

WHEN YE COME TOGETHER



Eight Addresses to
Young Christians



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I. INTRODUCTORY.

Reading—Isaiah viii. 20; Malachi iv. 4; 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

The subject of this series is, "When ye come together." The expression is taken from 1 Cor. xi. (where it occurs three times) and from the 14th chapter (where it occurs once). There are similar expressions in 1 Cor. x., xi., xii., xiii. and xiv. I hope you will all read and study these chapters. The object before my heart is to bring before us some of those truths that God used from His Word about 120 years ago and onwards to separate Christians from the various sects, and to bring them back to the simplicity of the early days of the Church, about which we read in the Scriptures. In these talks I must take certain things for granted. First of all I assume that we all agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, adequate to meet all that we need. For this reason the verse in Isaiah viii. was read to us, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." After the Children of Israel had been carried away captive as a punishment for their disobedience, had been brought back to the land and had again forsaken God, Malachi was raised up by God to deliver the message which included this verse, which we also read: "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." It took the Children of Israel right back to the beginning of their relationship with God and that is our similar object. We have to go back to the beginning; to the instructions that are in the Scripture, given to believers in the Lord Jesus in connection with their coming together. "To the Law and to the Testimony," is the spirit in which we need to read and listen to all Scripture; the written Word of God. We must check everything by it. This is the "acid test" of ministry. We have also read the verse in 1 Cor. xiv. which reminds us that the things the Apostle Paul wrote are "the Commandments of the Lord." How solemnly should we

attend to instructions in these chapters, just as we should in all other parts of the Scripture in their particular application!

Following on this, I want to emphasise this important threefold statement:—

(1) God has not left us to devise our own way of *Salvation*. We can only be saved in *His* appointed way: "there is none other name under Heaven" (Acts iv. 12), and I assume we all agree that there is no other way in which we can be saved. God has provided a Saviour; He has provided the way; and we must be saved *His* way or not at all.

(2) Similarly we are not left to devise our own way of *coming together*. We have all the instructions we need in the Word of God; that I hope is very clear. It is for us to obey and respond implicitly. God is sovereign and if we come together in any other way He may bless us; but we have no right to presume on *His* grace.

(3) God has not left us to devise our own way of *worship* or to decide what *we* think God should accept as worship. It is for us to respond to what He has revealed to us.

For our further enlightenment as to *His* will, we are able to look back to the descriptions in the Acts of the early companies which gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, and they are remarkably simple. On one occasion at least we read of two servants of the Lord on a long tour, preaching the word. On their way back they visited the "assemblies" in those cities where they had preached. It evidently followed that where men and women turned to God from idols, or Jews turned to Jesus as their Messiah, these believers came together in the simplest way and were recognised by the Apostles, according to the inspired record, as "churches" or assemblies in the towns concerned. As the history, however, goes on we find, even in New Testament times, various irregularities arose in these companies, and the Apostle Paul was inspired to write about them in his Epistles, which are so full of instruction. Men would arise speaking

perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts xx. 30). Even earlier, men had come from Judea to Antioch and had begun to teach the Gentiles that they must keep the law of Moses in order to be saved (Acts xv. 5). There were others later who wanted to introduce the Jewish law for Gentile Christians to keep and the Apostle Paul was inspired to write an epistle to the various assemblies in Galatia, telling them what serious error it was for Gentile believers to put themselves under Law. That developed in later years, sad to say, although there may have been a real response in those Churches in Galatia at the time. Very soon many companies of believers in the Lord Jesus adopted ritualistic practices borrowed from the Jewish order of things which had been set aside at the Cross (Col. ii. 14). Thus we find priestly organisations were borrowed from Judaism by the companies of Christians; even some of the heathen ceremonies were introduced; all of which interfered with the liberty of God's Holy Spirit; and this evil went on spreading. Christians in the early days were clear and distinct from the world, but there came a time, which is very briefly foretold and brought out in the Epistle to Pergamos (Rev. ii. 12), where the Church and the world "married"—joined up together. Christianity became the state religion under the Emperor Constantine. From that time onwards one can see how the State and Christendom (by which I mean all professing Christians in a very broad sense) "married" and went along together. This led eventually to the tyranny of the Roman Catholic church in the middle ages. The political power and the priestly organisation which had been borrowed from the Jewish economy co-operated, and tyrannised over the whole Christian world. After that we know the Reformation took place. God in His grace worked in various men's hearts, both to attack the tyranny of the Roman Catholic priesthood and also to bring out afresh the all-sufficient importance of the truths in His Word. The Roman Catholics found in Luther, for instance, a preacher of justification by faith which completely cut the ground from under their feet as regards penances. They saw that a great deal of their vested interests as a tyranny would be ended, and they were bitter opponents of Luther. There were many

