of the Apostle, who saw these things at work among the saints in Galatia and Colosse. Let us echo the cry, "Why do you suffer yourselves to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage?"

**3. Persecution.** The most terrible of all the results arising from the system of amalgamation is that of persecution. It has taken place to such an extent that the whole world has stood appalled with horror at the cruelty witnessed; and has actually been forced to intervene and wrest the instruments of torture from the hands of the so-called Churches.

It is no exaggeration to say that

### **The Bloodthirstiness of Sectarianism**

and its tyrants has never been surpassed in the history of the world.

The reason is obvious. So soon as the "lords" of these amalgamations find that their commandments and ordinances are not observed they claim authority to enforce them and fix dire penalties for disobedience. This at once singles out those tender in conscience and faithful to the Word of God, who cannot go with them in their man-made systems, as the principal objects of attack. Thus the "Churches" (so-called) become the persecutors, and have down the ages been "drunken with the blood of the saints."

The record of Rome is notorious in this respect; its history is written in the blood and tears literally of millions

of God's children, of whom the world, much more this guilty hierarchy, was not worthy.

While other sectarian bodies have not been guilty of such vulgar torture in the same degree, or in recent years at all, nevertheless

### **"Heresy Hunting"**

has gone on. The most powerful of modern time evangelists have been driven out of those systems in which they began their labour; we mention, for example, such names as Whitefield, Wesley, General Booth, and "Gipsy" Smith, their only offence being want of subjection to man-made ordinances.

Even those who once stood for the unsectarian position, having adopted

### **"Exclusive" Rings**

and central governments, find the same principle at work.

The following are the words of one of their number, published in a pamphlet, which is a pathetic cry wrung from the heart of those who acknowledge their sorrow. It is entitled, "Is the Sword to Devour for Ever?"

"One saint dare not cross the border-line and worship and break bread in another circle except under the penalty of expulsion; or a system of persecution so unbearable is adopted that the transgressor—not of a divine law, but of a human one—is forced outside. Thus a reign of terror exists, destructive of true Christian fellowship, and of individual conscience also. Some we know have braved the storm and saved their conscience, others have cowered before it and are nigh moral wrecks."

Brethren, beloved, these things ought not so to be. We may and should continue in the simplicity that is in Christ, gathering to His Name, acknowledging no other head than the Lord Himself, receiving all those whom Christ has received. Thus we shall find that we need no other bond of union than the unity of the Spirit, who makes us

one in love, in faith, in hope, with all who with us are holding the Head.

### **Man-made Ordinances**

will but serve to separate and divide us, and amalgamations become occasions of schism, and opportunities for the pride of place and fleshly ambition.

But let us look back over the history of Christendom and see how the present state of things has come about.

In the beginning we find Assemblies, meeting in various places, of those who had been added to the Lord by the preaching of the Gospel. These gathered together in the simplest manner, yet with godly order; the elder among them being overseers and shepherds, and others ministering according to divinely given gifts as the Spirit guided them. Thus they walked in love and the comfort of the Holy Ghost.

No amalgamation was formed, no system embracing all Assemblies. The Apostles moved from one to another as the Spirit led them, teaching and admonishing and directing as the need was; but never organising nor claiming any centralised authority.

But even in those early days we find evidences of the evils to come. The Lord Himself gave several solemn warnings. As for example in Mark 10. 42, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them; but *so shall it not be among you.*"

What could be clearer?

### **The Worldly Systems of Government,**

lordships, great ones, and authorities are not to be among the saints of God. Yet this is exactly what we see on all hands to-day, and because some refuse them allegiance they are termed schismatics.

Again in Matthew 23. 8, "But be not ye called Rabbi:

for one is your Master, even Christ ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth : for one is your Father which is in Heaven. Neither be ye called masters : for one is your Master, even Christ .”

Is not this a word in season, when the Churches are full of lords, bishops, and reverend fathers ?

The assumption of such positions and titles is forbidden ; and the reason given is, “One is your Master, and all ye are brethren.” May we have grace to obey !

These warnings are followed by the Apostle’s, as in 1 Peter 5. 1-5, where directions are given to the elder brethren to take oversight in their respective Assemblies. They are warned not to act “as being

### Lords over God’s Heritage, . . .

Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility : for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” Paul warns the elders of Ephesus, whom he says the Holy Ghost had made bishops (shepherds of the flock), that after his “departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch.” But in spite of these solemn commands the very evils warned against began to show themselves among the Assemblies.

Diotrephes is found, “who loveth to have the pre-eminence.” This man not only refused to receive brethren, but prevented others doing so and cast them out of the Assembly, even the Apostle John himself was refused. “Diotrephes...receiveth us not.”

The Apostle Paul appears to have had a similar experience, for he refers to all in Asia turning against him, specially mentioning Phygellus and Hermogenes.

Thus did the pride of man assert itself from the beginning. Instead of mutual service and loving, mutual subjection,

we find "lords" exercising assumed power and using usurped authority to tyrannise over the saints of God.

We can trace the beginnings of these things and see down the ages their working in history.

The facts of history are not (speaking generally) in dispute. They are well established.

## THE PROGRESS OF THE EVIL

may for convenience be recorded under stages:

### 1. The Rise of Clerisy.

The teaching of Scripture is simple and clear. All "ye are brethren," but there are diversities of gifts, and as each has received the gift so he is to minister the same (Rom. 12. 6 and 1 Cor. 12. 4-7).

In this we find no distinction between clergy and laity. It is a distinction utterly unscriptural and contrary to the positive teaching of the Word of God.

The Bible teaches the universal priesthood of believers, who are to offer up the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (1 Peter 2. 5 and 9).

The pride of man soon made differences. Those who had gifts, whether of government or ministry, began to regard themselves as a class or caste. It was an easy step from this to the claim of a monopoly. Once recognised they would brook no rivals. Thus the flesh asserted itself, and an unscriptural position was taken, and claim insisted on. Monopoly was soon followed by the assumption of a distinctive dress, and by the use of distinctive titles, the early equivalents for the Reverend, Very Reverend, Venerable Father, Holy Father, and His Grace, and Your Lordship of the present day. Thus *monopoly and privilege* came into the Assemblies.

But two other curses quickly followed. No longer was there a recognition of the spiritual gifts raised up of God (as is commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5. 12 and 1 Timothy

5. 17); but men began to clamour for place that gave them ascendancy and authority over their fellows, for the flesh loves power. Who was to decide upon those to occupy such positions?

*The principle of electing officials by vote or show of hands* was adopted. This gave the preference to the popular and most plausible, who are, we know, often the least spiritual.

These elected persons were accordingly ordained by a formal ceremony, and

### Officialism and Professionalism

were thus established to the suppression of the grace and power of the Spirit, who gives the gifts "as He will."

The claim that this election and ordination was divinely guided, and thus the true mind of the Spirit, is too palpably contrary to all experience and history to need discussion.

It took many years to establish this system of clerisy, for there was much true spiritual life that tended to check and correct the evil; but we see its beginnings in the case of Diotrophes in Scripture, and find the distinction between clergy and laity first in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (who died A.D. 217), and Tertullian (died A.D. 220).

Thus the "caste" had improperly assumed the name of the "inheritance" ("cleros," 1 Peter 5. 3 and Acts 1. 17 and 25), and those over whom they claimed their monopoly were called the "laos," or common people.

So far had they already got from the word, "One is your Master...and all ye are brethren."

### II. The Rise of Episcopacy,

or government by lords bishops.

The derivation of the term "bishop" is "one who watches over," "a shepherd." It means a person who, with a heart of love and a gift therefor, cares for and shepherds the saints of God (see 1 Peter 5. 1-5).

Philippians 1. 1 and Acts 20. 17-28 both show that in one Assembly there were several "bishops," who were the elders—the idea of *the* bishop, as one above his fellows, not being then recognised.

The "bishop" in Scripture is the same as "elder," the elder brethren, as seen from the above passage (1 Peter 5. 1-5), being directed to take the oversight, feed the flock, and set an example, but not to lord it over the inheritance (the saints being the "cleros," not the elders only).

The following passages confirm this:

Acts 20. 17-28. "The elders of the Church" of Ephesus are commanded "to take heed to," to "feed the flock," in the which (not 'over') the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops (R.V.).

Titus 1. 5 and 7, also where the Apostle bids Titus "appoint elders," blameless men, "for a bishop must be blameless."

The identity is admitted by the fathers (so-called), as Jerome (died A.D. 420); by candid Roman Catholics as Dollinger; by Anglicans, Lightfoot, Alford, Hort, etc., and by all

### **Unbiassed Historians.**

The words of JEROME are:

"Among the ancients, presbyters were the same as bishops; but by degrees, that the plants of dissension might be rooted up, all responsibility was transferred to one person."

Dr. LIGHTFOOT says:

"It is a fact now generally recognised by theologians of all shades of opinion that in the language of the New Testament the same officer in the Church is called indifferently 'bishop,' or 'elder,' or 'presbyter.'"

Dean ALFORD says:

"The identity of 'episkopos' and 'presbuteros' in apostolic times is evident from Titus 1. 5 and 7," and

he adds, "The 'episkopoi' of the New Testament have officially nothing in common with our bishops."

But to-day we find great episcopal systems governed by lords bishops, admittedly unknown in Scripture.

How did these great systems arise? Jerome's words above quoted may be taken as giving us the clue to the beginning. The pride of man clamoured for dominion in a sphere where Christ alone should rule.

Elders were for the godly order of Assemblies. Modern bishops are

### **Lords of Amalgamations and Systems,**

each forming a so-called "Church." Let us trace the transition from godly order in Assemblies to lordly government over systems.

The elders or bishops in an Assembly became, as Jerome says, the elders with one as a chosen leader or head. Thus *the* bishop over the elders came into existence.

We find IGNATIUS (died A.D. 115), in his letters, pleading for obedience to "*the* bishop," and distinguishing between bishops and elders. Some reject this as a forgery, but there can be little doubt that *the* bishop had appeared in some Assemblies early in the second century.

Ignatius, "with all his urgency," never says "Obey the bishops as the Lord ordained or as the Apostles gave command" (Gwatkin's "Early Church History"). He regarded it as desirable; but never claimed authority for his position, and from this omission it is obvious that he knew of none.

However, by the time of Irenaeus (died A.D. 200) *the* bishop was established, and where a city had a noted bishop he claimed and exercised authority over the village Assemblies around.

Thus diocesan bishops were originated. These bishops gradually increased in power till some of them, in later times, became great lords politic lly as well as ecclesiasti-

cally, and soon fell to quarrelling amongst themselves. Once the departure from Scripture was allowed it was not possible to limit the growth of the evil.

Cyprian (died A.D. 258) was the first to turn

### **The Bishop into a Sacrificing Priest.**

We need not trace the matter further, but only notice the great conflict between the Bishop of Rome and the Bishop of Constantinople. The Emperor Constantine having transferred his headquarters from Rome to Constantinople in A.D. 330, a fierce rivalry sprang up between the bishops of these two great cities, and each endeavoured to assume a kind of high priesthood over all Christendom. The Patriarch of Constantinople was the first to claim to be Universal Bishop.

It is interesting to notice the answer of Gregory I., the then Bishop of Rome (died A.D. 604). He says:

"None of my predecessors have consented to take this profane name, for when a patriarch gives himself the name of Universal the title of patriarch suffers discredit. Far be it then from Christians to desire to give themselves a title which brings discredit upon their brethren."

It is instructive to find a bishop of Rome repudiating the claim since so loudly insisted on.

This rivalry brought about the great split of the Eastern and Western Churches in A.D. 726, and since then the absurd claim of the Pope to be Universal Bishop and Vicar of Christ has been gradually built up on forgeries and lies.

That Peter did not found the Church in Rome is clear from one fact revealed in Scripture. Paul wrote to the saints at Rome in A.D. 58, and was in the city from 61 to 63 A.D. (see Acts 28. 15), when on his arrival the brethren of Rome came to meet him. It is clear Peter was not there then, nor recognized as a bishop among them. But

in the Epistle to the Romans Paul speaks of two notable Apostles among them, Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16. 7), who were in the faith before the Apostle himself.

It is enough, episcopacy is working itself out to its ultimate great apostasy. It was, and is in effect, the rejection of the Lordship of Christ for that of man. The sin of Israel in choosing themselves a king is repeated, "Nay, but *we will have a king over us*, that we also may be like the nations" (1 Sam. 8. 19). To which the Lord said, "They have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." And the prophet added, "The Lord your God was your King...Your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of the Lord in asking you a king."

### III. The Rise of Churchianity as a Rival to Christianity.

By Churchianity I mean the putting of a great system on earth in the place of Christ, asserting that salvation is in "the Church" instead of in and by Christ, and claiming that even the Word itself must only be interpreted by it.

Our blessed Lord only twice referred to the Church, using the word three times. (Matt. 16. 18, and 18. 17.) There are no other uses of the word in the Gospels.

He spoke of His building it on Himself, the Eternal Son of God, the Rock, and on the second occasion directed that where two brethren had a difference it was as a final appeal to be told to the Assembly, the gathering of their fellow-believers, and if the offender neglected to hear their counsel he was to be as a heathen man and a publican.

These simple words, bidding him "hear the Church," have been magnified and perverted to such an extent that the great hierarchies of Christendom have claimed them as their authority to speak, to govern, and to interpret, so that the office of Christ as Saviour and the Holy Ghost as Teacher and Guide have both been usurped.

"Holy Church" has ousted our Lord Jesus Christ. Churchianity has displaced Christianity. The Word of God has given place in these systems to the teaching of "the Church."

It would take time to trace the development of this heresy down the ages. It began and grew in exact proportion as the twin evils of clerisy and episcopacy developed.

When the Churches adopted the practice of baptising infants in about the fourth century, they assumed a power that degenerated into

### **The Making of Christians Artificially.**

It became more and more common for these unconverted but baptised persons, as they grew up, to look to the Church as responsible and able to do all required for their salvation. They performed its ritual, paid its tithes, attended its ceremonies, and were satisfied.

These became by far the most numerous, and then as now, the so-called Church was constituted very largely of unconverted and unregenerate men, who knew nothing of Christ, but who were exceedingly zealous, as now, for their ecclesiastical organization.

By the time of the Reformation, the Church had usurped every office of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and had successfully suppressed the Scriptures.

The Reformers shook the foundations of this anti-Christian "Church" and set many free from it; but the evil is being renewed, and I believe I am justified in saying that in many of our village Churches to-day there is more Churchianity performed and preached than there is Christ preached, "even Him crucified."

### **IV. The Churches at and Since the Reformation.**

The question arises, How did the Reformers deal with this question of the Church? They were indeed in a great

dilemma. They fully recognised the evil of priestcraft and episcopacy; but were not able to shake themselves free from the unscriptural idea that an earthly organisation of some kind was necessary to bind together the Assemblies. They attempted to "reform" Churches, instead of exhorting each local gathering to hold fast the Head from whom the love and unity alone can be obtained that is of any real value in binding saints together.

Our ever blessed Lord makes unity the result of love, and His indwelling in each believer. No other unity will stand the test of time.

The result of this failure on the part of the Reformers was that each country sought an earthly head for its organisation. The Lutherans tolerated episcopacy or appointed superintendents, so that to-day there is diversity among them in different lands.

Calvin attempted to found in Geneva a theocracy (following largely the Old Testament ideal for Israel) with a Court of Discipline to regulate the politics and religion of the people.

