

Present Exercises

as to

Christian Fellowship

BY JOHN BLOORE

CONTENTS:

A Glance Backward	3
Scriptural Simplicity	8
National Churches and Denominations..	9
"There is one Body," the principle on which to gather together	11
Associations and Defilement	12
Separation from Evil	15
Divisions among "Brethren"	16
Discipline	16
Circles of Fellowship	19
The Unity of the Body of Christ	20
Have we heard the rod and who ap- pointed it? (Mic. 6: 9)	21
Is the Lord's Supper the Expression of Vital Union, or of Agreement on Details?	24
A Personal Confession and Appeal	25
Appendix: The Bethesda Statement of 1906	27

PRESENT EXERCISES

as to

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

A GLANCE BACKWARD

The meridian of divine revelation was reached in the ministry of Paul. It was given to him to complete the Word of God. We get its full splendor in Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians. Related truths, both doctrinal and practical, are developed in his other epistles. This whole counsel of God Paul declared and committed to the assembly. Not for long did it abide in the glory and goodness of these wondrous unfoldings. In the addresses to the seven churches we learn from the Lord Himself how great the declension had become within 100 years.

Departure increased, and in another century the shadows had greatly deepened. The distinctive truths of Paul's epistles were no longer ministered in the churches. The gloom became greater until the dense darkness of the middle ages enveloped Christendom. Into this darkness the Reformation sent a beam of light. This wrought a partial transformation, but not until about one hundred years ago did the Spirit bring again to light the long hidden truth enshrined in the Pauline Epistles. This was not done all at once, but gradually those whom the Lord then raised up brought out

the gold, silver and precious stones long buried under the accumulated debris of man's religious inventions and sophistries. Their display touched many hearts, and delivered many from bondage to traditionalism, ritualism, and their attendant evils. We are the inheritors of this remarkable and blessed renaissance of divine truths. Let us take inventory of this priceless legacy. We need not follow a historical order, but rather consider it in its spiritual relations.

First, we may mention *the headship of Christ*: His place in glory, atonement having been fully accomplished, where He is set forth as Head of the assembly and Head over all things, the One in whom all the fulness dwells, the One who has all preeminence. To this there are many related lines of truth, both individual and collective, for example, justification, sanctification, redemption, sonship, co-heirship, new creation.

The truth of the one Body of which Christ is the Head follows. To this all believers since Pentecost belong, being baptized into it by the Holy Spirit and united to the Head—members of Christ and members one of another. With this we get the unfolding of our relation to Christ and the relationship established among the saints who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.

This leads to *the truth of the Spirit's presence*, affording full power and sufficiency for Christian life and service in all the varied activities to which the Word of God directs us, whatever the sphere of life we consider, individual or collective, apart from all confidence in the flesh or the use of the ways and means which man's wisdom might devise or human expediency dictate in place of simple wholehearted recognition and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Himself declared that as there was the One Shepherd—Himself, so there would be one flock, made up of Jewish and Gentile sheep. In due course, after the Spirit had come, we see the sheep gathered together. Thus the assembly was formed, and this found expression in local assemblies gathered at various places as the Spirit wrought through the Word by the apostles and their fellow-laborers. To all such companies, gathered as they must have been in recognition of the truths already mentioned, pertained *the great blessing of the Lord's presence* as gathered unto His name and not another. Thus the apostle in writing to the Corinthians could say, "I exhort you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and speak too of all who in every place call on that Name.

These related truths involve that of *ministry*: with that of Christ's headship there are the gifts given to the assembly as a whole, but then also every member of the Body is viewed as a channel of love's ministry from Christ to the Body that it may increase and be edified; with that of the Spirit's presence, formation of the Body, and indwelling, it follows that He is the One who is to energize and direct in all the functions of the Body—*He*, in the hearts and minds of all, is to be given this place, and in the exercise of patience and prayer in which all should share, with all fleshly confidence set aside, *His* guidance be sought, *His* right recognized to use whom He will, our own spirits held in leash as we wait upon Him, assured that that to which He leads will be in agreement with the Word of God as to spirit, mode and matter. As there is to be no independence among the members, so there is to be none on their part of Him—that One Spirit of whom they have been made to drink. This means true liberty—not license to do as we please or say

what we please, but dependence and submission to this divine and holy Leader. This involves exercise and self-judgment, so that restless, proud flesh may be kept under our feet. He, the Spirit of truth, has given ample instructions which need no supplementing by man-made regulations to safeguard from disorder and confusion in the assemblies of the Lord's people.