others raised up by God to bring out afresh doctrines which had long been overlooked, though always in the Scriptures. In those days, the word of God was not allowed to be read by the majority of people, except in Latin, and was then read in the churches at such a speed that only highly educated people could follow it.

Although the Reformation was a very important event and very many important truths were recovered, there was no real return from the human organisation that men had set up to the simplicity of the gathering of Christians as described in the Acts, or the instructions about "coming together" contained in the epistles. Some of the abuses were remedied, but the Reformation left the system of church organisation very much as it was.

Since the Reformation we find there have been many wonderful evangelical revivals and great gospel preachers. In this country, for instance, there have been Whitefield and Wesley, Moody, Spurgeon, Torrey and Alexander—to name a few. Gospel truths, which had been buried so long because the priestly organisation did not want people "saved" for fear they might lose their vested interests, were freely preached and there were wonderful results, but even so, while there was much blessing, the various sects still continued to practise a one-man ministry, which restricted the liberty of God's Holy Spirit. It was not until about 120 years ago that the Spirit of God began to work in various places and individuals, without their intercommunicating with one another at first, to bring them right outside all human organisations and systems, right back to the principles practised in the Acts and taught in the Epistles. It is very remarkable that in spite of the corruption that had been going on for so many years there should have been a time when, in the good Providence of God, such a movement was brought about by the Spirit of God. When that occurred, the condition in many of the "churches" had become very bad. In a few of them the gospel was preached, but not in very many. Speaking generally, there were no lay-preachers, no Sunday schools, no teaching of the coming of the Lord Jesus for His people. There was no return to the simple truth of the unity of the body of Christ. Every professing

Christian was a "member" of a "church" or chapel. It was still the law of England that every adult should attend Holy Communion in the "Church of England" three times a year. The "Church of England" is in origin an organisation which was primarily modelled on the "Church of Rome," which in turn was modelled on the Jewish priesthood plus various heathen practices. Each sect had its own methods and ways of appointing its own ministers. There was no liberty for the Spirit of God to use whom He would.

Some may say that may have been the case then, but to-day conditions are different. Thank God there has undoubtedly been a change in many of the sects, but this is largely the result of the teaching of those who came out 100 years ago. Some of the truths they taught have been accepted and now form part of the teaching in the systems of men, but there are other important truths which are still ignored.

It has been said before that we are not left to devise our own way of coming together. The Lord spoke to His disciples of being gathered together in (or, more correctly, "to") His Name. Such a centre of gathering involves rejecting any other centre, but to be gathered in this way is one of the things that is still ignored very widely in practice. Another is that men worship God in ways of their own devising instead of bringing, in worship, what He has said is acceptable to Him.

Finally I want to bring home to you that it cost these Christians who left the sects 100 years ago a very great deal to be obedient to the Scriptures. Many of them had to abandon high social position. For many it meant ostracism by their relatives. Many of them had to pay a very high price in other ways, such as loss of fortune. Truths which we now enjoy, and which God has allowed to spread to the great blessing of us all, are not to be treated lightly because they now cost us little or nothing to practise.

The responsibility of learning from the Scriptures how God would have us come together is one from which we who know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour cannot escape,

especially since the truths have been brought out afresh from the Scriptures in these last days before the Lord's return.

II. THE GOSPEL, THE NEED OF SINNERS; WORSHIP, THE PRIVILEGE OF SAINTS.

Reading—John iv. 20-24, Acts xvii. 22-25, Heb. x. 1-2.

There are certain facts that I wish to state again. God has not left us to our own devices as to the way we are to come together any more than he has left us to devise a way of salvation or to earn our way to heaven. The two principal forms of error that still exist very clearly to-day in the "sects" are an organised form of service and a set ministry.