The English found a head in the king, and returned to a new episcopacy. Scotland governed the Church by a presbytery or synod, while reactionary Ireland came under the sway of

### **The Newly Formed Body of Jesuits.**

But many believers saw that there was no need of synods or councils, or ecclesiastical dignitaries, and that they obtained no authority from Scripture since there was no provision made for them in the Word of God. In 1585 Robert Brown taught these things, and was followed by Robinson, who was the pastor of those who sailed in the "Mayflower." These teachers and their followers became known as Independents, and stood boldly and suffered for the truth of liberty and simplicity until Cromwell, who was himself an Independent, obtained toleration for them.

But while they rejected episcopacy, they retained clerisy in its less offensive form of the "one man" minister.

George Fox, the Quaker, in Cromwell's day, revived and taught boldly the simplicity and liberty of the saints of God as we understand it, both as to government and worship and ministry.

Since then God has raised up all over the world many companies of believers who confess and practise these truths.

### V. A Godly Seed Down the Ages.

The Church was never without witnesses to the truth.

It must not be thought that, because so much rubbish has been heaped upon the truth of God, it was ever completely obscured. There has, we believe, never been a time when godly men did not protest against clerisy, episcopacy, and priestcraft.

Witnesses were never wanting who maintained the priesthood of all believers and the guidance and liberty of the Spirit in worship and ministry.

There are, however, two difficulties to remember.

1. **History only records the doings of the lords and great men** who fought for their creeds and places; of the godly, humble believers who sought and desired no mitre or great swelling titles, little or no history is left.

It has been said, "Blessed is the people that has no history." History deals in war, strife, wrath, and ambition. The truly blessed of the Lord are those who serve their Lord without these things.

While Rome and Constantinople, and Carthage and Alexandria, wrangled and fought at Councils and among themselves, these humble, unrecorded saints carried the Gospel far and wide and won many thousands for Christ.

2. It must further be remembered that **the truth has ever been branded as heresy by the ecclesiastics in power.**

It was indeed often mixed with false doctrine and mistakes, as all revivals have been, but this does not alter the fact that the truth was often on the side of the so-called heretics, and that when the great amalgamations of Christendom at length pledged themselves to clerisy, episcopacy, and priestcraft, the truth was uniformly branded as heresy, and believers who desired to walk in all the truth of God were scattered and persecuted.

**Montanism** (Montanus lived about A.D. 175), almost the first great so-called heresy, was a vigorous protest against clerisy and episcopacy, and a claim for liberty of the Spirit in ministry. Ignorance led to abuses, and these abuses are fiercely attacked as if they represented the whole movement, but it was no doubt an effort to escape from the chains being forged by clerisy. Tertullian joined them in A.D. 204, and was their champion. He denounced infant baptism, then creeping in, and many other abuses now rife.

The **Nestorians** in the fifth century, the **Paulicians** in the seventh, the **Waldensians** in the twelfth century, the followers of Jerome of Prague and Huss of Bohemia, of our own Wyclif, maintained the truth in their days in varying degrees, as against the assumptions of the great worldly Church powers. The subject is too great to deal with in so short a space; we desire merely to assert the great fact that God has always had His witnesses willing to lay down their lives for the simplicity that is in Christ and the liberty of the Spirit in His Assemblies. Their history, though unrecorded on earth, is written in Heaven.

I conclude with

#### FOUR PROPOSITIONS.

1. **That clerisy and episcopacy have no foundation in Scripture, and are opposed to the Spirit and teaching of Christ.**

2. **That there can be no true union in man-made organisations.** Living union can only be obtained by each believer holding the Head, even Christ, and walking in the love and unity of the Spirit.
3. **That the substitution of a Church as a gathering point, in the place of Christ is sin.**

As one has recently written:

"The exaltation of a 'Church' has always tended to disunion, fanaticism, and persecution.

"The exaltation of Christ," round whose Person alone we should gather, "tends always to union and charity."

"This allegiance to a Person instead of to a Church is the only possible ground of unity amongst Christian bodies."

4. **We should confess no Head but our Lord Jesus Christ,** who is "over all God blessed for ever. Amen."

We should know no "Church" but that of all believers, who together are His body.

We should gather to no other Name than His.

We should acknowledge no authority but the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, as taught by the unction of the Spirit.

Yet we should seek godly order in each individual Assembly, submitting gladly to the oversight of such older saints as are called by the Holy Ghost (Acts 20. 28), whose fitness for rule is manifested in the Assembly in which they labour, and whose qualifications are those set out in 1 Timothy 3. 1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5. 12, 13; Hebrews 13. 17; and 1 Peter 5. 1-5; who take it not for filthy lucre, nor as lords over God's heritage, but for love's sake.

## LECTURE III.

**Christian Liberty****In the Individual and in the Assembly.**

**T**HE exhortation to “Stand fast in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free” (Gal. 5. 1), and not to be “entangled again with the yoke of bondage” at once raises the question,

**What is that Liberty?**

How does it affect my relationship to my fellow-believers and the fellowship I enjoy with them, and the responsibility I acknowledge to obey those that are the guides in the Assembly?

The Apostle speaks very plainly and seemingly in great fear of the consequences of losing that liberty; of subjecting oneself to “the law,” and thereby making oneself “debtor to keep the whole law” (v. 3), and “falling from grace” (v. 4), and the “faith which worketh by love” (v. 6), and so not “obeying the truth” (v. 7).

Liberty is not in any way disobeying the truth, or it becomes mere license—lawlessness—and an “occasion to the flesh” (v. 13); nor is it disregard to the need of others, merely going my own way alone, but rather manifests itself in our “by love serving one another” (v. 13).

Liberty is the right of walking by the Spirit (v. 16) irrespective of the yoke of the law, without regard to “the commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. 2. 22), and fearless of the petty judgments and criticisms of those who spy out our liberty (Gal. 2. 4) and would restrict our enjoyment of it (Gal. 4. 17).

“If ye be led of the Spirit ye are not under the law” (Gal. 5. 18), and all the rules of men, such as “touch not,

taste not, handle not" will not help but hinder those who fear them (Col. 2. 21).

This liberty is a very precious thing. It is a full deliverance from the Spirit of bondage, the fear of man, and the legal precision that robs so many children of God of their joy and makes their Christianity a heavier yoke than that of Moses.

There is a form of

### **Christian Legality**

(if an expression so self-contradictory may be used) which is most depressing, and has spoiled many bright lives. It is contained in *unwritten laws* far more terrifying to tender hearts than any tables of stone, since there is uncertainty, suspicion, and fear that some tradition may be broken. Let us not be entangled again in this kind of thing, but "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free."

Let us then consider this liberty under two heads. First, Personal, and then Assembly Liberty.

### **I. PERSONAL LIBERTY**

in Christ is the right of each child of God to decide for himself from the Word of God how he shall act. He is not to be bound to accept another's judgment, nor another's guidance against the light the Holy Spirit has given him. He is not to fear another's criticism or censure in any matter where the question is one of expediency (where otherwise lawful) or of discretion, "To his own Master he stands or falls" (Rom. 14. 4).

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" (v. 4). "Why dost thou judge thy brother?" (v. 10).

Let us take three oft recurring cases:

#### **1. What Books shall I Read?**

The Romanist prints an "ex purgatoris," a list of books a Christian must not read. Shall we submit to "law" of

this kind? No, a thousand times No! I am free to decide such a question before the Lord. Not to read anything, but to read anything my Lord approves; and as to that approval it is given to me personally and not to another as a lord over my conscience. I have one Lord—all sufficient, all gracious, all wise—I want no other. I will please Him and not man, for no one has authority to interfere with my liberty in Christ.

## 2. What Amusements shall I Allow?

Here again I am free to decide and act before the Lord.

There are many things to be considered. All things are lawful, but neither expedient (1 Cor. 10. 23) nor edifying. I must not get under the power of any lawful thing I allow (1 Cor. 6. 12), as some do with smoking, and I must not so use my liberty as to stumble a weaker brother (the whole of Romans 12 should be read on this) or act with uncertainty, and thus feel condemned (v. 23). But having weighed all these things I am the Lord's free man, and must refuse to be bound by another's mind.

All cannot wear the same size in shoes; I must not pinch my brother's toes into my boots. So minds are small and great, weak and strong, and we cannot and must not judge, set at naught, or speak against another.

A vegetarian eats herbs because we are told he "is weak" (Rom. 14. 2), but I shall not strengthen him by judging him. "God hath received him" (v. 3). Let me not offend him, but if it will prevent him falling rather "eat no meat" (v. 22) myself. Yet try and help him to be strong.

## 3. What Associations shall I Have

with other believers who do not see the systems of men to be unscriptural and continue in them?

I love them; I hate to seem to be a Pharisee, sticking out for trifles; I want to avoid unnecessary division lest the world enjoys the spectacle of two Christians afraid to

walk together. What a difficult question it is, but how constantly arising in the present day!

There is no "law" to be laid down. We must go to the Lord in each case and act before Him; but (and here is the important point) we must have liberty to decide the question there in His presence and not be obliged to ask "what will So-and-so say?"

Who gave So-and-so authority to decide this for me? Who art thou, So-and-so, that judgest another man's servant? In this I must be free to serve the Lord Christ.

If there is a godly teacher, a guide, a wise counsellor, by all means let me give him diligent attention, but let me search the Scriptures to see if these things be so, and let me remember that the decision rests with me before God and not with him. If he is a godly man he will fear to usurp such an authority; he will advise me to settle it before the Lord, and when I have done so, will not judge or condemn me.

## II. ASSEMBLY LIBERTY.

The principles above laid down apply to Assemblies, *mutatis mutandis*. One Assembly cannot settle for another its course of action. One Assembly has no authority to excommunicate another Assembly or to pass judgment upon it in any matter. Not that often things are not to be seen wrong in another Assembly, but because God has not invested any Assembly with jurisdiction or authority to judge another. It is not a court, nor has it the judicial ability or apparatus to sit in judgment over another Church of God.

Let us suppose

### Two Common Cases.

A brother visiting a new country worships with an Assembly in a certain town. He then seeks to do so with another Assembly in another town. Now it happens that

the Assembly in the latter believes much allowed in the former to be unscriptural, and therefore some would refuse to receive the brother because he went to it. But two questions of liberty arise. Who made the second Assembly a judge of the first? And who made it a judge of the brother's liberty to go where he will before the Lord? Elders may guard their own flock from error and evil, and possibly consider carefully how far the coming brother brings error with him, but they are no court to sit in judgment upon the liberty of either the brother or the Assembly.

Again, an Assembly for the sake of the testimony to the world of the oneness of all believers in Christ decides, after careful and prayerful consideration, to join with other Christians in some joint effort (as for example, the purging of the streets from open evil or a united reply to a Spiritualist campaign). Who shall judge them in this? To their Lord alone they answer; before Him they stand or fall. Perhaps some weaker brother (or, perchance, a stronger) may see differently. Let him in the exercise of his personal liberty refrain from the effort, but let him not judge the action taken by the Assembly in the exercise of its liberty.

Above all, let him not form a discontented party and split the Assembly of God, for this is to use his liberty as an occasion to the flesh.

One last word. How does

### **The Use of this Liberty**

fall in with the commands to obey them that have the rule over us and to submit ourselves to them? The answer is that in all matters to which their authority extends, the direction of the Assembly; in the arrangements for suitable ministry; in the appointment of all matters affecting godly order, and in the decision of difficulties arising from time to time let our hearts loyally submit. "Yea, all of us, let us gird ourselves with humility to serve one another, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5. 5, R.v.).

## LECTURE IV.

**Gifts and Government in the Assembly.****A Study of 1 Corinthians 12.**

**WE** have seen from previous lectures that the Church of God, that Church which is the body of Christ, consists of all believers, and that it finds its expression in the Churches of the saints, the Assemblies of even two or three gathered together around the Person of the Lord, and, moreover, that we can place no confidence in man-made systems.

In the early Church history quoted in the second lecture, it is admitted that episcopacy finds no foundation in Scripture; but the writer goes on to say that the development of episcopacy was perhaps as well, for it was "*that or chaos.*" This we must deny since it implies that Christ is dead, that the Lord Jesus is not now, as always, in the midst of His people whenever they are gathered together in His Name. We should therefore refuse episcopacy, even as a permissible system, and repudiate the suggestion that its rejection would mean chaos.

**There is a Divine Order**

which is set out in the chapter we have now to consider, and we are not at liberty to set it aside for something of man's construction, however attractive. The chapter sets before us God's revealed order for His Assemblies under the figure of a body, directed by a living Head, each part of such body serving and performing its proper office.

Let us notice in detail how the chapter proceeds. The first verse shows that it is not the mind of the Spirit of

God that we should remain ignorant concerning these matters. In the two following verses we have a striking contrast. The Apostle reminds the Corinthian saints that they were Gentiles, carried away by dumb idols, but that they had become, by the grace of God, those who confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus. The comparison is impressive—they were idol led, they had now become Spirit led.

The distinctive mark throughout the New Testament of a true child of God is always this, that *he is one who, having received the Spirit of God, is led by that Spirit* and taught to walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8. 14): "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The 9th verse: "But if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." In Galatians we are told (ch. 4. ver. 6), "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And in the first Epistle of John, 3rd chapter, 24th verse: "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us;" and again in the 4th chapter and the 13th verse: "Hereby we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit."

This, then, is

### **The Distinctive Mark of the True Believer,**

from having been led by divers evil spirits, lusts, and carnal desires, he has been brought by the Spirit of God into subjection to Christ, whom he confesses as Lord and Saviour.

Two thoughts are before us in these verses: the first, that only by the Spirit of God is the Lordship of Christ in fact confessed and in practice submitted to whether by a person or in an Assembly. "No man can say Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost."

Secondly, that only by and in that Spirit can God's definitely appointed order be practically carried out in the Assembly.

Man-made systems can go on without Christ. The true Scriptural Church order cannot be carried out by unconverted persons or carnal Christians. Without the presence and power of the Spirit maintaining all in love and unity, the Scriptural order falls to pieces.

Thus in the Assembly we have the Lord Himself in the midst, working by His Spirit according to His own will through such members and in such manner as He pleases.

The next truth brought before us in the chapter, from verses 4 to 13, is that of *unity in diversity, and diversity in unity*. It will be noted that the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are referred to in these verses:

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."  
 "Differences of administrations, but the same Lord."  
 "Diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

Similar truth is taught in Ephesians 4. 16, where Christ is spoken of as the Head of the body, "from whom all the 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."

God is a God of infinite variety and resource, and builds up and nourishes the body by the working together of each part under the guidance and direction of the Head.

The three words that are used in the original in these three verses (4 to 6) are very helpful, and express the meaning better than perhaps any translation can do.

### **There are Diversities of Gifts.**

Here the word is *charismaton*, a word meaning a grace-gift from Him who, having ascended on high, has given gifts to men.

They are the gifts of His love bestowed in His desire to bless His people. These are not merely gifts of **natural**

ability, but gifts which cannot be fully used according to the intention of Him who gave them, except in the Spirit.

These are given in great diversity, no two persons ever having received exactly similar gifts.

The second word is also instructive: There are

### **Diversities of Administrations.**

The word here is *diakonion*, a word from which we have the English word deacon.

There are diversities of deaconings. To this we shall refer later on.

The third word, in the 6th verse, is: There are

### **Diversities of Operations,**

*energmaton*, the word from which our English word energy is derived. Thus we see there is infinite variety in the love-gifts from the risen Head of the Church; and there is infinite variety in the services, as well as in the manner, in which energy in that service is displayed. Thus the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each to profit withal. "But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." As the body is one, having many members, each in full exercise, so also is Christ, the title "Christ" being applied here not only to Him who is the Living Head, but also to His members, who together with Him form the one body.