That revival of truth already alluded to quickly manifested the evil condition of things in Christendom and its religious system. Clerisy was seen to virtually usurp the place of the Holy Spirit, substituting for *His* recognition that of a man to whom some special title was given, along with a place of authority and rule which practically set aside the place of both the Spirit and the Lord in the midst of the saints. With this there is a second evil, that of ritualism, to be observed in various gradations from the heathenish superstitions of Rome to the more or less formal order of what is called "worship" under the direction or selection of some specially appointed person designated for the place. From all of this, in greater or less degree, that liberty of ministry involved in the presence and power of the Spirit is conspicuously absent, even when there is orthodoxy as to fundamental doctrine.

Along with this revival of truth mention must be made of the large place given to prophetic teaching, the prominence given to the truth of Christ's Second Coming, and the dispensations which mark the course of time from Eternity to Eternity.

As these precious truths gripped heart and conscience, many saw that it was impossible to practise them in the system of things found in Christendom and with which they were associated in some form or other. That system with its clerisy,

traditionalism and ritualism was the opposite to what the New Testament taught, while the absence of scriptural discipline in any form permitted all manner of evil association. Therefore separation became necessary, that what the Holy Spirit had been bringing to light might be put into practice. Thus companies were soon gathered, owning no name but that of Christ, no leader but the Holy Spirit, no order other than that found in the Word. There was no pretense to being the Church, or a new Church, or of an attempt to form the Church again, rather a humble confession of the outward ruin of the Church because of the failure and sin of men into whose hands the truth of it had been committed, with a simple dependence upon the Lord's promise that where two or three are gathered unto His name He would be present, and the recognition that the Spirit and the Word remained as at the first, with the refusal of man's fleshly wisdom and ways in the things of God.

The companies so gathered sought to own the truth of the one Body—the unity of all believers, and received to walk with them in the joy and blessing of what had been received, all who gave witness to faith in Christ, soundness in the faith, and godliness of life. All such companies by virtue of the place taken, confessing the unity of all believers, owning the One Spirit who formed that unity, and the Lord's name alone, acted as mutually recognizing each other, for to that unity must belong the same general order, the same discipline and the same relationship the world over.

Whatever has come in since the early days of this movement to mar this precious and powerful witness to the truth, does not absolve us from using all diligence to *now* practise and maintain the same principles of truth and unity. This can

only be done with deep humility and self-judgment, confessing not only the general ruin spoken of at the first but now also the sad breakdown and break-up of those companies gathered together by those very principles. It is still true that the Lord's promise abides for faith, and that the Spirit and Word are here.

SCRIPTURAL SIMPLICITY

In view of the present disorderly state of Christendom, separation from its various sects and denominations is certainly necessary if there is to be the practice and enjoyment of the truth as to the Church revealed by the apostle Paul. Only by separation from them, and a local gathering together of those who do so, can there be a testimony to such truth and an endeavor to walk according to it.

*This involves the confession of the ruin of God's house as committed to the responsibility and care of men, and also the judgment of the whole system of things found in Christendom. But what is the resource for faith? This can only be found in the Lord's name as all-sufficient for His people, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as the power for all worship and service, and the Word of God as all-sufficient to thoroughly furnish for every good work.*¹

To act upon this, means to gather to the Lord's name *only*, refusing any other, however worthy, and all those by which the many sects of Christendom are distinguished. It means to own no other membership than that of the Body of Christ to

¹ Matt. 18: 20; John 10: 16 ("one flock, one Shepherd"); John 14: 16, 17; 15: 26, 27; Luke 24: 48, 49; Phil. 3: 3 ("by the Spirit"); 1 Cor. 12: 4-11; 1 Thess. 5: 19; 2 Tim. 3: 16, 17.

which all Christians belong, being members of Christ and one another by the operation of the Holy Spirit. ²

Of this unity the Lord's Supper is the symbol, and its scriptural observance becomes the expression of that unity, in fact the external centre around which His people gather together to bear witness to their oneness in life as in Christ and in the Body of which He is the Head. ³ In this way every evidenced believer, not justly subject to discipline, may enjoy Christian privilege and fellowship according to scriptural simplicity and order.

NATIONAL CHURCHES AND DENOMINATIONS

By contrast, national churches meet and make members, according to a sacramental process which they apply (as far as they can) to all the nation.

The many other sects, each with its own polity and special tenets, meet as voluntary associations of those who subscribe to their system and take their name, so that persons are members of one sect, and not another, each organization receiving only the accredited members of its circle of churches. In such associations, if you are a believer, you are that *and* something else not found in Scripture, and your church-fellowship is defined and circumscribed by the particular sect with which you voluntarily associate yourself. Such an association is taken up as a matter of your own will and choice, not according to God's will and Word. This, though quite unintentional, is really independence of Him and of Christ.