There have been, as you know, a great many evangelical revivals, through the preaching of various great preachers whom God has used in a very remarkable way to bring sinners to Christ for salvation. But there has been no change in the general organisation of most of the sects of Christendom. You may think it a rather severe thing to say about the various sects, but I say very solemnly, and feeling it is not a matter to treat lightly at all, that the whole system of services in the Church of England and in a great many of the non-conformist sects is a confused jumble. Statements applying to the un-saved, expressions taken out of the Old Testament that can only be properly used by Jews, and words of praise which can only be uttered by true believers are put into the mouths of whole congregations indiscriminately whether all are Christians or not. The result is confusion between Gospel preaching, worship, prayer and so on. In the Church of England, for example, the whole congregation have to say "God have mercy on us miserable sinners," but no true child of God ought to be a miserable sinner! On other occasions words of praise and worship are put into the mouths of the whole general congregation. But are the non-conformist sects any better? Sankey's Hymn Book is largely used and can be taken as typical of the state of confusion. You will find

in it a group of hymns called “*Public Worship*”; which includes “O Come, Sinner, Come,” “Send Showers of Blessings,” and other gospel hymns; “Give Me the Wings of Faith” and other hymns expressing prayer for a more godly walk, and similar sentiments which are not worship at all. In fact, there is, both in the Church of England and in the ordinary services in the sects, complete confusion between gospel work, prayer, instruction in the Scriptures, and worship. In a very vague way the whole group of Christian endeavour is called “worship.” It is a most important thing that we should distinguish clearly between the *gospel* of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, which is the need of sinners, and *worship* which is the privilege of saints. You must be one of God’s saints before you can worship the Father. In one sense all creation will have to do homage to the Creator, but worship, which is the privilege of saints and of which the Lord Jesus spoke at the well of Sychar, is the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth.

In Hebrews x., verses 1 and 2 which we read, the expression “the worshippers once purged should have no more conscience of sins” is the first reference to men worshipping in that Epistle. People with purged consciences are those who know their sins have been blotted out; then they are free to worship God. If you do not know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour your first need is to accept Him, Who has died on account of your sins.

We have been reminded already that God has not left us to our own devices in regard to worship. We find in the Old Testament (and it is necessary to read the Old Testament) very detailed instructions to the Children of Israel about their worship. Why? Because the Jews had not God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in them or among them, and so God gave the Jews these detailed instructions. It is surprising how much detail there is about it. On the other hand we now have the whole Word of God; and we have the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us to unfold the word of God to our hearts. When we study the Old Testament we find in the order in which they were offered, first the sin-offering, so that we may have a clear conscience. After that we find the meat (or “meal”) offering, then the thanksgiving (or “peace”)

offering, and then the burnt-offering. These last three may be grouped as "worship" offerings. There was also the burning of sweet incense on the altar of incense and in the censers of the priests when they entered the Holy of Holies, so that the cloud of smoke from the censer should cover the mercy seat. We have in these worship offerings and in the incense wonderful types of what may be brought acceptably to God as worship. All the details of them given in the Old Testament are figurative of the personal attributes and beauties of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in the sight of God, which we as worshippers can appreciate in our measure as taught by the Holy Spirit. Although worship cannot really be defined, in general terms it includes the presentation to God of what we have learned from the Scriptures, in the power of God's Holy Spirit, concerning the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have nothing of this earth or of man that can be brought to God acceptably as worship. In ourselves we are just sinners; the work of our hands is all under God's curse. Consequently there is nothing of man or nature that we can bring acceptably to God; we can bring the Person and Work, the Attributes, and the Glories of the Lord Jesus Christ as we learn them from the Scriptures. How very important it is for us to read our Bibles, seeking the Spirit's guidance, so that we may have our hearts full, and may know more and more the mind of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ!

There are three Old Testament Scriptures to which I wish to draw your attention to show you how confused and adulterated the idea of worship is in Christendom generally. (I shall use that expression "Christendom" to cover all professing Christians; "Christendom" covers both true believers and those who are *only* professors.) The three Scriptures have a lot of bearing on what brought the believers out from the sects 100 years ago. They should open our hearts and open our eyes as to what is extremely displeasing to God.

(1) Lev. ii. 11-13: "No meat offering . . . shall be made with leaven; for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire."

Verse 13: “And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt, neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering with all thy offering thou shalt offer salt.”