Let us look again at the word before referred to, which we have translated deaconings.

*There is in the New Testament no such thing as*

### **The Office of a Deacon.**

It is true that in our English translation, the Authorized Version, the words twice appear in 1 Timothy 3, verses 10 and 13, but the words in verse 10, "Let them use the office of a deacon," are represented by one word only, *diakoneitosan*, the imperative form of the verb, to serve.

So the verse should be read, "Let these first be proved, then let them serve, being found blameless." There is in this passage no suggestion of an office.

The same applies to the 13th verse; the words, "They that have used the office of a deacon," being represented by one word in Greek, *diakoncsantes*, which literally translated is, "they having served," so that the verse should read, "They, having served well, purchase to themselves a good degree." There is again no suggestion of office in the verse.

The word deacon is in Scripture the common word for servant, as can be seen from the following passages:

In Luke 22. 27, the Lord Himself says, "I am among you as He that serveth" (one who deacons), and in Romans 15. 8, He is spoken of as a minister (deacon) of the circumcision.

In Romans 13. 4, the ordinary magistrate is called a minister (deacon) of God, although no member of the Church.

In Romans 16. 1, Phebe is said to be a servant (deacon) of the Church at Cenchrea, and Paul, Apollos, Tychicus, and Timothy are called by the same humble name.

The word is also applied to the ordinary domestic servant, as in John 2. 5 and 9, where the servants who poured out the wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee are spoken of as deacons.

From this it is clear that those who serve, either in the Assembly or out of it, are not regarded as being in office, but as exercising the God-given grace-gifts in subjection to their Lord. The exercise of any gift is deaconing.

There are two words to which I would specially call your attention in this chapter.

In the 7th verse we have the word *given*, and in verses 18 and 28 the word *set*. The Lord has not only given the gifts, but has set those to whom He has given them in the body, "as He will" (verse 11). This fact puts *ordination as practised in the present day* altogether out of place.

To attempt to bestow

### Gifts by Ordination

is quite unscriptural. It would be ridiculous to attempt to ordain men to natural gifts.

Suppose, for example, the position of Poet Laureate were vacant and no poet to be found, consequently it was resolved to ordain a Poet Laureate. It would be possible to invest him with the title, to clothe him in suitable robes, to place a wreath of laurel upon his head, and to give him office; but there would be one thing lacking, he would not be able to write poetry, in spite of all the ordination.

The same result would follow if an attempt were made to ordain artists or musicians. They might be placed in office, but if God had not bestowed upon them the natural gifts, their appointment would be in vain, so far as painting and music were concerned.

If the ordination is appointment to office or place in the Church, again we contend it would be unscriptural, since God has set the members, every one of them, in the body, *as it hath pleased Him*, and for man to attempt to decide by ordination in what position a service should be performed or gift exercised, is to deny, in practice, the fact. It is the Lord's office to give the gifts, and to set those to whom He has given them in the body. Thus

### We Recognise no Human Ordination,

but those having the gifts should seek to be in subjection to the Lord in this matter. As one has written, "Mine, the holy ordination of the pierced hands."

There are, however, two commands given with reference to those who are serving the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 5. 12 to 14, the Apostle writes: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish

you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake;" not, please note, for their "office's" sake.

We should seek, therefore, gladly to recognise and esteem highly those whom God has gifted and set in the Assembly. In 1 Timothy 3. 10, those who have received the gift are *to be proved*, and if found blameless, *to be allowed the liberty of serving* as the Lord hath appointed.

The chapter, from verse 14 to verse 27, then sets forth certain principles under the figure of

### **THE BODY AND THE MEMBERS,**

which are of the utmost importance.

These may be placed under four heads.

#### 1. Verses 15 and 16 teach

#### **The Truth of Mutual Responsibility.**

No member of the body is to be excused. Thus, "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? and if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" The Lord has many kinds of servants, and none is to be excused his duty.

There are foot-servants, there are handmaids, but in the body of Christ each is responsible to perform that service, however lowly, as unto Him who set them in the body as it pleased Him.

The evil of clerisy is that it leads those who are not clerics to regard themselves as excused from responsibility. Such become mere pew-sitters, considering it the duty of the clergy to minister to them instead of each acknowledging and feeling the responsibility of every member to supply his part to the building up and enrichment of the body of Christ.

2. The second principle is found in verses 17 to 20, where we have

### The Truth of Variety

taught. There is to be in the body *no monopoly*, thus: "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where were the smelling?" It is impossible that one man can embody in himself gifts that shall supply the need of the whole body. There is to be the effectual working in proportion of each part, every joint supplying its due measure. The practical effect of monopoly in the present day is disastrous. For example, the minister changes his views, becomes a higher critic, a new theologian, and leads his followers astray. Some years ago, discussing a popular preacher, exception was taken to him that he denied the atonement. "That was so," was the reply, "but he has since changed his views." "And has he changed the views of the young men and others who used to hang upon his lips?" was the just rejoinder.

3. The next principle is found in verses 21 to 25, wherein we have

### The Truth of Interdependence

taught. There is to be *no independence* in the body, but each is to seek to work in harmony with the other, each to perform his own service having regard to others, so that the body is "tempered together," one part supplying what another lacks.

In our service we are in no sense to be free lances, but to acknowledge our interdependence and responsibility to the other members of the Church of God, each member having the same care one for the other.

The reason given is, "That there shall be no schism in the body." Where there is the assertion of independence it is quickly followed by partisanship, sides are formed, conflict ensues, resulting in division; but in the mind of God no part of the body can say to the other, "I have no need of thee." It is interesting to notice the illustration the Apostle uses, for it is particularly gracious. The head cannot say to the foot, I have no need of you.

The Lord Himself is the Head, and even He cannot say to the humblest member of His body, I have no need of you.

4. The last of the four principles in this chapter is found in the 26th verse, where we are taught

### **The Truth of Mutuality**

or mutual sympathy. There must be *no selfishness* in the body. If one suffer, all the members suffer with it; if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. This is as it should be. Is one suffering? We must not say it is no concern of ours; we must be willing to suffer too. "We ought," said the Apostle John, "to lay down our lives for the brethren." Is one honoured? We must not regard the honour with envy, but realise that in the honour of one the whole body is honoured.

In all this we see the mind of God with reference to the Church which is His body. The gifts are given in infinite variety, but are all to be exercised under the direction and control of the same Spirit. They are not to be regarded as personal gifts, but gifts to the whole Church of which each is put in trust. When we speak of having injured our finger, we do not say "My finger has hurt itself," but "*I* have hurt my finger," recognising in this way that the smallest member of the body forms part of the whole man.

The closing verses of the chapter contain an enumeration of those to whom God has been pleased to give gifts, and the order in which He has set them in the Church: "First apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles; then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

In this list it is important to notice that "*helps*" come before governments. It is better to help a man than to govern him, it being evidently according to the mind of God that governments should have a subordinate place, as they certainly will have where there is true spiritual life, and the children of God are walking in love and the unity of the Spirit,

But something needs to be said upon

### **This Gift of Governments:**

According to the instructions given in 1 Peter 5. 1 to 6, the elders are to exercise their gifts of governments by taking the oversight of the Assembly of which they form part.

In 1 Timothy 3. 1, in our Authorised Version, we have the words, "This is a true saying, If any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," but there is nothing in the original to represent the words "office of." We need to remember that, when the Authorised Version was translated, the translators had express instructions not to alter ecclesiastical terms, and similar instructions were given when the Revised Version was undertaken. When the translators of the Authorised Version came to translate Acts 20. 28, they found themselves face to face with the fact that the Apostles called the elders of the Assembly at Ephesus "bishops." They accordingly sent to the king for instructions, and he directed them to translate it "overseers," which they accordingly did. As a fact the New Testament never recognises *office*. "If any man desire oversight, he desireth a good work," would be a fair translation of 1 Timothy 3. 1.

AUGUSTINE remarked upon this passage that "episcopos was the name of a work, not a dignity;" "episcopos" being the word for bishop; "episcopos" the word for his service, not as translated, "the office of a bishop." In other words, a man might desire, because he had received the gift of government, to shepherd and oversee the Assembly, but it is the work and not an office that he should desire.

### **THE SUBJECT OF GOVERNMENTS**

is important. We make the following remarks:

#### **1. Not all Old Men are Elders.**

In Job 32. 9 we read: "Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged (*i.e.*, necessarily) understand judg-

ment," and this some of us have no doubt discovered to be true. An elder has, before exercising his good work, to be recognised as a person having the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3. 2 to 7.

He must be blameless, not given to wine, having his children in subjection with all gravity, and must not be a novice.

## **2. He Must be Gifted for the Good Work he Desires,**

for the service requires both grace and gift. Were he so gifted there would be no need of self-assertion. Spiritual people would recognise and bow with respect to the guidance and order of one who exercised his gift aright, and in whom they recognised the Spirit of God and an evident aptness to rule. When Moses was bidden to provide men out of all the people to rule Israel they were to be "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (Exod. 18. 21).

## **3. He must Exercise his Gift only under the Guidance of the Spirit of God,**

just as other gifts in the Assembly must be in subjection to the same Spirit.

He expresses the Lord's mind and not his own; he carries out the judgment of the Lord's people and not his individual opinion. If he acts in independence, or with self-assertion, he becomes a tyrant and not a shepherd. And this leads us to our last proposition.

## **4. The Appeal against the Unjust Exercise of the Gift of Governments is to the Lord of the Assembly.**

There is no relief to be found in contention, nor in the formation of parties; but he who judges himself to have been aggrieved, or that Assembly which judges itself to be oppressed, must turn to the living Lord who is in the

Church—the“Master of Assemblies,” the“Chief Shepherd.” His ear is ever open to the cry of His people, and He will avenge His own elect, though He bear long with them.

To give an illustration of this principle: Some years ago a brother informed me that he and others were much troubled in the Assembly where they met by the action of one elder brother, to whom the hall belonged, and who regarded the meeting largely as his own concern. When asked what they proposed to do, he replied that they were anxious to avoid all strife or faction, but that those whose hearts were exercised in the matter had agreed to lay it before the Lord Himself. Some months later I met the same brother and asked how things were progressing. He replied that the trouble had disappeared. The brother referred to had some time back had a stroke, and had not been able to meet with them again. In fact he never did. The brother recounting this did not, I would say, attribute it to the judgment of the Lord, and it may be that the Lord had other purposes in the visitation, but He had certainly used the circumstance to meet the need of His people who had called upon Him.

The chapter closes with a reference to

### **A More Excellent Way, the Way of Love,**

and this the Apostle exhorts us to follow after. No more profitable words could end this lecture than those contained in the early part of the following chapter. After pointing out that gifts, and knowledge, and great philanthropy would profit nothing apart from charity, the Apostle reminds us that “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth” (1 Cor. 13. 4-8).

## POSTSCRIPT TO LECTURE IV.

WITH the kind permission of Mr. C. F. HOGG I reprint his answer to the question, "What should be the attitude of an Assembly toward a brother who demands that he be recognised as an overseer?"

*"Ans.—*If a man wishes to be recognised as an overseer, the obvious course is for him to do the work of an overseer, but the true shepherd will be little concerned to be recognised as occupying any 'office.' The approval of the Lord and of his own conscience will be the chief consideration, the other his last thought. He will not under-value the goodwill and fellowship of those he seeks to serve, indeed, but these will not occupy his mind, and he will not forget that love and kindness are not always appreciated by their immediate objects. Remembering the experiences of the Lord he will not resent this, but will find it a new point of contact, a new opportunity for fellowship with Him, and like Him will say, 'I thank Thee, O Father' (Matt. 11. 25). The true shepherd seeks not the recognition but the welfare of the saints, and this though he may have to say with the Apostle that the more he loves the less he is loved by those for whom he is being spent out (2 Cor. 12. 15); at least he will not be a burden to them.

"As a rule, however, it will be found that the saints are forward to recognise any little service rendered to them, and where there is some initial prejudice, from whatever cause arising, patience lives it down, and 'love never faileth.'

"But if any man desires an office the duties of which he does not discharge, he surely leaves the Lord out of the account, for the law of His Kingdom, as of His own life, is that he that would rule must serve (Mark 10. 42-45). The saints will need to bear patiently with such, for they wrong not merely the Assembly, but the Lord and their own souls. The true shepherds, those who give evidence that they have no ambitions of their own but that they seek to watch for the souls of the saints, should point out to him his mistake, kindly, albeit firmly, in the hope that, brought to recognise his misunderstanding of the pastor's responsibilities, he may even yet be more 'useful to the Master' and to his brethren. When he attains to that he will not fail of recognition by both. But men who reach out after position are seldom either happy or useful. Those who love to serve are loved because they serve."

## LECTURE V.

## The Guidance of the Spirit in Worship and Ministry.

### A Study of 1 Corinthians 14.

**I**N the last lecture we spoke of the spiritual gifts (ch. 12), and of the love with which they must be used (ch. 13). We have now to consider these same gifts in exercise (ch. 14).

There is an expression which occurs twice in the 11th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and twice in the 14th chapter. In verses 18 and 20 of the 11th chapter we find the expression, "When ye come together in the Church;" and "When ye come together into one place." In the 14th chapter and the 23rd verse, "If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place;" and the 26th verse, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together."

We gather from these references that the two chapters are concerned with the gathering of the saints together as an Assembly.

We notice that in the 11th chapter the purpose of their coming together is for the breaking of bread; and in the 14th chapter, while the breaking of bread is implied, as in the 16th verse, where the saying of Amen at the giving of thanks is mentioned, the Assembly is met together also for the purpose of edification.

There can be no question that the order given in the 14th chapter is intended to apply to the Assembly thus met together, whether for the breaking of bread or for edification.

From verse 26 down to the end of the chapter we have *the ordering of that gathering according to the mind of the Spirit.*

There are in these verses thirteen imperatives, each represented in the English by the word *let*.

Our English language is deficient in its form of imperative. When it is in the second person, as "go thou," or "go ye," the imperative quality is clear; but when it is in the third person it has to be expressed by the word *let*, thus, "let him go," or "let them go." The weakness of this imperative is that it seems to imply permission, but there is nothing permissive implied in the Greek. In each of the cases represented by the word *let* we have the divine imperative.

This fact is emphasised by the language of the 37th verse, "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*."

We have then in these verses the commandments of the Lord with reference to the gathering together of His saints in the Assembly.

The first imperative is the general principle that should govern the meeting, "Let all things be done unto edifying."

There then follow four imperatives dealing with the matter of speaking in a tongue. It is to be by two or three in turn, and one is to interpret. If there is no interpreter silence is to be maintained, occupied with speaking to oneself and to God.

There then follow three imperatives as to prophets.

They are to speak, two or three, the others are to discern. If anything is revealed to one that sits by, the first is to hold his peace.

Two imperatives follow for the direction of women: They are to keep silence, or if they would learn anything, to ask their husbands at home.

And finally, three imperatives as to the general principle:

The directions are to be regarded as the commandments of the Lord. If any man is wilfully ignorant he may

remain so. And all things are to be done decently and in order.