² Rom. 12: 4, 5; Eph. 4: 25; 1 Cor. 12: 12-14; Col. 3: 15.

³ 1 Cor. 10: 16, 17; Eph. 1: 22, 23; 2: 8-16; 4: 4, 15, 16.

All of these systems, national churches and denominational sects, are unscriptural; and such membership of so-called churches is wholly unknown to Scripture. Their character is that of *Independency* by which the glory of Christ and the place of the Holy Spirit is compromised and the Word of God made of no effect. They are independent as being humanly formed associations or organizations having no warrant in Scripture. Membership in them is unknown to Scripture. All of them meet, not to the Lord's name only, but (while professing to call upon Him) to their own particular name, creed, and order of things. This is the practical denial of the one and only membership taught in Scripture, and so of the one and only Church of which it speaks—the Body of Christ, of which all are members who believe on Him as the eternal Son of God and only Saviour, whose work alone is the foundation of all blessing for time and eternity.

All national churches, all sects and denominations, whatever the name they bear, practically deny by their system and conditions the truth, "There is one Body." With this there is the manifest setting aside of Christ's name as the only and sufficient name for all Christians to own. These sects also in the practices which they have instituted deny the place of the Holy Spirit in the order of worship and service; and of the Word of God in its teaching as to the Church, its order and discipline. This in principle and action is *Independency*, which brings great loss, and the result as seen to-day is the prevailing Laodicean state.

"THERE IS ONE BODY," THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH TO GATHER TOGETHER

Our separation from the systems of Christendom is that we may own the truth of the Body of Christ formed by the Holy Spirit, and meet to break bread on that ground,⁴ owning no membership but that of Christ, no name but His, glad to welcome all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, this being known as true of them by godliness of life and soundness in the faith, such being received simply and only as members of Christ and our fellow-members in His Body the Church. They do not join us. They are not received into some circle or unity which we ourselves constitute as separated from the independency of Christendom, for Scripture does not speak of any such special circle or unity. Humanly speaking, and in contrast with what surrounds us, we may be thus spoken of; but it is non-scriptural. Such phrases as "circle of fellowship," have been misunderstood and misapplied.

There being then no distinct circle or unity as far as Scripture speaks, and confessing the Body of Christ as the only circle or unity known to Scripture, we are to follow righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2: 22)—such being those we may discern as true believers. But we thankfully admit there must be many more un-

⁴ Though this truth is not presented in Scripture as the reason for Christians having meetings, yet to say we meet on that ground does state the difference between sectarian gathering together (the character of which I have already defined), and that which is of a scriptural character. The reasons for Christians assembling together, whether for prayer, worship, general edification, or discipline, are found, for example, in Matt. 18: 20; in apostolic practice as recorded in the Acts; 1 Cor. 5: 4; 11: 20; ch. 14; Heb. 10: 25.

known to us because of the existing state of things, but "the Lord knoweth them that are His." There are many, too, who say "Lord, Lord," with whom we could not walk; but with all who call upon Him whose doctrines and practical life give evidence of doing so out of a pure heart we are commanded to walk.

We are not to reject *such* who may come to us because they are not clear as to separation from ecclesiastical associations from which we are separate. Rather, let us recognize them as fellow-members of the Body of Christ, and, if they desire, permit them to remember the Lord with us, since we meet to break bread as acknowledging the Body of Christ, by instruction seeking their deliverance from unscriptural associations, while not refusing them unless they lay down unscriptural conditions. That would be the case, if one came asserting his right to remember the Lord with us, and according to his own convenience and pleasure going to do likewise in the sects; or requiring that we recognize him by some sectarian name. Why then our separation? It would be equivalent to saying: There is no difference between subjection to Christ's name and word and what is in manifest independence of both. Such exclude themselves from the company of those who seek to keep His Word and not deny His name. Their own attitude precludes the possibility of pursuing those moral characteristics essential to walking in truth and according to the truth.

ASSOCIATIONS AND DEFILEMENT

Teaching long current as to defilement through association with evil has made it a continuous procession to the remotest touch. Some have used the Levitical regulations to establish this, but it

is really unwarranted deduction which involves us in much confusion. Examination will show that there is no foundation for the elaborate development of things presented by some along this line.

Neither in the New Testament nor in the ritual of the Old is there a foundation for the endless chain theory of defilement. Those who were unclean, the three classes mentioned in Num. 5, were to be put out of the camp, as also the wicked person found in God's house, the assembly. Then those who had to do with any of these cases, even those who were the ministers of God in connection with them were unclean *until the evening*, but in no case were they subject to exclusion, that pertained only to one of the three classes mentioned. The course of defilement stops with the second group of persons, those in immediate contact with the case, *and no one coming into contact with them is spoken of as unclean or defiled*. Let us say "A" is one of the three classes; "B," who touches him or what pertains to him, and even the priest who has to do with the case, is defiled until the evening, but "C" who may touch "B" is not spoken of. There is no continuity, no further transmission of uncleanness referred to in the Levitical regulations.

That association with evil defiles is certain. But we must define what association means when applied in the realm of Christianity. Christianity is moral and spiritual, not ceremonial and physical like Judaism. In the Old Testament, defilement comes from being identified with what is proscribed by direct contact, as the touch or open vessel suggests. To translate this into the moral and spiritual realm of Christianity can only mean, not physical contact or necessarily presence in a place where evil exists, but acceptance of or deliberate association with known wickedness, either doctrinal or moral. It is knowingly and wilfully

associating with impurity which defiles. This is true of one who may denounce the evil, yet refuse to purify himself by separating from those who maintain it. The heart is not pure. This makes one a partaker of the evil and subject to the judgment it deserves (2 John 10, 11; 1 Tim. 5: 22; 1 Cor. 5: 6).

This would be equally true of a company which, as such, avowedly took that position. It would then become a matter of individual responsibility to "withdraw from iniquity," after patient effort to deliver one's brethren had been definitely refused. This would be required to really call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Eph. 4: 1-3 defines the spirit in which to act, and 2 Tim. 2: 19-26 the responsibility. Even after separation from such a company there might be occasion as to some individuals coming from it to exercise spiritual discernment, calling for patience and instruction that they may not be stumbled but eventually delivered. Heb. 5: 2 and Jude 22, 23 give guidance in such care for one another.

Again, in reference to association, as just pointed out, the Old Testament does not lend itself to an endless chain theory of defilement. Nor can it be established by applying in this connection as a principle the truth of the one Body, deducing from this that if one member is defiled then all are defiled, if one member is in association with evil all members are, and again if evil is in one assembly all assemblies are defiled. Surely then, there could be no escape from the link with defilement, for the Body is one; but such deductions are as unwarranted as those from the Levitical regulations.

In Scripture the truth of the Body is not presented in relation to such ideas. Not only so, but such an application has serious implications. The

defilement on this principle must not only apply to every member of the Body, for it is one, but must also touch the Head, for we are "one Body in Christ." Such an application is a perversion of the truth which has led to evil results and multiplied division. No thought of evil, association with it, the effects of such, or the exercise of discipline upon it, is connected with the truth of the Body as presented in Scripture. 1 Cor. 12: 26 does not imply this, for suffering is not defilement. Even Christ suffers with His people—"Why persecutest thou Me?" The truth of the Body has to do with our union with Christ and one another by the operation and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, with gifts received, with ministry and service in love, and final glory.

SEPARATION FROM EVIL

Here another question arises, that of separation, for he that names the Lord's name must withdraw from iniquity. This individual responsibility is imperative as soon as I find myself in an association which bears such a character. In *our present exercises* the separation which concerns us is separation from our acknowledged brethren who hold the same precious truth and have taken the place outside the independency of Christendom. What is the evil which requires such separation? With Scripture in my hand, I am certain I should not separate from my brethren, or be in separation from them, for *less* than that which would require their removal from among saints gathered to the Lord's name. The wicked person is to be put away. My brethren must hold, or deliberately permit among them the holding of, what subverts the faith in doctrine or morals, for me to separate from them, refusing to join with them in that supper which is to be

celebrated in a manner worthy of the Lord whose name we confess. Apart from this there may be, indeed are, many differences of view as to both doctrine and practice which do not call for separation as from iniquity, but for the exercise of those spiritual characteristics mentioned in Eph. 4.

DIVISIONS AMONG "BRETHREN"

Turning now to those who have taken a place of separation from the independency of Christendom that they might give expression, however feebly, to the things of which we have spoken, we find that they have had their own sad history. They too have become much divided, so that numerous "circles" are now spoken of. Each of these would claim to be the only true expression of the truth, "There is one Body;" and they mutually exclude one another on grounds in every case less than iniquity from which Scripture enjoins the believer to be separate. Generally acts of discipline dealing with matters less than wickedness, in either doctrine or practice, lie at the bottom of these divisions. They have been forced through pressure for universal acceptance of such acts on the ground that "there is one Body."