We notice, as we look carefully into these directions, the following matters:

**1. There is no Minister Represented as Presiding over the Gathering.**

The question is often asked of those who claim to carry out the order given here, Have you no minister? The reply is, "Yes, we trust, many, but we have no *one* who monopolises the ministry, or regards himself as entitled above others to preside or to be heard." The Scripture shows us that there is to be opportunity for the manifestation of the power of God, the "demonstration of the Spirit," through whom and by whom He will. God is represented as the Author of that which should take place (v. 33); as the one who makes His will known by whom He will (v. 30); so that one coming in will "worship God and report that God is in (or among) you of a truth" (v. 25).

**2. It will be noticed that the commandment of the Lord Directs that there may be Liberty for All.**

"For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (v. 31). Two or three are directed to speak while the others discern, that is discern the mind of the Lord. And provision is made (v. 30) for the possibility of a word unpremeditated and unprepared.

Failure to observe these commandments of the Lord is the cause of the barrenness that so frequently prevails among Christian communities. For example, I once attended a certain place of worship on Sunday morning in company with a godly gentleman who is now with the Lord. The service was conducted and a sermon preached by a young student from one of the ministerial colleges. No exception could be taken, from the point of view of orthodoxy, to the carefully prepared discourse to which

we listened, but on the way home the gentleman who accompanied me told me with great earnestness that he was deeply exercised because of the spiritual decline he knew to exist in the place.

To the sermon to which we had listened he took no exception, but he felt that it did not meet the present need of the hearers. He longed that something spiritual might have been spoken that would move them to concern as to their lifeless condition. I replied (I think justly) in some such words as the following: "You are the one who ought to have spoken in that gathering this morning. Had you stood up and spoken with the same concern and conviction, and said to the people such things as you have mentioned to me, there is little doubt that they would have been aroused out of their lethargy, that they would have been edified, and possibly awakened to see their need of a more consistent, spiritual life." He smiled, and said in reply that it would never do.

It is, however, evident from this Scripture we are considering that such was the intention of the Spirit of God, that there should be liberty of ministry for all whom God, by His Spirit, moves to take part.

3. It will be noticed that there are two objects of gathering set before us in this chapter:

### **Worship and Ministry.**

In verse 15 we have prayer and praise; in verse 16 we have the giving of thanks; in verse 3 we have edification, exhortation, and comfort; in verse 31, learning and comfort.

With reference to these I would remark that anyone in the meeting seeking to pray or to give thanks must understand that in so doing *he is voicing the Assembly*. Worship is not that of his own individual heart, but is the expression aloud of the praises of the Assembly.

The worship meeting is not to be regarded as a prayer meeting into which personal matters are introduced.

In the same way, with regard to ministry, he who seeks to minister must remember that *he should be giving utterance to the mind of the Spirit of God* for the saints of God assembled.

Next, let us notice

### **The Speakers in the Meeting.**

Some have sought to set aside this chapter for one or other of two reasons: Either, it is contended, that it was for the direction of a meeting where miraculous gifts were in exercise, and these having ceased the chapter had no longer any practical value; or, that since there are no longer prophets among us, prophecy having ceased, the directions given concerning them have no present application.

This raises the question,

### **How far, if at all, has prophecy ceased?**

We shall all agree that, so far as any authoritative revelation is concerned, the canon of Scripture is closed, and that God has, in this respect, spoken His last word.

There are several considerations, however, that lead us to the conclusion that prophecy is not limited to authoritative revelation. Prophecy may be looking backward, as Moses did when he spoke of creation; or looking forward, as Isaiah did when he saw the Lord Jesus Christ and spoke of His glory; or as John did when upon the Isle of Patmos he looked forward to the end of all things.

But prophecy may also be *a word for the present*, and may consist in the application of the already revealed truth of God to the present need and occasion. As J. N. Darby says, a prophet is "one who is so in communion with God that he is able to communicate His mind." There has been the revelation of Scripture, may there not be illumination *from* Scripture?

In his farewell sermon to the Pilgrim Fathers, on the eve of their sailing in the "Mayflower," John Robinson spoke these famous words: "I am very confident the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word." Do we not require the spirit of prophecy to open up the word so that the light and truth may break forth?

In confirmation of this suggestion let us notice:

**1. Prophecy is Distinguished from Revelation** in verse 6, "What shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine (teaching)?" Here the contrast is clearly drawn between revelation, prophecy, and teaching.

**2. Special Directions are given to Seek this Gift.** Verse 1, "Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." Verse 5, "I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues."

Verses 4 and 12, "He that prophesieth edifieth the Church;" "...Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. And verse 39, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy."

It is impossible to believe that these express commands would have been given to seek and cultivate this gift, for so continually necessary a purpose had the gift been withdrawn from among us. In Romans 12. 6 it is included in the gifts which are to be exercised according to the proportion of faith and in ministry upon which we are to wait.

We understand, therefore, by prophesying, *that speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which is to the edifying of the Church*; and to our younger brethren I would say, yet not I, but the Lord Himself, "Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye excel to the edifying of the Church." Some of you are zealous to win souls,

eager and earnest in the preaching of the Gospel. This is well, but it would be well too if you would lay to heart this exhortation, and were earnestly desirous of this gift, that ye might excel—going beyond even those who are gone before you—to the edifying of the Church. May the Spirit of God begin to move you at times to this end!

The question of

### **The Guidance of the Spirit of God**

in the Assembly, for worship or ministry, is a very practical one, and we find in this chapter *clear indications of what is not guidance.*

First: It is obvious that anything like

#### **Display of Gift is Forbidden.**

Liberty is not licence. It is sometimes said, "In your meetings anyone may speak." We answer, "Certainly not, anyone *can*, but no one *may* unless led by the Spirit of God to do so." The Church of God is not a platform for the display of gifts, nor a field for the pleasing of ourselves. However outstanding the gift may be, if it is exercised in independence of God, he who attempts to do so will but grieve that Spirit who indwells His people.

In verse 26 a state of things is described in which everyone has a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation, and this is rebuked. No one is justified in taking any part unless he has the assurance that he is doing so in accordance with the mind and will of God.

#### **"Everyone Hath a Psalm!"**

How much our Assemblies suffer from the promiscuous giving out of hymns. Many have favourite hymns, and regard the meeting as an opportunity for singing them; indeed it has become common to find everything that takes place in the meeting punctuated with a hymn. No hymn should be given out unless with the conviction that it expresses and voices the praise and worship of the company assembled.

In verse 9 we are told that *what is said must be easy to be understood*. The attempt to be profound, the frequent unnecessary quoting of the original before simple or ignorant people cannot be according to the mind of God. We are reminded of the remark of one who was asked concerning the ministry of a certain brother, and replied, "He went down deeper, he stayed down longer, and came up drier than any man I have ever heard." If there is a true desire to edify it should and will find expression in words that are readily understood.

In verse 19 there is *a warning against lengthy speaking*. Five words in the Spirit are better than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. The principle is of universal application. Five words to profit are of more value than ten thousand which are either unsuitable to the occasion or unprofitable to the hearers.

There is great need in many Assemblies of warning against lengthy or frequent unprofitable speaking. If there were a greater tenderness of heart on this matter it would be well.

### A Striking Confession.

Let me give an extract from John Woolman's diary. He says, "I went to meetings in an awful (*i.e.*, full of awe) frame of mind, and endeavoured to be inwardly acquainted with the language of the Shepherd. One day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up and said some words in a meeting; but not keeping close to the divine opening *I said more than was required of me*, and soon being sensible of my error I was afflicted in mind some weeks without any light or comfort even to that degree that I could not take satisfaction in anything. I remembered God and was troubled, and in the depth of my distress He had pity upon me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offence, and my mind became calm and quiet, being truly

thankful to my gracious Redeemer for His mercies, and after this, feeling the spring of Divine love opened, and a concern to speak, said a few words in a meeting. This, I believe, was about six weeks from the first time, and as I was thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened in the pure Spirit, who inwardly moves upon the heart, and taught me to wait in silence, sometime many weeks together."

What exercise of conscience before God such an entry shows!—"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. 5. 1, 2).

Especially to the young men I would say, if you have five words that are to profit, say them, have the courage to stop, and do not go on to the ten thousand. You may not be able to give a lengthy exhortation, therefore when you have said that which the Lord may give you, do not attempt to continue from fear it should appear too little. In verse 20 we are warned against two evils, *there must be nothing childish*, and, above all, *there must be nothing malicious*. To use so solemn an occasion for a personal attack upon another, as has been done, alas! is indeed lamentable.

In verse 32 we are told that

### **The Spirits of the Prophets**

*are subject to the prophets*. This teaches us that those who minister are to do so with self-control.

Mere impulse is never recognised as a reason for taking part, nor should there be in the Christian Assembly anything similar to that which is found among the heathen.

as in the case of dervishes, who work themselves into a frenzy and lose their self-control. Some little time back I was speaking of a brother who professed to have the gift of tongues and had rolled upon the floor laughing, under what he believed to be the influence of the gift, I asked why he allowed himself to do so. The reply was that he could not help it, as he believed the Spirit of God took possession of him. I replied, I believe truly, that this showed that it was not of God, for we read, "The fruit of the Spirit is self-control," and "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."

There is one other matter I would refer to. *Some are restless under silence*, but there is no reason to be. Silence may be an opportunity given of God for meditation upon what has been brought before us by the Spirit. The word is, "Let the others judge," or discern, what is the Word from the Lord. This may need a pause for speaking to oneself and to God (v. 28).

I once knew a sister, now with the Lord, who showed great impatience whenever there was a pause in the gathering. She would take her Bible and open it emphatically, as much as to say, "If you brethren will not do something, I shall read my Bible."

But this is certainly undesirable. Silence, while it may indicate spiritual indolence, may on the other hand be a time of hallowed communion with the Lord.

But it remains to ask, *What are the marks of*

## TRUE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

*in worship and ministry?* In reply we would suggest that the one who is to minister must be:

1. **So Taught in the Word of God that he is "apt to teach" and "able to admonish."** In Romans 15. 14 the Apostle writes, "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."

And in 2 Corinthians 6. 4 and 7, where the Apostle speaks of approving ourselves as the ministers of God, he adds, "In the word of truth, in the power of God."

In 2 Timothy 2. 15 he exhorts us to study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth; that is, knowing how to minister the Scripture appropriate to the unconverted, to such; and what is suitable to the saints of God, to them.

John Bunyan, in "Grace Abounding," speaking of "the ministry of holy Mr. Gifford, whose doctrine by God's grace was much for my stability," says: "He bid us take special heed that we take no truth upon trust from any man, but cry mightily to God that He would convince us of the reality thereof, and set us down therein by His own Spirit in the Holy Word, and," adds Bunyan, "truly in those days, let men say what they would, unless I had it with evidence from Heaven, all was nothing to me; I counted myself not set down in any truth of God;" but speaking of a certain Scripture that had thus come to him, he says: "But, oh, methought this did glisten! It was a goodly touch, and gave me sweet satisfaction." And of the Scriptures generally. "Ah! these blessed considerations and Scriptures with many others of like nature were in those days made to spangle in mine eye, so that I have cause to say, 'Praise ye the Lord God in His sanctuary; praise Him in the firmament of His power; praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness'" (Psa. 150. 1-2).

That is ministry in the Spirit that brings the Word "with evidence from Heaven," and "sets the believer down therein." That causes it so to "spangle" as to awaken worship and praise, that makes Christ precious.

It should therefore be the prayer and desire of all who seek to minister and edify the Church that they may be such persons; so mighty in the Scriptures that they shall be able to admonish.

Nevertheless, one who has but a small knowledge of Scripture may yet, so far as that knowledge of the Scripture extends, minister to profit, provided he does not go beyond that which is written.

2. Speaking under the guidance of the Spirit of God is described in 1 Peter 4. 11 in the following terms: "*If any man speak,*

**Let him Speak as the Oracles of God;**

*if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*"

One who speaks, therefore, under the guidance of the Spirit will speak as the mouthpiece of God. The oracles were consulted in olden times in great events, and were supposed to give utterance to the mind of the oracle upon the particular matter and for the definite occasion. So the Apostle says, *If any man speak he is to speak as the oracles of God, that is, as one who speaks for that occasion, the mind of God.*

GEORGE FOX, the Quaker, would sometimes refuse to speak a word, although thousands had assembled and were waiting for his ministry. He would let them wait until he knew that he had the word from the Lord for his people at that particular time. This he described as "speaking to the occasion."

It was in this way that Elijah the prophet spoke: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand;" he felt and knew that he stood before his Lord and spoke as His mouthpiece, so we should speak with an authority that commands the conscience and heart, the word of the Lord who liveth, and before whom we stand.

In 2 Corinthians 2. 17 the Apostle thus describes himself as ministering: "Not as many which corrupt the Word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God **speak we in Christ.**" This is ministry in the Spirit.

### 3. Ministry under the guidance of the Spirit will be

#### **The Result of Communion with the Lord.**

It will be exercised with a deep sense of responsibility to Him, and with the desire to glorify and set forth Christ.

It is said that when Whitefield preached people went away saying, not "What a wonderful preacher," but "What a wonderful Saviour;" their thoughts being turned from the speaker to the Saviour whom he set forth.

So it should be the desire of all who minister that those who hear should go away saying not "What a gifted brother," but "Blessed be God for all that He has given us in Christ Jesus our Lord;" even as the disciples on the way from Emmaus said, "Did not our heart burn within us as He talked with us by the way."

There is nothing more blessed on earth than such a gathering as is above described. We may often have to confess failure, nevertheless any who knows the power and has tasted this blessedness, and felt the presence of God in His Assembly, will confess that it is even as a foretaste of the communion that we shall enjoy when we are gathered together to be for ever with the Lord.

In conclusion, I would again exhort our younger brethren to pray over the 12th verse, and forasmuch as many of them are zealous of spiritual gifts, to seek that they may excel to the edifying of the Church, and to covet to prophesy.

## LECTURE VI.

## The True Nature of Worship.

**A**T a conference held some time since the question was raised, "How do you occupy your mind during those solemn moments when you partake of the bread and the wine at the Lord's Supper?" Replies were invited, and these displayed a sad ignorance of the privileges of that hallowed season. Such answers as these were given: "I confess my sins, and ask for grace to do better;" "I pray for my friends," and so on. But right and desirable as it may be to confess sins, to seek grace to do better, to pray for friends, it is surely not at such a time our minds should be so occupied.

It is a season for worship? Worship has been well defined as the overflowing of praise and love resulting from

**The adoring contemplation of God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

It is not merely thanksgiving for what He has done, though this has its place, but the ascription of praise to Him for what He is, both in Himself and in His ways with His saints.

Consider for example the worship of Moses in Exodus 34. 8. He had asked God to show him His glory. How suitable a petition for those seeking to worship! and in reply God had said, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Name of the Lord before thee" (33. 19). "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the Name of the Lord, and the Lord passed by him, and proclaimed, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for*

*thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation."* At such a display of grace and majesty "Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped" (Exod. 34. 5-8).

Look again at the worship we have described in the Revelation. The four living creatures cease not day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was, and which is, and which is to come" (Rev. 4. 8, R.V.). The elders fall down before Him that sat upon the throne, and worship Him in these words as they cast their crowns before Him, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive the glory and the honour and the power, for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were, and were created" (v. 11).

And again, Revelation 5. 12 and 13, "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And every created thing responded, "Blessing unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the honour, and the glory, and the power, and the dominion be unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

WILLIAM LINCOLN, of Beresford Chapel, London, says of worship: "To worship God we must be quite conscious of His love and grace. The more conscious we are of this, then the easier and better is our worship. So we must sit at His feet and learn the story of His love. We must have the Spirit to show us the things of Christ. We must sit at His table and partake of the fatted calf. Then we can be merry before Him.