DISCIPLINE

We learn from Scripture that discipline is committed to the local assembly. True, too, it must be, that what is done in this way is done for all,⁵ if the action is according to the Word, to the test of which all must conform. The third epistle of John shows action the opposite of this, for from what he still called "the Church" some cast out in one place those who not only *might* be, but

⁵ 1 Cor. 1: 2; 5: 13.

ought to be received elsewhere. This indeed should humble and cause searching of heart, for the Lord could not have one mind for His people at "A" about a certain case, and another as to it for those at "B." But on the other hand there is nothing in the Word to justify the publishing of such matters by letter and circular to the ends of the earth. The consequence of this is that discussion and strife arise, meetings break up into parties for and against what they have no competence to judge, and world-wide division follows. Such results alone prove the procedure not of God, for He is not the Author of disorder but of peace in all the assemblies of the saints.⁶ Scripture does not state, nor its teaching imply, that other assemblies are to be concerned as to such matters until circumstances make them a matter of their own local responsibility. That must then be fulfilled on their part as gathered to the Lord's name, recognizing interdependence upon their brethren, especially those who have already acted in that Name in the matter that has thus come to their door.

Certainly the normal thing is to recognize discipline wherever enacted when by local circumstances such acts become a matter of concern to another assembly. But if question arises, or mistaken judgment appears, surely the course is not for "B" to act independently of "A" in re-judging the matter, but rather seek that together with "A" the matter may be reconsidered and tested by the Word, since all own one Lord in the midst of those gathered together in His name who can only have one mind for His people as to what concerns the order and discipline of God's house. Seeking this with our brethren under such circumstances we own our interdependence as mem-

⁶ 1 Cor. 14: 33.

bers one of another, and use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. The bond which calls for practical unity of fellowship is the Lord's name to which alone we gather. "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all say the same thing, and that there be not among you divisions; but that ye be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion" (1 Cor. 1: 10, *New Trans.*).

Those who advocate this course rather than that of world-wide publication with its consequent evil results, can not justly be called Independents because they thus stress the local responsibility of assemblies and believe in trusting the Lord, whose Name all own and seek to honor, to guide and help His people when such acts of discipline rightly come up within the sphere of the local responsibility of another assembly. This is not independence of Christ and His Word by which they believe all must be tested, nor of their brethren either, since they affirm it to be their responsibility to own scriptural discipline wherever enacted, and believe that if questions arise as to any act of discipline at another place it should be considered *with*, and not separately as independent of, their brethren who have already acted in the case in the name of the one Lord all own and to whom all confessedly gather.

It is little short of evil-speaking to charge independency upon brethren who are owned by those who make the charge as beloved, godly, free from evil, and whose position as gathered to the Lord's name only, confessing the absolute authority of God's Word, declares their separation from what is real Independency—the unscriptural system of Christendom.

This brings us to some present-day questions.

CIRCLES OF FELLOWSHIP

From various letters, and also from pamphlets now in circulation, it appears that the present test of fellowship is: "Do you accept 'the unity of assemblies,' or in other words 'the circle of fellowship?'" In its final analysis this comes to mean: Do you acknowledge as such a unity or circle one specific company of the many with their party names now found among so-called "Brethren," and as a consequence receive only those recognized as belonging to that circle, or who come into it as leaving the others?

I refuse this application of those phrases. I do not give up whatever of scriptural principle lies back of them, for I do believe in a unity of fellowship between assemblies as to both essential doctrine and practice according to holiness and truth. Substantially this is found among many others beside ourselves, the so-called "Grant" company or circle, even though differences of view exist as to certain things—differences which are not of the fundamental character which require that separation enjoined by the Word upon all who name the name of the Lord. I desire to recognize this and act accordingly, while seeking neither "amalgamation," nor "union" of "circles," parties, or meetings. This may not be an easier path than simply to move within one circle out of many, to the ignoring of thousands similarly gathered who are as godly and useful as we are, in some cases more so. But it is a path more consistent with the truth as held by "Brethren" from the early days, though perhaps presenting more difficulty to-day because of our own multiplied failures and consequent confusion.

Those who would restrict practical Christian fellowship to one "circle" among the many of so-called "Brethren" usually seek to justify this by

claiming for that particular "circle" some superiority in truth or practice which makes it more scriptural. Apparently this is found for many in the idea of "the unity of assemblies." For them, insistence on this, even to the necessity of division, it seems, alone makes possible the maintenance of the truth, "There is one Body." Yet with that truth as taught in Scripture no such idea is presented.

THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

There is unity of membership in the Body, and this involves our interdependence upon all saints. Owing to the great confusion in Christendom, the proper enjoyment of the precious features of fellowship growing out of this unity becomes of necessity confined to those who confess and endeavor to practise the truth of the Body. In pursuance of this such gather to the Lord's name only, owning the place of the Holy Spirit and the supreme authority of the Word of God. For many it seems to have become a matter of being gathered to "the unity of assemblies," or "the circle of fellowship;" and if these phrases are not accepted as their present-day advocates press them then it is "Independency," which they are not slow to define as the surrender of Christ and His truth to Satan and his principles. One is reminded of David's words: "Let me not fall into the hand of man."

But further as to the truth of the Body which is frequently called the ground of gathering, it should be clear that it is not presented in Scripture, even by implication, in connection with evil, its effects, or discipline, as already mentioned. Nor is there anything warranting its application in any distinctive way to one particular company among Christians, so that it is to be viewed as

a distinct unity or circle actually less in its bounds than the Body itself. Such an application of the truth promotes sectarianism. †

On the other hand, it is common knowledge that many so-called Exclusive "circles" would lay claim to being the only company giving scriptural expression to the truth, "There is one Body." This, too, would be the reason given for the exclusion of each circle from the other, for to those in any one circle all the others have in some way broken the unity that they judge should have been maintained. Along with this, for many in those circles there is the idea of exclusive possession of the Lord's Table—a maintained successionalism as they suppose, some even trying to set up a distinction between the Table and the Supper, they having the former, and others only the latter. Doubtless seeds of mistaken ecclesiastical conception were planted when spirituality declined and pride of position took its place, which like a weed choked a spirit of humility and smothered the heart confession of Church ruin—features which so marked the beginning of "Brethren." Such weeds grew, and their fruit is seen in the continual break-up marking our history. There is more need than ever, and the call more imperative for humility and confession—to repent and do the first works.

HAVE WE HEARD THE ROD AND WHO APPOINTED IT? (Mic. 6: 9).

I believe we (so-called "Grant" brethren) began to do so, at least, in 1892, as set forth in the circular and correspondence issuing from Plain-

† Properly speaking, Scripture only recognizes one company. Anything else is but a few Christians walking together according to the principles proper to that company.

field, N. J., in that year. In 1894-5 the attitude then taken was completely reversed. Giving full weight to the things then advanced as cause to change, should not those very things have rather led us to seek our brethren with a view to further help and deliverance, instead of at one stroke cutting them off again, and never since seeking to further the work of healing and restoration to one another begun by the Spirit of God in 1892? But further, even allowing that the reasons then advanced were sufficient cause to change at that time, can the continuance of that change be justified *now* and that from Scripture?

Has nothing since transpired that should challenge the position to which we were committed by the Pittsburgh circular? If nothing else, there is the Bethesda Statement of 1906.⁸ But there is the present acknowledgement by those who oppose any change that our brethren called "Open" and "Independent" are free from Christ-dishonoring doctrines, are as godly as any, and much used of the Lord. Accepting this testimony, and then asking for scriptural ground for maintained separation, not Scripture is given but the phrase, "the unity of assemblies," supplemented by reports of irregularity in reception or matters of discipline, or the allowance of evil in some form, to show what happens among those not accepting this phrase as a ruling principle. But upon investigation such reports invariably prove unfounded, or at least subject to important modification.⁹

⁸ See Appendix.

⁹ In this connection, let us suppose an "Open" brother asking those who recently separated from us why they did so: would not the reply be to the effect that our circle of meetings was identified with moral and doctrinal evil allowed at West Philadelphia? Would we like "Open" brethren to broadcast this unrighteous accusation against us? Yet it is conceivable that they might consider the

In the light of history, it must be admitted that the advocacy of this principle has not preserved from irregularity and dissension over discipline, developing into world-wide division. In fact it has been used to foster the latter evil. The use of it has been destructive rather than constructive.

Those who would refuse others, or make division, because their interpretation of this phrase, "the unity of assemblies," is not accepted, are as sectarian in principle as those who would refuse others because of particular views as to water-baptism. This now appears to be the position taken by some among us on the former question, as we know it is among some so-called "Open" brethren on the latter question. Is it then no longer a matter of walking with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, but with those who subscribe to either of the above tests, neither of which can be justified as such from Scripture. Or is it that some are not calling on the Lord out of pure heart since they differ as to the meaning and application of a *non-scriptural expression, and do not limit water-baptism to believers?* It almost seems so, as the cry of further division sounds in one's ears, while the heart is made sick by brethren finding special faithfulness in godly people separating from godly people on such grounds, and all in the Lord's name. May the Lord even yet deliver us out of these distresses. He will do so at His coming, but what about our walk until that hour?

source of information "reliable" and do so, as on the same supposition "Exclusive" brethren have done against them. The Lord give us grace to cease speaking against one another, and in self-judgment humbly bow under His hand that He may lift us up in due season.

IS THE LORD'S SUPPER THE EXPRESSION OF VITAL UNION OR OF AGREEMENT ON DETAILS?