### **Worship is the Overflowing,**

and *only* the overflowing of our hearts when under His eye we admire and adore Him. For in 'Thy presence is fulness of joy'" (Psalm 16. 11).

Here then is the true secret of worship. The Spirit brings before our hearts the glories of Christ, so that admiring and adoring we overflow with love, gratitude, praise, and worship.

Two ladies were bidding good-bye. Their fellowship had been very happy, and they were parting with great reluctance. One, as she bade farewell, added, "Thank you for being what you are." It was gracefully said, and O to turn with gratitude and love to the Lover of our souls, saying, "Blessing unto Thee for what Thou art—for Thou art WORTHY!"

We love the Lord for what He *has done*, and cease not to give Him thanks, but we adore Him for what He *is*, and pour out our hearts in worship.

"One thing," said David, "have I desired, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, *to behold*

**The Beauty of the Lord,**  
and to inquire in His Temple" (Psa. 27. 4).

God delights to display Himself (John 17. 24). He has given a wonderful display of His majesty and power and beauty in nature (Psa. 19; Rom. 1. 20). As we stand before a wide view or a brilliant sunset and watch its changing beauties we exclaim, "How wonderful! How beautiful!" So as the Spirit reveals to our faith the glories of Christ; the beauty of the Lord as manifested in grace, salvation, holiness, love, we "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psa. 29. 2), exclaiming, How wonderful art Thou! "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?...Thou in Thy mercy hath led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed, Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation" (Exod. 15. 11-13) "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!" (Zech. 9. 17). **Read**

the last six Psalms carefully, for they contain the very essence of true worship, beginning, "I will extol Thee, my God, O King;" and closing, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

Our Lord Jesus, in John 5, instructed the woman of Samaria in the elementary principles of true worship. It is not a matter of place (v. 21), nor of tradition of the fathers (v. 20), nor must it be an ignorant thing (v. 22). It must be the worship of "the Father" (v. 23), which only true children of God can offer. It must be "in spirit and in truth, for God is a Spirit" (v. 24).

In Philippians 3. 3, we have the

### THREEFOLD MARK OF THE TRUE WORSHIPPER.

"We are the circumcision which *worship by the Spirit of God.*" It is no fleshly effort; it is not produced by the natural man; he can offer nothing acceptable. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the believer's heart. We "*rejoice in Christ Jesus,*" for He is the object of our hearts' love and praise, and we have "*no confidence in the flesh.*"

The things that the flesh glories in are enumerated in vv. 5-6: circumcision, pride of birth, legal precision, zeal for God, and these the Apostle counted loss, that Christ might be the all-occupying and all-satisfying object of his faith, love, hope, and worship.

But to revert to the question raised in the first paragraph above, How shall we occupy ourselves in those sacred moments? There are express directions appropriate to such an occasion.

#### 1. "Let us Draw Near"

(Heb. 10. 22). Full provision has been made. The blood on the mercy seat—the rent veil—the new and living way—the High Priest over the house. Then draw near. The fourfold condition of soul is given (v. 22).

So when we sit at the Lord's Table let the first effort of faith be to draw near, to see that our souls consciously approach the Lord, earnestly directing our thoughts to Him in meditation and adoration. Draw near to worship—with reverence and godly awe—into the Holiest to contemplate Christ, to be occupied with Him. Remember that in order to worship we enter the Holiest (that is Heaven). Worship is no longer a thing of forms and ceremonies "as though living in the world" (Col. 2. 20), or as having "a sanctuary of this world" (Heb. 9. 1, R.V.).

A wise worshipper will see the profit of coming in good time so that in a few minutes quiet the mind and heart may be prepared to worship so soon as the meeting begins.

2. Surely the next thing will be to

### Give Thanks

(1 Cor. 14. 16) and to offer *sacrifices of praise* (Heb. 13. 15). "Therefore will I offer in His tabernacle *sacrifices of joy*; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord" (Psa. 27. 6). "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me" (Psa. 50. 23).

Offering the sacrifices of praise is said to be "the fruit of lips which make confession to His Name" (Heb. 13. 15, R.V.).

An example of "lips confessing" is given us in Deuteronomy 26. 1-4. It should be carefully pondered. The confession over the basket of firstfruits of our former condition "ready to perish;" our birth in sin; the cruelty of our former bondage; the cry to the Lord; how He heard, looked on our affliction, saved, brought us out and brought us in. The firstfruits are presented as an evidence of the Lord having done all this. It is set before Him with worship (v. 10), and rejoicing (v. 11). Surely in a much greater sense we can offer the fruit of lips that confess to His Name.

Consider the ointment and the alabaster box of spikenard "very precious" of Luke 7. 37, 38, and of Mark 14. 3. They express real worship, the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

### **3. Memory should be Active,**

for He has said, "This do in remembrance of Me."

Memory can be "stirred up" (2 Peter 1. 13), and it should be. Our language should be "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee, we will remember thy love" (S. of S. 1. 4). And here the Spirit will help our infirmities and bring to our remembrance, and will take of the things of Christ and show them to us, so that the display of His glory and beauty in grace may overpower us and our love flow out.

### **4. Then worship is**

#### **Associated with Giving**

both in the Old and in the New Testaments.

"None shall appear before Me empty handed" (Exod. 23. 15) is the thrice-repeated command of the law; and the first mention of worship in the New Testament is connected with giving: "They fell down and worshipped Him, and when they had opened their treasures they presented unto Him gifts" (Matt. 2. 11).

The collection should be regarded as part of the worship. It should be "freely" and "cheerfully" given, "according as God has prospered" (1 Cor. 16. 2). It should be "your liberality" (v. 3). We are exhorted not to forget it (Heb. 13. 16), because with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

## LECTURE VII.

# **“The Lord’s Table” and “The Lord’s Supper.”**

**A Study of 1 Corinthians 10. 15, 23, and 11. 20-34.**

OUR Lord Jesus instituted two ordinances: Baptism, which is a figure of union; the Lord’s Supper, which is a figure of communion. Baptism, speaking of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6. 3-5), is never repeated, since that union is effected by the Spirit of God when we believe in Christ once for all; the “breaking of bread,” being a figure of communion, is repeated frequently: “As oft as ye do it.”

We are to consider the second of these ordinances from the passages above.

In the 2nd chapter of Acts and the 42nd verse, we find that those who were converted on the day of Pentecost “continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and *fellowship*, and in *breaking of bread* (notice these two things), and in prayers.” The apostles appear to have instructed the saints immediately upon their baptism in the matters of fellowship and breaking of bread.

From the 20th of Acts and the 7th verse we learn that it was the practice of the disciples to come together to break bread upon the first day of the week, and this we should still consider our highest privilege.

What then is

## **The Meaning of this Ordinance?**

Instruction upon the subject is given in the two passages read from 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, but there is a distinction to be drawn between the teaching of the two chapters.

In chapter 10 it is *fellowship*; in chapter 11 it is *breaking of bread*; in chapter 10 we have the Lord's Table; in chapter 11 the Lord's Supper. In other words, chapter 10 deals with our position and privilege as those who are in fellowship with and partakers of the Lord's Table; while chapter 11 deals with the feast itself, and the happiness of those who partake of the Lord's Supper.

Let us look carefully at chapter 10.

In verse 16 we have the words: "The cup of blessing which we bless, *is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*" What do these words mean? The Revised Version (margin) renders it, "Is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?" The word communion is *koinonia*, and is the word that is usually translated "fellowship," indicating a common property or interest in anything.

Thus "the cup of blessing which we bless," or, for which we give thanks to God, is to us an indication that we have an interest, with others, in the death of Christ; that we have been brought into fellowship with all those who, like ourselves, have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The cup of blessing reminds me that I am a blood-redeemed sinner, and that as such I am in fellowship with that great company, the purchased possession of God, bought with the precious blood of His dear Son.

"*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*" That is, does it not indicate to us that we are in the fellowship of the body of Christ, that we have our portion, our part in that one body?

Verse 17 makes this quite clear: "For we being many are one bread (or loaf) and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread (loaf)." Thus the loaf upon the table is a figure or symbol to us of the body in which we have fellowship, speaking to us of this great fact that we have become one with Christ and all His members.

The next three verses, 18 to 20, contain

## TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

of this great truth.

1. **Israel, after the flesh, is the first illustration.** In their case, those who ate of the sacrifices were those who were partakers of the altar; or, as the Revised Version has it, were in communion with the altar.

None but the priests, those who have been set apart of God for service, and had thus become definitely and peculiarly associated with the altar, had a right in Israel to eat of certain sacrifices. David, on one occasion, ate of the shewbread, which our Lord said it was not lawful for him to eat, special grace being shown in his case because of his need. Those twelve loaves on the table of shewbread, were a figure and symbol of the twelve tribes, presented or "presenced" before the Lord. The one loaf is to us a figure or symbol of the one body of Christ, into which by the Spirit we have been baptised; only those associated with Christ may eat of it. For this reason the loaf is put upon the table whole, and not cut into pieces, or made into wafers. Such is the illustration.

2. The second is taken from the **practice of idolaters.**

Idols are not mere pieces of wood or stone, but are the instruments of demons, and those who sacrifice to them sacrifice to demons, and in eating of these sacrifices show their association, their "fellowship with devils." This being explained, there follows the solemn exhortation, "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils."

The whole passage is intended to teach us the solemn responsibility of our position as those who are in fellowship with Christ and all His members; the cup of blessing is a figure and sign to us of our fellowship in His blood; the bread which we break, of our fellowship in His body.

Therefore He says: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and the table of devils."

THE cup of blessing which we bless,  
The bruised fruit of the Vine,  
Doth to our faith, O Lord, express  
In simple, lowly sign,  
Communion in Thy precious Blood  
By which we are redeemed to God.

The bread which we together break  
(Though many we are one);  
This loaf of which we all partake  
Is, in a symbol shown,  
Communion in Thy Body, Lord,  
"One bread, one body," is the Word.

O blessed holy fellowship  
In Christ, our Living Head;  
O sacred, happy membership  
With all for whom He bled;  
How shall we rightly praise Thy Name  
And all Thy matchless grace proclaim!

*We do well to ponder our responsibility as being in this blessed solemn fellowship.* The subject is introduced in a chapter in which instruction is being given to Christians living in the midst of idolaters, where their daily associations caused difficult questions to arise as to conduct. The Apostle would have them settle all such questions in the light of the holy fellowship of which the cup of blessing and the bread which we break speak. He gives them

#### FOUR PRINCIPLES

by which they may determine what their conduct shall be in all doubtful cases. They may be stated in the form of questions:

1. In verse 23: **Is it Expedient?** For example, they are invited to a heathen feast, and are disposed to go; but the Apostle bids them ask, will it expedite the purpose they have in view? Their desire is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, to adorn the doctrine of the Lord Jesus in all things. Will this purpose be expedited, be helped on, by their doing this thing, or allowing this association?

2. In the same verse: **Is it Edifying?** An edifice is a building, and the Apostle bids them ask, if in the building of the godly character and development of the Christian life they so much desire, this thing will be of service? By allowing it will they be building on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble?

3. Verse 24: **Is it likely to stumble Others?** It may be lawful for them to do, or allow it, but they have not *only* themselves to consider, but another's good, and if the thing which they allow will stumble another, it had better not be permitted. The same truth is taught in verse 32: "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." Our testimony in the Church as well as to outsiders is to be considered.

4. Verse 31: **Is it to the Glory of God?** For whatever we do, whatever we eat or drink, this must be our chief concern.

5. To these four we may add a fifth from the 12th verse of chapter 6: **Shall I, by allowing that which is lawful but not expedient, bring myself under the power of evil?** It may be considered lawful for a young believer to listen to some popular preacher, but if that popular preacher, however eloquent, denies the truth of God, or teaches that which is false, let him beware lest the power of that evil doctrine deceive him and turn him aside from the truth, and he make shipwreck of the faith.

Let us now look at the 11th chapter. In this chapter the subject is that of eating

### THE LORD'S SUPPER,

the privilege, of course, only of those who belong to the Lord's Table; in other words, those who, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have been brought by the Spirit into the fellowship of the body of Christ. Of this feast we would say:

**1. It is not a means of obtaining salvation or merit.** The table is for those who have already been saved. No more solemn mistake can be made than to come to the Lord's Table hoping thereby to obtain the forgiveness of sins or salvation. If there should be one inquiring the way of salvation, the answer is very simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and having believed, you will, as a child of God, have your place at His table.

**2. It is not to be regarded as a sacrifice,** or the continuance of the one sacrifice offered upon Calvary. Nor does the Word of God teach that it is a memorial sacrifice. There is nothing in Scripture to justify the teaching of the sacerdotalist that in the celebration of this feast of remembrance there is the offering of a sacrifice, or, in any sense, the continuation or application of the sacrifice of Christ. The following incident shows the terrible conclusions to which such teaching leads:

A Christian man went into the Roman Cathedral at Westminster, having in his mind a desire to put a certain question to some one in authority there. He accordingly addressed himself as follows to a priest whom he met walking across the building: "I believe the teaching of your Church is that at the words of consecration the matter of the elements undergoes a miraculous change, and is converted substantially into

**The very Body and Blood of our Lord  
Jesus Christ?"**

"That is so," he replied, "Christ Himself then descends on the altar. He is there in *propria persona*, as we say."

"You mean that Christ is actually there, as truly as my arm is under the sleeve of my coat?" he inquired.

"Yes," said the priest. "Well, that is not my faith, but this is the question I was wishing to ask you: When you have the Lord Jesus Christ upon your altars, and actually in your hands, what do you do with Him? *Do you profess to put Him to death?*" His answer was "Yes." "You profess," insisted the man, "to slay Him, to immolate and kill Jesus Christ upon your altars?" A chill went through the man as he proposed the question.

The priest seemed momentarily to be off his guard, but the dogma of his Church, according to the Council of Trent, states that His flesh, bones, nerves, and divinity under the accidents of bread and wine are there. So again the question was urged: "Do you put Him to death?" Again the priest's answer, perforce, was "Yes."

"Then," replied the questioner, "if you profess to put Jesus Christ to death in the sacrifice of the Mass, do you not see that you crucify Him afresh, and thus declare and convict yourselves as the successors of those on whom Peter himself charged the crime: 'Ye killed the Prince of Life,' and Stephen called 'His betrayers and murderers?'"

There is no avoiding this conclusion. Such is the blasphemy of the Roman Mass.

A reference to the 10th chapter of Hebrews makes it quite clear, that no such sacrifice can be offered since it is no more needed. In the 10th verse we are told that we are "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" in the 12th verse, "But this man, after He had offered *one sacrifice for sins for ever*, sat down on the right hand of God;" and in the 14th verse,

“By one offering *He hath perfected for ever* them that are sanctified.”

So to represent the Lord's Supper as having a sacrificial character is a blasphemous denial of these truths, for our standing with God has been eternally secured by the blood of the everlasting covenant, the one Sacrifice offered once for all.

**3. The Lord's Supper is not to be regarded as eating and drinking the actual flesh and blood of Christ.** It is true the Lord said, “This is My blood,” but He explained His meaning in the following words, “This cup is the New Testament in My blood which is shed for you” (Luke 22. 20). Thus the cup is said to be the blood, only in the sense that it is the new covenant in that blood. As an illustration of the use of the same figure of speech, in 1 Chronicles 11. 19, David, who had longed for a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, when the three mighty men brake through the enemy and brought him the coveted water, poured it out, saying, “Shall I *drink the blood of these men?*” Surely no one would contend that he spoke of literal blood, though he said, “Is not this the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” (2 Sam. 23. 17).

### **Eating His Flesh—Drinking His Blood.**

The passage which is often regarded as giving some ground for this idea is John 6. 53 to 56. It is clear that Christ intended in this passage that a man must so take of Him, that it was like eating and drinking of His flesh and blood. How did He intend this to be done? Certainly not at the Lord's Supper, for that ordinance had not then been instituted; but the Lord Himself explains in verse 35: “Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life; he that *cometh to Me* shall never hunger; and he that *believeth on Me* shall never thirst.” Thus coming and believing satisfy

the spiritual hunger and the soul's thirst, and are the eating and drinking that our Lord, in figure, sets forth.

Again, when His disciples murmured and wanted an explanation of the strange language, He told them that His material flesh would have been of no value, even could they have eaten it, for He says (verse 63), "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; *the flesh profiteth nothing*: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

So that those who come to Him believing those life-giving words, concerning His blood shed for our sins, His body given for us, are those who eat and drink of His flesh and blood.

The Scriptures use every sense of the body as an illustration of faith: *Look* and live; *Hear* and your soul shall live; she *Touched*, and virtue came out of Him and healed her; *Taste* and see that the Lord is good. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that eating and drinking are used as figures of that faith that so appropriates Christ, that He abides in us and we abide in Him. Just as in baptism, the fact (that is the baptism by the Spirit into Christ) must precede the figure (baptism in water); so we must know the fact, that is, we must by faith have eaten and drunk of Christ by coming to Him, and receiving Him for our own selves (John 1. 12) before we can enjoy the figures, the cup which is a remembrance of His blood, and the bread, of His body.

### **How then are we to regard the Lord's Supper?**

1. It is as we have seen from chapter 11 a **token and sign to faith** of our union with Christ and all His members. It is "fellowship in His blood and in His body."

2. In verses 24 and 25 it is spoken of as a **remembrance** of Him, not merely of His work, but of Himself. The Lord Jesus knew that our memories were weak, and He would have us constantly bring to mind the fact that our

salvation and life are found in Him and in Him alone. Faith delights to remember the Lord, and He rejoices that His loved ones should do so. It is in the nature of a **memorial feast**. As in the case of the Passover, of which we read, "This day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord" (Exod. 12. 14).

3. Verse 26 tells us it is showing or **proclaiming the Lord's death**. Whether to ourselves or to the world, we desire to make known the ground upon which we stand, so we proclaim in the simple ordinance, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

4. It is **an anticipation**, for we show the Lord's death "till He come." It is the table spread in the wilderness in the presence of our enemies (Psa. 23. 5). It is but for a little while, for "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." It cheers us on our pilgrim journey, so much the more as we see the day approaching. Till He come, we delight to gather around the table of our Lord, to remember Him, to anticipate with joy the marriage supper of the Lamb.

### THE TABLE IN THE DESERT.

The bread and wine are spread upon the board,  
The guests are here, invited by the Lord;  
What wait we for? Why tarry for a space?  
But for Thy presence, O Thou King of Grace.

Hush, O our hearts, as in the sacred Name  
We bow in worship and the promise claim;  
"Where two or three are gathered there am I,"  
Unseen, yet present to faith's opened eye.

Here in our midst art Thou, O risen Lord;  
Worthy, O Lamb once slain, to be adored;  
Here in our midst to lead Thy people's praise,  
And spirit worship as sweet incense raise.

We *do* remember Thee, as Thou hast said,  
And think upon Thee as we break the bread,  
Recall Thy dying love, Thy cross and shame,  
Drinking the cup of blessing in Thy Name.

So show we forth the death of our dear Lord,  
While in our hearts His love is shed abroad;  
So is faith quickened for the conflict here,  
Till in a little while He shall appear.

Only a little while we pilgrims stay  
To spread the table on our desert way;  
Soon will He come, and coming take us home.  
Amen, e'en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

There is, however, one other subject that is dealt with in the closing verses of this chapter:

### **The Matter of Eating and Drinking Unworthily.**

In verse 27 we read. "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

And in verses 28 and 29, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Of whom is this spoken?

1. **Of the Unconverted.** An unsaved man who dares to come to the Lord's table, certainly eats and drinks unworthily. The Cross of Christ which is there shown forth, is to the believer, salvation, but the same Cross is the unbeliever's condemnation, for every Christ rejecter will be accounted guilty of the murder of the Son of God, and if he come to take the symbols of that death, he eats and drinks that which speaks condemnation to him.

### **2. A believer eats and drinks unworthily:**

(1) If he come *with unjudged sin upon his conscience*. In Hebrews 10. 22 we are bidden to "draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience;" but to come with an evil conscience is to bring condemnation upon ourselves.

J. N. Darby says: "To bring sin or carelessness into it is to profane the death of Christ, who died rather than

allow sin to subsist before God." It has frequently been said that it reads: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat," not "so let him stay away;" but obviously, if the examination of himself is unsatisfactory, the intention is that he should not eat, for to come to the Lord's Table with the knowledge that he is allowing some evil practice, or has some sin upon his conscience which has not been confessed, judged, and forsaken, is to invite God to judge him.

### **A Case of Restoration.**

Years ago I was asked by an elder sister to speak to a young girl who had once been happy in the Lord, but had for some reason lost all her joy, and love, and zeal. She had continued her Sunday school class, and even came occasionally to the Lord's Table, from fear that her absence might cause questions to be asked. I was led to inquire from her if there was not some unjudged evil upon her conscience that had robbed her of her joy. She replied that there was, and without asking her what it was, for I was not her confessor, I urged her to judge it and put it right before the Lord, and had the satisfaction later of hearing that she had been restored to joy and fellowship. Months afterwards the elder sister informed me of the facts. The young girl had, in a foolish moment, taken her sister's jewelled ring. The servant, who had been accused of stealing it, was dismissed on suspicion in disgrace, and the girl, being afraid to confess her guilt, fearing discovery, had thrown the ring into the dustbin, and it had been carted away with the rubbish; but from that time all her peace and joy had gone, and it was only after the sin had been confessed, and the servant found and vindicated, that she was able again to take her seat at the Lord's Table with her heart sprinkled from an evil conscience.

In Ezra 6. 21 we have the description of the great Pass-over feast on the occasion of the return from the captivity,

and there we read that "all such as had separated themselves from the filthiness of the heathen of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, and keep the feast seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful." It is only such as have separated themselves from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, from all defilement of the flesh and spirit, that should partake of the Lord's Supper.

### **Brøther with Brøther.**

(2) A believer eats and drinks unworthily **if he come to the table at strife or out of love with a fellow-believer.** For the one loaf speaks of the fellowship and union of saints in the body of Christ, and to come in a state that is a practical denial of it is to condemn oneself in the eating. "First go and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come," may indeed, be urged of this feast.

(3) A believer eats unworthily if he come to the table in **a careless state of heart.** Surely this is the meaning of the words, "If he discern not the Lord's body."

Nothing could be sadder than to see a display of irreverence on this solemn occasion. Those who take the Lord's Supper after the manner of the "Church of England," coming up to the rail and kneeling in reverent posture there, have sometimes contemptuously spoken of those who take the Supper "lolling upon benches." We have certainly no desire for a form of reverence that does not express the true state of the heart, but we believe that where reverence truly exists it will show itself in a suitable posture of the body, and reverent conduct generally, and we shall do well to give attention to this matter. But the body is of small importance compared with the state of the heart. We should watch and pray against wandering thoughts, and should prepare our hearts to seek the Lord.

Nevertheless we are all *objects of grace*, and when we draw near to the table of the Lord we do not look for any worthiness in ourselves, but come in simplicity and godly

sincerity to remember Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us never forget this, lest any be discouraged or have superstitious fears that hinder them from enjoying the communion the Lord desires to hold with His gathered people.

### **The Lack of Self-judgment.**

The closing verses of the chapter contain solemn warnings. *The refusal to judge oneself is to invite judgment.* Some of the Corinthians, failing to do so, were weak and sickly, and "not a few" had even fallen asleep, that is, actually died under the chastening of the Lord. But we are told that "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged," judgment being the chastening of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Let us take heed to the solemn words, and the Lord give us understanding in all these things.

## LECTURE VIII.

**The Baptism of Believers.**

**T**HERE is no Scripture that teaches clearly the baptism of any but those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The order given is "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved," and "Many hearing believed, and were baptised."

The first case of baptism we have given in detail is that of the eunuch, and to him the challenge was given, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." The Revised Version omits this, but its place in the traditional text shows it to have been accepted as authoritative at a very early date, and indeed no one would dispute that in such a case it was a necessary challenge. With adults no one denies the necessity of an antecedent faith.

**Infant Baptism**

introduces a subject admittedly not definitely taught or enjoined in Scripture. It is, however, alleged that it can be deduced from Scripture. *But is deduction sufficient in so great a matter?*

We have every sympathy with those who desire, as Hannah did, to dedicate their little ones, given them of God, tenderly loved and earnestly desired for Christ, to Him and His service, but this can be done without robbing the child of that sacred privilege of following the Lord in baptism when the right time comes.

Baptism is not dedication. It is a figure of death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Why deprive your child of this ordinance then by substituting one in which he cannot give "the answer of a good conscience towards God," which is definitely stated to be a necessary part of the ordinance (1 Peter 3. 21).

The need has been felt by those who practice infant baptism, and in order to meet it godparents have been invented and an unscriptural ordinance called "Confirmation" has been appointed in some way to meet the need.

If, then, infant baptism is not enjoined in Scripture, have we any right to destroy the value of the baptism therein clearly taught and enforced (*i.e.*, believer's baptism) by a mere deduction?

Like most traditions it makes void the Word of God. Thousands have never given "the answer of a good conscience" in baptism because they have been taught to regard baptism as unnecessary owing to their having been in infancy subjected to an ordinance in which there was no such answer on their part, and thus no real baptism.

Christendom is divided between two ideas of the baptism of infants. One is known as

### **Baptismal Regeneration,**

and teaches that by baptising an infant it is really "born again." A fact so clearly disproved by the event in thousands of cases that a good deal of difficulty is found in explaining away the truth that our prisons and public-houses are full of persons thus "born again." Baptismal regeneration is generally based upon John 3. 5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

The meaning of "water" here has been the subject of much controversy, but we need not enter upon it.

We know from many Scriptures that regeneration, or new birth, takes place when the sinner is baptised in the Holy Ghost, that is, when believing on the Lord Jesus he receives the gift of the Holy Ghost and is born from above. Even as we see from Peter's words on the day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptised every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2. 38).

But that such a command has no value to an infant is

obvious. The gift of the Holy Ghost and the new birth resulting are consequent upon repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 3. 5 does not teach infant baptism, even admitting that to be a reasonable interpretation which insists that by the water was meant baptism. The Lord expressly declares that it alone is of no value, there must be that of the Holy Ghost to be "born again."

The other idea taught in Christendom is that baptism is

### **An Anticipatory Rite.**

It is the faith of parents who put the seal of their faith on the child, believing that their faith will be honoured by the subsequent regeneration of the child when coming to years of responsibility he believes on the Lord Jesus for himself. It is common to hear the Prayer Book Catechism "...at my baptism wherein I was made a child of God, a member of Christ, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven" explained away in this way, by those who wish to avoid the plain but unscriptural meaning of that Catechism.

There is no direct teaching of this anticipatory idea in Scripture. This is a serious want. It discredits it at once. On so solemn a subject we would certainly have expected a "Thus saith the Lord" if He had intended it to be done, and believer's baptism to be thereby set aside.

It has, however, been deduced from the Old Testament rite of circumcision. There seems at first sight to some to be an analogy. The seal of the covenant made with Abraham was put upon the infant at eight days old. Why not put the seal (baptism) of the new covenant upon our children in infancy. First, because *baptism in water is not the seal of the new covenant*, but the gift of the Holy Ghost is that seal (Eph. 1. 13; 4. 30). Where, we would earnestly inquire, is baptism by water said to be a "seal?"

Secondly, because God has made no new covenant with the natural man. His covenant is with those who are "in Christ." When they are surely born again by faith in the Lord Jesus then, as early as they will let them be baptised.

God's first covenant with Abraham was for those who were born to him in the natural way—an earthly seed. His new covenant is in Christ with those who are born again from above—a heavenly seed.

*Baptism never took the place of circumcision.* This is clear from the discussion in Acts 15. 5-29, when the question raised was "Should the Gentiles be circumcised?" Had baptism taken the place of circumcision the dispute would have been ended in a word, "Of course not, baptism has taken its place." But none of the apostles or elders thought of such a suggestion. It has not done so.

To set aside the baptism of believers on such a supposed analogy is evidently a serious mistake. As the child of Abraham was circumcised eight days after natural birth, so the child of God is baptised after "new birth" by the Spirit. This can be the only true analogy if any is sought.

A more recent theory by which believers' baptism is set aside is that known as

### **Household Baptism.**

It has been stated by one who holds it thus:

"Whenever one apprehends that water baptism has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper or the body of Christ, that it is temporal, for earth, external and *introductory to the sphere where the Lordship of Christ is owned*, all is easy, and the question of the household presents no difficulty."

We need not trouble about the statements that baptism by water is "temporal," "for earth," "external." Such expressions are gratuitous, and have no Scripture to support them. Let us consider the suggestion that house-

hold baptism is "introductory to the sphere where the Lordship of Christ is owned." Is this so? No!

Let us suppose a case. A godly father has ten children, and has them all baptised as infants. He dies while they are all young, and missing his gracious control, they wander unguided into the world. What is "the sphere" into which they are introduced?

Here is another exactly similar family; the father, however, lives, but does not find household baptism in Scripture, and he believes in no such "sphere," but trains his children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Now, according to the "sphere" theory, the latter are at a disadvantage, they are outside "the sphere where the Lordship of Christ is owned," while the other, left without a godly father's training, are in it. I do not ask, "Do you believe it?" I inquire, "Does the Scripture teach this, and if so, where?" The influence of a godly home is a precious thing in God's sight, as many Scriptures teach, and in it the Lordship of Christ is taught and recognised.

### **What is this other Mysterious " Sphere "**

that these children of a godly home are not in and the others are supposed to be in because baptised as infants?

If we are told it is the Church universal which is His body, we ask for any word of Scripture that unregenerate souls are introduced into that body by baptism in water without "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," and without the "answer of a good conscience towards God."

If we are told the sphere is the local Assembly, we ask in amazement if unregenerate souls are to be gathered with the saints of God because baptised in water alone, while those not so baptised are to be refused? Or that the one have any benefit or privilege the other lack. We have no hesitation in rejecting this theory of the sphere. It is, in fact, a revival of an old ecclesiastical fiction which

can be found in such writers as Richard Hooker. In his *Ecclesiastical Polity* this writer says, "We speak now of the visible Church, whose children are signed with this mark, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism.' In whomsoever these things are, the Church doth acknowledge them for her children, them only she holdeth for aliens and strangers in whom these things are not found...If by external profession they be Christians then they are of the visible Church of Christ, and Christians by external profession they are all, whose mark of recognizance hath in it those things which we have mentioned. Yea, although they be impious idolaters, wicked heretics, persons excommunicable; yea, and cast out for notorious improbity. Such we deny not to be the 'imps and limbs of Satan,' even as long as they continue such. Is it then possible that the self-same men should belong to the synagogue of Satan and to the Church of Jesus Christ?