In conclusion there is another feature of present conditions to notice. Among "Brethren" now separated into many parties, each refusing to join the other in the Lord's Supper, it has become a wide-spread practice to show toward one another and to share with one another almost every feature of Christian fellowship except that of remembering the Lord. I do not mention this to disparage or discourage such intercourse, but to simply call attention to the fact that this is an anomalous condition, entirely the reverse of what we see in Scripture. There we see that much in the way of Christian fellowship may be withdrawn from those acknowledged as brethren who walk disorderly,¹⁰ while refusal of fellowship in the Supper is only because of wickedness in morals or doctrine, and then this is to be accompanied with a cessation of even social intercourse (1 Cor. 5: 11).

To-day "Brethren" refuse one another participation in the Lord's Supper by reason of party and circle distinctions, yet extend to one another every other feature of Christian fellowship. If the Supper is scripturally refused surely the other should be. But if it is right to allow every other feature of Christian fellowship, by what scriptural authority is the Supper refused?¹ In this is the Lord's Word kept, and His name not denied?

¹⁰ 2 Thess. 3: 14, 15; Tit. 3: 9; Matt. 18: 15, 16; Rom. 16: 17, 18..

¹ It is a cause of sorrow and distress that many in our meetings who are undoubtedly saved and partake of the Lord's Supper, manifest such an unloving and critical spirit that little fellowship can be enjoyed with them personally. Others are so worldly that their company is un-

A PERSONAL CONFESSION AND APPEAL

Let me close this statement of present exercises with a word of confession and appeal: In view of the conditions referred to, and as identified with them, I take my place before the Lord and my brethren everywhere in self-judgment, owning the evident weakness and failure, confessing the deep dishonor brought upon the Lord's name and the truth by this sadly divided state.

Truly humbled, I trust, I confess the shame before Him who has righteously smitten in faithful love, and pray that even now He will revive His "work in the midst of the years" and "in trouble remember mercy" (*Rotherham*). Further, I wish to express to my brethren everywhere, irrespective of party name by which they may now be called, that my desire is to walk with all saints wherever and whenever found, who, being gathered to the name of Christ from the systems of Christendom, walk in separation from iniquity; who confess and seek to practise the truth of the one Body, owning the place of the Holy Spirit in relation to the individual and the assembly; and who, acknowledging the full inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures, endeavor to conform their doctrine, manner of life, and practice, whether in worship, service, or discipline, to the teaching of those Scriptures—the Word of God, the Bible.

In particular I feel assured by what I learn from responsible brethren who have moved for from 15 to 50 years among so-called "Open" and

profitable. Yet devoted and godly brethren whose ministry is used of the Lord to edification and salvation are refused as not of "our circle," or because they do not confine themselves to it. Can this be justified from Scripture?

"Independent" brethren that, notwithstanding certain differences in teaching and practice, they walk in this way of truth, as do also the many, if not all, of those called "Exclusive."

Affectionately and earnestly I appeal to all in every place. Let us seek one another and endeavor, as the Lord may exercise and lead through mutual conference for prayer and brotherly counsel, to walk together. Let us thus use "diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace." Let us cease excluding from the breaking of bread evidenced members of the one Body who are not scripturally disqualified because of wicked doctrine or manner of life.

Is it possible that our parties and circles have become like the houses of the Remnant into which every man ran to leave God's house waste and His people scattered to follow their own ways and things? Does this explain our worldly state, our spiritual barrenness and sloth? "Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah" (Hag. 1: 8).

—JOHN BLOORE.

11 Van Reypen Street.
Jersey City, N. J.
July, 1931.

Additional copies may be had from the author
Five cents each.

A P P E N D I X

THE BETHESDA STATEMENT OF 1906

At a small Conference recently held at Bristol with a view to the removal of hindrances to fellowship existing between some of God's children now severed, the so-called "Letter of the Ten" came under discussion, and it was stated by those representing Bethesda that there were good reasons for not withdrawing or amending that letter. They pointed out that all those who signed it have since passed away, and cannot now be appealed to; that the Statement was published without any authority from them or the Church, and without the verbal explanations which accompanied it, and that the Church cannot be held responsible for the misunderstandings that have arisen out of that action: that rightly understood, there is nothing in it that they should wish to withdraw, but that interpretations and meanings have been read into the Statement which it does not, and never was intended to bear; and that as a Statement it was made only for the occasion which called it forth, and has, so far as Bethesda is concerned, been non-existent since December, 1848, when the peculiar doctrine known as B. W. Newton's was definitely judged to be so fundamentally erroneous that no fellowship with it, or with upholders of it, or those continuing in wilful association with it, could be received.