"Unto that Church which is His body not possible; because that body consisteth of none but only true Israelites, true sons of Abraham, true servants and saints of God. Howbeit of the visible body and Church of Jesus Christ those may be, and oft-times are..."

Is this the "sphere" intended? Are these limbs of Satan really in it because baptised by water? Peter did not think so when he told the baptised Simon, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in the matter, for thine heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee, for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8. 21-23).

Evidently this "sphere" is invented to meet the emergency of a man-made creed. A visible Church, consisting of all baptised persons, whether "imps and limbs of Satan" or not, is, to say the least of it, unsupported by the Scriptures.

We have no "Thus saith the Lord" for a "visible Church" which is not His body. Nor do we read in Scripture of such a Church acknowledging her children.

We are not surprised then to read in the *Ecclesiastical Polity* that it is not necessary that "Church polity must be found in Scripture."

Beloved, why not be satisfied with what is clearly and unmistakably taught in Scripture. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." Why set it aside with inferences and deductions?

### **An Interesting Illustration.**

A lady, well known for her good works, told me the following story of how she was led to the truth on the subject of baptism.

As a young believer she had been taught to test everything by the Word of God. On one occasion she heard a discussion between a Roman priest and a Protestant churchman. The former was insisting on the authority of "Holy Church," as he was pleased to call the Roman hierarchy. In order to convince his opponent he exclaimed, "Where do you get infant baptism that you practice from? It is not in the Bible. No, you got it from Holy Church."

"Is that so?" asked the lady, "then I must look into it." She accordingly examined the Scriptures and found two things: that infant baptism was not there, but that believers alone were baptised on the confession of their faith; and in obedience to the Word of God she was accordingly baptised by immersion as a believer in the Lord Jesus.

## LECTURE IX.

## The Messages to the Seven Churches.

### A Study of Revelation 2 and 3.

**WE** shall do well to remember that there are three realms in which God has been pleased to make Himself known, and in which we may see His hand at work. The first is, of course, nature; the second is revelation, the Word of God; and the third is history.

We are all familiar with those Scriptures which speak of the manifestation of God's praise in nature: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," and none but one who has his eyes shut can fail to see the eternal power and Godhead of the living God in the things which are seen.

Again we are constantly exhorted in Scripture to give heed to the Holy Scriptures, as to a light that shineth in a dark place; but I am afraid there are many who have not recognised the fact that the Scriptures have something to say also upon the subject of history.

God would have us know something of the signs of the times, as the Scripture calls them. May I remind you of the words of our blessed Lord in the 16th of Matthew and the 3rd verse, "When it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern

### The Signs of the Times?"

There the Lord makes a special appeal to us to observe the signs of the times which have something to teach us,

and rebukes those who could read the signs of the sky as to whether it would be a fine day or not on the morrow, but had failed to see the hand of God working in the events happening around them.

We have similar teaching in the 21st of Luke and the 28th verse, "And when these things"—of which He had spoken in that chapter, signs in the heavens, wars, and tumults upon the earth—"begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. And He spake to them a parable: Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." He bids them lift up their eyes, for there were things about to happen in the history of nations and peoples which were to be signs to them of the coming of their redemption.

There is a

### **Very Practical Value in Prophecy.**

It is the Holy Spirit's forewarning and anticipation of things to come. Thus the Lord warned His people of days of persecution, and said, "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come ye may remember that I told you of them" (John 16. 4). I have given you prophecy, foreshadowing the history that is to be unfolded in due time so that when you see these historical events happening you won't say, "Alas! how different it all is from what we expected!"

*The purpose of prophecy is not to satisfy mere curiosity.* It is not like seeking to familiar spirits, and wizards that peep and mutter, prying into the future. God has forbidden that, but the use of prophecy is to foreshadow great events that are to happen, that when they happen we may not be taken by surprise, as the Lord said, "Now have I told you before it come to

pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe" (John 14. 29).

Let me give you a very simple, but, I think, a forcible illustration that I once heard of this subject.

Suppose you are going for a long day's walk in a strange country, you ask some one who is familiar with the way to point out some of the landmarks by which you will know that you are right. He tells you, "When you get to a certain point you will see a pond, a little further on you will see a windmill on the top of a hill, make your way in the direction of the windmill, and when you have got over the hill, down in the valley, you will see a little white cottage; take the road by the white cottage, and some time later you will see a clump of beautiful fir-trees, and when you see them you will be within sight of your destination."

Now the foreshadowings of prophecy in Scripture are given with that intent, so that when on our pilgrim journey we see things happening that would otherwise have alarmed us we are assured. Just as the traveller might say, "Here is the pond, and here is the windmill, here the cottage, and here are the fir-trees, I see I am right," so by the events foretold we know we are being brought safely along our journey. I am saying these things because I want you not to do as so many do in their impatience: they brush all prophecy aside, and say I do not believe in those people who go in for prophecy, they are just cranks. Now it is true there are those who may be described as cranks, but there is also such a thing as a reverent and a profitable study of the mind of God, as foretold in the prophetic forecasts which He has given us in His Word, and what I want to do is to point out what I believe to be one of the most wonderful forecasts of all that God has been pleased to give us.

The question I desire to answer is: Are these chapters 2 and 3 in the book of Revelation simply messages, of general interest perhaps, but only messages given to little

local Assemblies in years gone by, that have no particular interest for us, except that these people had to be warned of certain things; or are they to be regarded as *a prophetic forecast of the things which are happening now*, so that we may observe by means of them the "signs of the times," and be confident, and may look up and see that our redemption draweth nigh. In other words, are these *indications by the Spirit of God of*

### The History of His Church

*in the midst of Christendom and the world?*

I believe, and I know there are many others who believe with me, that God has been pleased to do this very thing, that we have in the history of the seven churches seven stages in the course of God's Church on earth. That while it is true each message had a local application, that there were seven churches in this province of Asia, and no doubt the state of them was such as is described; nevertheless, we believe that God has been pleased to select these seven churches, because they had in them the seed and fruit of that which was afterwards to be manifest in the history of Christendom. In other words, that there is in these two chapters a prophetic anticipation of "the things which now are."

Let us look and see if we are justified in this. I do not for a moment suppose that the wise men of this world, or the philosophers of this age, will do anything but sneer at such a suggestion, for they sneer at all prophecy. We do well to remember what some one has very wisely remarked that the child of God can see farther on his knees than the philosopher on tiptoe, that it is written: God has "hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes;" and, "If any man will be wise, let him become a fool that he may be wise."

If we come in this spirit and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, we shall find that God has a very blessed

purpose for us in the quickening of our hope of the Coming of the Lord, in this wonderful forecast, in the messages to the seven churches.

Now let us look at some reasons that have induced us to think this.

First of all, notice that

### **The Number Seven**

is a symbolic number. In the book of the Revelation everything is in sevens. The seven stars, the seven candlesticks, the seven vials, the seven trumpets, the seven seals, and so on.

And we find mentioned some things which we should not expect to be spoken of in sevens, and which we know in fact are not literally seven in number. For instance, the "seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 3. 1). We know that there is only One Blessed Spirit, that the language here is symbolic language, setting forth a perfect conception under the figure seven, of the One Spirit of God. There were many other churches than these seven; indeed some of the more notable churches are not included amongst the seven. For instance, the church at Antioch, the church in Jerusalem, the church at Rome, the church at Alexandria, and so on. We have these seven Assemblies picked out and the messages given to them, the number seven being a symbol or figure of the whole of the churches of the saints.

The second thing that leads us to this conclusion is that it is called

### **The Mystery of the Churches.**

There would be no mystery in messages to seven particular Assemblies, but if in these seven Assemblies the Lord is addressing the whole Church of God, and is speaking in prophecy, as He says in the 1st chapter, 3rd verse, "the words of this prophecy," then we can quite understand Him speaking of it as a mystery, for mystery in Scripture

does not mean something mysterious, but something that has been hidden until God, in His grace, unveils it. Here, then, we have the unveiling of that which had been hidden, the purpose of God down the ages for His Church, "the mystery of the seven stars... and the seven golden candlesticks."

The third reason is, that *seven times over in these chapters we have the appeal:*

**"He that hath an Ear, let him Hear**

*what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* You see, therefore, that each message is not limited to the angel of that particular church, but there is a wider word, the Spirit speaking to the churches. It is very difficult to resist the conviction that God has, therefore, a message to the churches down the ages, when He says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

But perhaps the strongest argument is *the place that these seven messages to the churches occupy in the book of the Revelation*. Now we know that the book of the Revelation is very extraordinary. Some one has said that the Word of God would be without its completion, its topstone, if the book of Revelation did not end it.

Indeed, the Scriptures would be exceedingly discouraging if we had not the book of Revelation. For what should we find? We should discover from the epistles the creeping in of failure in the churches, and we should say, "Alas! the Church which seemed such a beautiful and glorious thing is already corrupted." There are signs of decay already in this majestic work of God, and we should lie down with disappointment, if not in despair, were it not that in this prophecy God has given a forecast and a warning of what is to be.

The book of Revelation carries us right on through the judgments, amidst the crash of ruin, to the establishment of the new Jerusalem, and to the glory which shall be

throughout all eternity. Therefore nothing alarms us, for we are forewarned before it comes to pass.

Now let us look carefully at this book. Those who have studied it agree that we have the divisions of the book in the first chapter, and the last verse but one. "Write *the things which thou hast seen*"—that is the wonderful revelation of Christ walking among the candlesticks. Second, "*the things which are*;" and third, "the things which shall be hereafter." Now, as to the third division, "*the things which shall be hereafter*," we know when that begins. If you turn to the 1st verse of the 4th chapter you will read, "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in Heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter." So the things which shall be hereafter begin with the 4th chapter, and you will notice that the 4th chapter introduces us to Heaven; a door is opened in Heaven. The Church of God is seen, not upon earth, but in Heaven.

The promise of 1 Thessalonians 4. 15-18 has taken place, and the Church has been caught up to meet her Lord, and is gone in to be with Him for ever. So, from the 4th chapter, we have "the things which shall be hereafter."

Where, then, are those events which are described as "the things which are?" Where is the prophecy of present events? Where do we find the history of the Church from the time of its foundation by the Coming of the Holy Ghost to the time of its being caught up to be with the Lord? The only conclusion we can come to is this, that forecast must be found in these two chapters, between "the things which thou hast seen," and "the things which must be hereafter." We may fairly say that without question "the things which are," are the things which are contained in the messages to the seven churches. This confirms us in the assurance that these chapters have a prophetic value.

Let us consider carefully some of the things we find in these seven messages.

### 1. The Lord Clothed in Dignity,

*walking among His churches.* Let us never forget that this is His office until He takes the Church to be with Himself. Not now the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, but clothed in majesty. We have only to read the description to feel with John that we must fall down upon our faces before Him. We have in Scripture three references to the Lord's apparel. He *girded Himself* on one occasion, and that was with a towel, when He washed His disciples' feet. Men put upon Him a purple robe, and there we see how *the world girded Him* in mockery and despised Him.

But here we see how *God has girded Him*, "girt about the paps with a golden girdle." Thus in dignity and majesty He walks among the churches.

And to each of them He says, "I know."

Oh, dear saints of God, who gather in our Assemblies, remember Him who walks amongst us, seeing all that takes place, the Beholder of all. He says, "I know, I know." All down the ages He walks thus; He whose eyes are like a flame of fire says, "I know." Do not let us forget it.

And to these churches He says, "I will give." He is the avenger and will recompense. And again He says, "I will come again;" and His reward is with Him. Thus He represents Himself to His churches. Next note,

### 2. A Steady Decline

*in the spiritual state of these Assemblies.* From Ephesus, which had left its first love, to Laodicea, wretched, miserable, and poor, and blind and naked.

The idea that the Church of God is gradually going to make the world better finds no place in Scripture. As one has written: "Things do not melt quietly into the peace of the Kingdom of God; there is the crash of ruin." In this

book of Revelation, where we get a prophetic forecast of what is coming, we see judgment upon judgment, vials, trumpets, seals, and the pouring out of wrath. Christendom is not getting better; there is stupendous failure stamped upon its great organisations and so-called churches yet in it, but not of it, is the holy thing that the Lord loved and gave Himself for, and which will be manifested and glorified with Him one day. This is what we have foreshadowed as we look down the history of the churches, beginning with the first decline, "Thou hast left thy first love," and ending with, "I will spue thee out of My mouth," because thou art neither cold nor hot, lukewarm, a thing which a man turns from with revulsion. High profession of sanctity, consisting with evil life and everything godless and worldly, this is what is found in Christendom to-day—a thing to be loathed and turned from with disgust.

### **3. The Rise and Progress of Great Heresies.**

In the first church, Ephesus, we have the heresy of the Nicolaitanes. This has always been a great mystery. Historians have searched in vain for any record of this heresy. Some have sought to identify it with the followers of a certain Nicholas, but unsuccessfully. There is, however, another explanation; those who read carefully the meaning of words will have no difficulty in seeing what was the first trouble that crept in. The word "Nicolaitanes" is made up from two Greek words, "Niko," I conquer, or I overcome, and "laos," the people; and many believe—one cannot dogmatise upon it—that we have here the beginning of clerisy and priestly domination. In Ephesus it existed, but was hated (Rev. 2. 6); but in Pergamos it had ceased to be hated, and was held (Rev. 2. 15).

So we find in the very first church a caste forming that soon began to tyrannise over what has been called the laity.

In the second church, Smyrna, we find "*them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*" These are Judaizing teachers, those who, down the ages, have sought to reduce Christian life to the level of a moral code, as if it were but a supplement to the law of Moses. We find this at work among the Galatians, and strongly rebuked by the Apostle, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

In the third church, Pergamos, we have *the doctrine of Balaam*. Balaam is spoken of three times in the New Testament. He is referred to as the one "who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2. 15), who taught "error for reward" (Jude 11): a prophet who loved wages, the worldly priest. Again, as the one who taught Israel to "commit fornication" (Rev. 2. 14). Now spiritual fornication, as all know, is the Christian mixing with the world, and this worldly system of Balaam is the believer joining hands with the world in a so-called religion. And again, he was the one who stumbled Israel with idols. He is the Mr. Anything of Bunyan—anything as long as he is well paid for it. Thus we have foreshadowed the union to its misery, of the Church and the world.

In the next church, Thyatira, we have a more serious state of things yet. "*Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel.*"

Jezebel is perhaps the most hateful female character that has ever been recorded, and she stands in Scripture as the figure of an apostate church, "the depths of Satan as they speak" (Rev. 2. 24). This apostate church has the following characteristics.

She claims inspiration, "callesth herself a prophetess" (v. 20). She teaches and seduces the Lord's servants "to commit fornication;" that is, she mixes her ecclesiastical profession with worldly pretensions, "and to eat things sacrificed to idols." It is easy to recognise the likeness in the great, worldly idolatrous hierarchies of which Rome is the most flagrant example

These heresies we find down the ages occurring again and again, for with regard to such there is nothing new under the sun. Nevertheless, these things do not hinder a reformation, a new earnestness, as in the Church of Sardis (but "not perfect," ch. 3. v. 2), that exists side by side with a marvellous opportunity and an "open door," as in the Church of Philadelphia, such as never has been known before in the world's history. Within the last fifty years the world's door has been set wide open for the publication of the Bible and the preaching of the Gospel.

Yet we have this open door just before the final stage, as in the Church of Laodicea, when men are indifferent to spiritual things, "neither cold nor hot."