It was then asked whether, to meet the prevalent misconceptions in certain quarters, Christians at Bethesda would define their present position. In reply it was pointed out that this had already been done more than once, and particularly in a

Statement signed by fourteen brethren in 1894, but that the result was not encouraging. It was urged, however, that the ineffectiveness of that Statement was due to the fact that those who signed it did so as individuals only, and not in a representative capacity, and a Bethesda brother then suggested that if it would remove difficulties out of the way, Bethesda might be asked as a Church to endorse the Statement of the 14. This met with approval, it being thought that if that were done it would be helpful to many at this time.

The Statement is as follows:—

“It has been suggested that a brief statement on the subject of fellowship of saints might, with God’s blessing, prove helpful towards keeping ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,’ and therefore we gladly mention a few points with a view of removing misapprehensions from the minds of any believers, especially in America, and we trust that this statement will be received with the same sincerity with which we make it.

“1. Those commonly known as “Open Brethren” only seek to maintain liberty to carry out all the will of God as unfolded in the Scriptures, and to receive all believers who are not plainly disqualified by the Word of God, because of evil doctrine or immoral practice.

“2. Intercommunion is not permitted with assemblies where the false doctrine of ‘annihilation’ or other fundamental error is tolerated.

“3. Although cases of reception of persons holding such false doctrines have been alleged, they have not been substantiated when proof was requested.

"4. On the contrary, cases have now and again occurred (though, we are thankful to say, not frequently) in which persons holding such doctrines have been put away from fellowship.

"5. When Christians who are sound and careful as to fundamental truths, but without sufficient light to renounce a sectarian position, desire to break bread as being of the 'one Body,' and are permitted to do so, we believe that it is on the ground that each one is responsible to Christ as Lord of the conscience, and in the hope that by remembering with them the love wherewith all His members are loved they may be helped to learn the way of God more perfectly.

"6. Though ourselves conscious of much shortcoming, it is our desire to carry out our Lord's word, 'He that doeth truth cometh to the light.' We do not strive to make a party, but we endeavor to hold the Head, and we trust that where there is a similar aim, misconceptions regarding us, though of long standing, will be removed, the name of our Lord Jesus will thereby be glorified, we shall receive mutual comfort and help, and the father of lies will be defeated.

"7. With regard to differences of judgment on points not involving vital doctrines, we seek to give ourselves to humiliation and prayer, knowing that God would have us to be of one mind, while exercising forbearance with one another, and carrying out our convictions as to the truth.

"8. We must add that we do not attach our signatures as representing the Assemblies with which we are connected, but rather as those who have had more or less lengthened experience we

give, according to our personal knowledge, the information that is desired.

"Finally, we would love and serve all who unfeignedly love our Lord Jesus Christ, and would cultivate fellowship with all who aim at walking in the truth, and though declining controversy on this subject, some of us will gladly reply to any brotherly enquiry as far as time allows.

C. Underwood, London,
John G. M'Vicker, London.
J. Churchill, Wimbledon.
George Muller, Ashley Down, Bristol.
Jas. Wright, Bristol.
G. Fred Bergin, Bristol.
Henry Dyer, Bournemouth.
J. L. Maclean, Bath.
Thos. Cochrane, Patrick, Glasgow.
John R. Caldwell, Glasgow.
F. C. Bland, Dublin.
Martin Shaw, Belfast.
Robt. E. Sparks, Belfast.
W. H. Bennet, Yeovil.

February 9, 1894."

Accordingly the foregoing narrative and statement were read to a meeting of the Church at Bethesda specially convened for the purpose, on the 17th December, 1906, and the following expresses the result:—

In response to appeals from different quarters, and with the desire to remove as far as possible certain misapprehensions concerning our practice as regards fellowship, it seemed good to the Church at Bethesda now assembled, to approve the statement of its position in regard to the so-called "Letter of the Ten," as set forth in the foregoing narrative, and to declare that a statement dated

h February, 1894, and signed by 14 brethren (three of whom were acknowledged leaders in our midst) correctly expresses what it has been, and still is, the aim of the Church to faithfully carry out in practice.

This Statement is made in the hope that it may tend to promote healing and peace among brethren, and the Church will unfeignedly rejoice if that end, so greatly to be desired for the glory of God, should be accomplished.

Signed on behalf of the Church at Bethesda, Bristol, 17th December, 1906.

G. Fred Bergin
David D. Chrystal
E. T. Davies
Christopher Elliott
Henry Fry
Lindsay Morice
John F. Stancomb
James L. Stanley
E. R. Short
William Street
A. G. Wyatt

[PRINTED
IN U.S.A.]