The following diagram is only a suggestion, the merest suggestion. I do not pretend that I have the prophetic insight to discern all that is taught in these messages to the churches, nor to indicate with any special precision "the signs of the times."

Yet we notice, as we look down the principal events that have happened since the time of Christ, that they follow with remarkable coincidence the stages forecast in these seven churches.

# Historical Outline of Christendom.

## Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A.D.

|                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| 29              | The Coming of the Holy Ghost.   | } <i>Ephesus:</i><br>The first love.                           |
| 70              | Destruction of Jerusalem under Emperor Titus.   |  |
| 99              | Death of John the Apostle.  |  |
| 64<br>to<br>309 | <i>Persecutions</i> under ten Roman Emperors (from Nero to Diocletian).   | } <i>Smyrna:</i><br>Faithful unto death.                       |
| 115             | Martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch.   |  |
| 166             | Martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna.  |  |
| 312             | <i>Constantine</i> (Emperor) professes conversion; moves to Constantinople (Head of Church and Pontifex Maximus). | } <i>Pergamos:</i><br>Doctrine of Balaam, Church and World.    |
| 325             | Council of Nicea.   |  |
| 337             | Baptised and dies.  |  |
| 590             | <i>Gregory I. (Pope).</i> Universal Bishopric.  | } <i>Thyatira:</i><br>That woman Jezebel; the depths of Satan. |
| 630             | Mahomed, Lord of Mecca.   |  |
| 636             | Captures Damascus and Jerusalem.  |  |
| 1453            | Turks capture Constantinople.   |  |
| 730             | Gregory II. excommunicates Emperor.   |  |
|                 | Schism of Greek and Roman Churches.   |  |
| 772             | Adrian I. (Pope) utters the forged "Donation of Constantine."   |  |
| 1073            | Gregory VII. (Hildebrand). Height of Papacy.  |  |
|                 | Emperor Henry IV. does penance.   |  |

|      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 1517 | Luther nails his theses to Wittenburg Church door.  | } <i>Sardis:</i><br>A few names<br>"not perfect."                |
| 1529 | <i>The Great Protest</i> of German Princes at Spiers.   |  |
| 1499 | <i>Printing</i> and Publication of the Bible.   | } <i>Philadelphia:</i><br>Love to<br>brothers; The<br>Open Door. |
| 1620 | The Pilgrim Fathers go to America.  |  |
|      | Liberty of Conscience. Revivals, Missionary effort in every nation.                             |  |
| 1800 | Philanthropy multiplies.  | } <i>Laodicea:</i><br>Neither hot<br>nor cold.                   |
| to   | <i>Large and Wordly Churches and Societies.</i>   |  |
|      | Much activity.  |  |
| 1900 | Christless Christianity. Churchianity—Social Christianity, Christian Science, Higher Criticism. |  |

### "BEHOLD I COME QUICKLY."

My purpose in setting out the above is not to contend that it is the right interpretation of these things; but to suggest to you that God is speaking to the churches, and that these prophecies are to him that hath ears to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. In them we may hear the Lord's voice saying, "These things have I told you before they come to pass."

One last thing we notice in the messages. There is a *seven times repeated call for overcomers in the churches to individuals in an evil day*. The Lord says, "To him that overcometh," and He puts seven special promises before those who hold fast until He come, who keep the Word of His patience, and who keep their garments white. May He give to us each individually to be amongst those overcomers in these evil, declining days!

## Concluding Words.

**T**HOSE who are sometimes called "open brethren" are desirous of being found among these overcomers, of being faithful to the Lord, and this in three special particulars:

### 1. **They desire to Hold Fast the Word of God.**

In spite of what is often alleged, there is very little difference of opinion as to what the Word of God actually says. In all essential particulars the language is unambiguous and clear. The real question that is raised is as to how far we are responsible to do it. Permissible systems, liberty to depart from the commandment, and other deductions are contended for, which we must disallow. In the keeping of His commandments there is great reward, therefore let us seek to carry out the Scriptures wherever they may lead us, so far as God shall give us grace and light.

We hear a great deal to-day about "full surrender," but let us recognise that true "full surrender" is heart submission and obedience to the Word of God. If we know any Scripture that is against us, let us surrender to it as we honour our Lord, for He said, "He that hath My words, and doeth them, he it is that loveth Me." Let us honestly desire that we may be found right with the Word of God, for He will judge us in that day by the words that He has spoken.

### 2. **They desire in all Sincerity to Separate from Evil Associations,**

false doctrine, uncleanness, and whatever else is wrong, and desire to have no fellowship with it. Such want really to keep their garments white. Not to separate from their brethren—God forbid—but to separate from wrong, from evil, from heresy, from all that is dishonouring to the Name of our Blessed God and Saviour.

Since the above was published the writer has been challenged, "How can one separate from evil without separating from his brethren?" He replies, "Love will find the way since the first is enjoined (2 Cor. 6. 17); the latter is forbidden" (John 17. 21 and 1 Cor. 11. 12).

### **3. They desire to Acknowledge Practically the Oneness of the Body of Christ.**

If they are to receive the title brethren (and they cannot help it being put upon them), they receive it "only as descriptive of their individual state as Christians." In other words they spell it with a small "b," and not a capital "B." We are all brethren because we are Christians, and the Lord bade us recognise the fact. Thus in our hearts we should go out with sympathy and affection to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, to all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, "for we are all one in Him." Our aim should not be denominational or sectarian, but to help and sympathise with every member of His body.

If in what has been said there is aught wrong, the Lord forgive it; if what is said be to His glory, the Lord bless it.

# INDEX.

|                                    | Page  |                                    | Page    |
|------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|---------|
| ADMINISTRATIONS, Divers,           | 51    | Clerisy, Rise of, ..               | 32, 109 |
| Alford, Dean ( <i>Quoted</i> ), .. | 34    | Communion in Blood and             |         |
| Amalgamations, .. ..               | 24    | in Body, .. ..                     | 81      |
| Amusements Allowed, ..             | 45    | Confirmation, .. ..                | 93      |
| Andronicus and Junia, ..           | 37    | Confusion as to Church Life,       | 9       |
| Anticipation, Feast of, ..         | 89    | Constantine, .. ..                 | 36, 112 |
| Assembly Liberty, ..               | 46    | Council of Trent, .. ..            | 26      |
| Associations Allowed, ..           | 45    | Cromwell, .. ..                    | 39      |
| BALAAAM, .. ..                     | 110   | Cyprian, .. ..                     | 36      |
| Baptism of Believers, ..           | 94    | DARBY, J. N. ( <i>Quoted</i> ), .. | 65      |
| .. of Infants, .. ..               | 94    | David refuses to drink, ..         | 87      |
| .. Hunschoff, .. ..                | 97    | Deacons, .. ..                     | 41      |
| Baptismal Regeneration,            | 95    | .. to be Known, ..                 | 53      |
| Beauty of the Lord, ..             | 76    | .. to be Proved, ..                | 54      |
| Bishops in Scripture, ..           | 33    | .. no Office of, ..                | 51      |
| .. Same as Elders, ..              | 34    | Deductions avoiding Scrip-         |         |
| .. of Southwark ( <i>Quoted</i> ), | 25    | ture, .. ..                        | 94      |
| Bloodthirstiness of Sots,          | 28    | Diagram, .. ..                     | 112     |
| Bondage, .. ..                     | 27    | Difference of Gifts, ..            | 50      |
| Books to Read, .. ..               | 44    | Diocesan Bishops, ..               | 35      |
| Breaking of Bread, ..              | 61-80 | Diotrephes, .. ..                  | 31      |
| Brother Demanding Over-            |       | Display of Gifts, .. ..            | 67      |
| sight, .. ..                       | 60    | Distinctive Marks of Be-           |         |
| Bunyan, J. ( <i>Quoted</i> ), ..   | 71    | lievers, .. ..                     | 19      |
| CALLED TO FELLOWSHIP, ..           | 9     | Divine Order in Ministry, ..       | 48      |
| Calvin's Plan, .. ..               | 39    | Drawing Near, .. ..                | 77      |
| Carelessness at Lord's             |       | Drinking Blood, .. ..              | 87      |
| Table, .. ..                       | 92    | ECCLESIA, Use of Word, ..          | 13      |
| Charismata, .. ..                  | 50    | <i>Ecclesiastical Polity</i> , ..  | 99      |
| Church and Churches, ..            | 13    | Edifying, Is it? .. ..             | 84      |
| .. Meaning of, .. ..               | 13    | Elders, Same as Bishops,           | 34      |
| .. Not a Building, ..              | 14    | .. Old Men, Not all, ..            | 57      |
| .. Not an Order of Men,            | 14    | .. Must be Gifted, ..              | 58      |
| .. Not a System, ..                | 15    | .. Appeal from, .. ..              | 58      |
| .. A Calling Out, ..               | 15    | Ephesus, Church of, ..             | 109     |
| .. Our Lord's Reference,           | 16    | Episcopacy, Rise of, ..            | 33      |
| .. Figures of, .. ..               | 19    | Exclusive Rings, .. ..             | 29      |
| .. Expression on Earth,            | 21    | Expedient, Is it? .. ..            | 84      |
| .. Purpose and Destiny,            | 21    | Ex-Purgatoris, .. ..               | 44      |
| .. of England, 24, 39,             | 99    | FIRST DAY OF WEEK, ..              | 80      |
| .. of Rome, 24, 100,               | 110   | Fox, G., the Quaker, ..            | 40, 72  |
| Churchianity, .. ..                | 57    | Foundation of All, ..              | 16      |
| Circumcision, .. ..                | 94    |                                    |         |

|  | Page   |                                | Page   |
|--|--------|--------------------------------|--------|
| <b>GIFTS AND GOVERNMENT,</b>                         | 48     | Members of Christ,             | 17     |
| Giving and Worship,                                  | 79     | Memorial Feast,                | 89     |
| Glory of God, Is it to?                              | 84     | Memory,                        | 79     |
| Government,  | 57     | Messages to Churches,          | 101    |
| Gregory I. ( <i>Quoted</i> ),                        | 36     | Ministry,                      | 63     |
| Guidance of Spirit,                                  | 61     | Liberty in,                    | 63     |
| in Ministry,   | 70     | in the Spirit,                 | 71     |
| in Worship,  | 76     | Montanism,                     | 41     |
| <b>HABITATION OF GOD,</b>                            | 21     | Mutuality,                     | 54, 56 |
| Headship of Christ, 20, 23, 42, 50                   |        | Mystery of Churches,           | 105    |
| Heresy, Truth often branded as,                      | 40     | <b>NESTORIANS,</b>             | 109    |
| Hunting,   | 29     | Newton, J. ( <i>Quoted</i> ),  | 17     |
| Progress of,   | 109    | Nicolaitanes,                  | 109    |
| History, Unwritten,                                  | 40     | Office in N.T.,                | 51     |
| of Church Forecast,                                  | 109    | Officialism,                   | 33     |
| Hogg, C. F. ( <i>Quoted</i> ),                       | 60     | One Body, 20, 51, 81,          | 115    |
| Hooker, Richard ( <i>Quoted</i> ),                   | 99     | One Offering,                  | 86     |
| Huss of Bohemia,                                     | 41     | Open Brethren Defined,         | 11     |
| <b>IDOLATRY,</b>                                     | 49, 82 | Operations, Divers,            | 51     |
| Ignatius ( <i>Quoted</i> ),                          | 35     | Oracles of God, Speaking as,   | 72     |
| Infant Baptism Introduced,                           | 38     | Ordinances of Christ,          | 80     |
| Deduced only,  | 94     | Ordination,                    | 53     |
| Interdependence,                                     | 55     | Overcomers,                    | 113    |
| Israel after Flesh,                                  | 82     | Oversight,                     | 57     |
| "Is the Sword to Devour for Ever" ( <i>Quoted</i> ), | 29     | Submission to,                 | 42     |
| <b>JEROME (<i>Quoted</i>),</b>                       | 34     | <b>PARLIAMENTARY REPORT ON</b> |        |
| Jesuits,   | 39     | BRETHREN,                      | 10     |
| Jezebel,   | 110    | Perfected for Ever,            | 87     |
| Joining Church,                                      | 18     | Pergamos, Church of,           | 110    |
| <b>LAODICEA, Church of,</b>                          | 111    | Persecution,                   | 28     |
| Legality, Christian,                                 | 44     | Peter's Confession,            | 16     |
| Liberty, What is?                                    | 43     | Philadelphia, Church of,       | 111    |
| Personal,  | 44     | Poems:                         |        |
| in Assembly,   | 46     | "The Cup of Blessing,"         | 83     |
| Use of,  | 47     | "The Bread and Wine,"          | 89     |
| Lightfoot ( <i>Quoted</i> ),                         | 34     | Praise, Sacrifice of,          | 78     |
| Lincoln, Wm. ( <i>Quoted</i> ),                      | 75     | Prayer Book,                   | 27     |
| Lord's Table and Supper,                             | 80     | President at Meetings,         | 63     |
| Lords over God's Heritage,                           | 32     | Proclaiming the Lord's         |        |
| Lordship of Christ,                                  | 24, 53 | Death,                         | 89     |
| Love,  | 59     | Professionalism,               | 33     |
| Lutherans,   | 39     | Prophecy Defined,              | 65     |
| <b>MAN-MADE ORDINANCES,</b>                          | 30     | Not Ceased,                    | 65     |
| Marks of True Worshipers,                            | 77     | Distinguished from             |        |
| Mayflower,   | 39     | Revelation,                    | 66     |
|  |        | Directions as to,              | 66     |
|  |        | to be Coveted,                 | 73     |
|  |        | Value of,                      | 112    |
|  |        | Prophets, What are?            | 65     |

|                                    | Page |                             | Page |
|------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| REASONS FOR LECTURES, ..           | 9    | Supper of the Lord, ..      | 85   |
| Reformation, ..                    | 38   | .. No Merit, ..             | 85   |
| Responsibility of Fellow-          |      | .. Not a Sacrifice, ..      | 85   |
| ship, ..                           | 83   | .. Not Eating Flesh, ..     | 86   |
| Restoration, ..                    | 91   | Systems of Government, ..   | 30   |
| Robinson, J. ( <i>Quoted</i> ), .. | 66   | Thanksgiving, ..            | 78   |
| .. Teaching of, ..                 | 39   | Thyatira, Church of, ..     | 110  |
| Rock, The, ..                      | 16   | "UNWORTHILY," ..            | 90   |
| Rome, Blasphemy of, ..             | 86   | VARIETY IN UNITY, ..        | 56   |
| SACRIFICING PRIESTS, ..            | 36   | WALDENSIANS, ..             | 41   |
| Sardis, Church of, ..              | 111  | Whitfield's Preaching, ..   | 73   |
| Schism Defined, ..                 | 27   | Woolman, J., Confession, .. | 68   |
| Sectarianism, Effect of, ..        | 26   | Worship, Nature of, ..      | 74   |
| Self-Judgment, ..                  | 93   | .. in Spirit, ..            | 61   |
| Seven, The Number, ..              | 105  | .. Illustrated, ..          | 74   |
| Signs of the Times, ..             | 101  | .. The Overflowing, ..      | 75   |
| Simpherty in Christ, ..            | 23   | .. Associated with          |      |
| Smayna, Church of, ..              | 110  | .. Giving, ..               | 79   |
| Split of Eastern and               |      | Wychf, ..                   | 41   |
| Western Churches, ..               | 36   |                             |      |
| Strife, ..                         | 92   |                             |      |
| Stumbling Others, ..               | 84   |                             |      |

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