Two things are forbidden; one thing is insisted upon. *Leaven* speaks of evil. The Lord Jesus refers to it in speaking of the *doctrine* of the Pharisees. When Paul uses it in 1 Cor. v. he refers to *moral* evil. The association of evil doctrine or moral evil with worship makes it unacceptable to God. We all fail, but to the extent to which we have learnt God’s mind we are responsible to judge evil doctrine and evil ways and exclude them from worship. *Honey* perhaps typifies the sweetness of sentimentality. There is a great deal of danger of our introducing into worship ideas and expressions of merely human sentiment and emotional sugariness which are unacceptable to God. *Salt* is to be there, “the salt of the covenant of thy God”; the Word of God, especially in connection with its purifying and preserving character. The Word constantly speaks to us of the work of Christ to meet the claims of God against us, that work which is the ground on which He deals with us and the basis of our approach to Him. We must never lose sight of the work of Christ when coming to God as worshippers. There are thus two matters to be jealously excluded and one to be zealously included.

(2) Lev. x. 1-2: Nadab and Abihu took it upon themselves to worship God in their own way, instead of following what He had said. It is most important that we should *not* think that we can offer God worship in *our* way. “They offered strange fire before the Lord which He commanded them not.”

In a “church” magazine which was recently brought to my notice there was an article on “brawling in church” dealing with protests against alleged Roman practices in Church of England churches. The writer of the article asked, “Why should people not be allowed to worship in their own way?” This just expresses the popular idea that Christians may worship God in any way *they* like. It is the principle of Nadab and Abihu who took incense (perhaps correctly made) in their cen-

sers and offered strange fire before the Lord which He commanded them not. God has not left us to devise our own way of worship or to decide what ought to be acceptable to Him, and we have no right to say or to think "God ought to like" this or that. It is so important that we should be waiting on the Lord that we may learn how and in what way He wishes us to worship Him. We shall find in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, right through the revelation God has so graciously given us, what the Holy Spirit has to teach us, through types and also directly, about the Work and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must examine ourselves; we have got to subject ourselves to the test of the Scriptures, in subjection to the Holy Spirit, honestly and carefully. We can so easily bring into our worship "honey" and "leaven" and leave out the salt. We are so prone to allow our own imaginations to be active, like Nadab and Abihu.

(3) Isaiah lxx. 1-3: "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not; I said: Behold me, Behold me; unto a nation that was not called by my name. I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after *their own thoughts*; a people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens and burneth incense upon altars of brick"; "Incense on altars of brick"—why should they not burn incense on altars of brick? Bricks speak of man's activity and in Genesis xi. we read of man's attempt to *reach to heaven* by building a tower of bricks. Babel is the first mention of bricks in the Bible. An altar of bricks speaks of what is earthly; something that we have made to support *our* worship to God. We may even bring pure incense, but man wants to have an organ; a fine choir; vestments and surplices, etc., all human additions which have no sanction in the New Testament. I have been feeling it more and more that the human embellishments in all the sects of Christendom are displeasing to God. He expects and accepts the worship that comes from the heart, but nothing of the flesh or of the natural man can make such worship more genuine or more acceptable. On the

contrary, its effect is to occupy us with ourselves and to gratify our human feelings.

The coming together on the first day of the week is for remembrance, primarily, but how can we partake of the emblems of Christ's death without worship and praise filling our hearts? Dare we add anything of nature or the flesh to what the Spirit of God brings before us concerning the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ? We pour out before God in worship what we have received from Him. Let us consider the Lord Jesus Christ in John iv., talking to the woman at the well. He speaks to her of worshipping in spirit and in truth. At Jerusalem the forms and ceremonies of worship according to the Old Testament were still going on but there was no reality behind it; nothing of the Spirit of God in it. It was ritual without any reality. On the other hand there was an imitation set up in Samaria, following as nearly as possible the worship in Jerusalem but never set up by God. It was an imitation with no *truth* in it. At Jerusalem the Spirit of God was not there; at Gerizim—no truth there. But remember you cannot be a worshipper of God in spirit and in truth if you are not saved.

A parallel New Testament passage is Acts xvii. 22-25, where the Apostle Paul tells the Greeks that God is not worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything. Nor does He “dwell in temples made with hands.” The habitation of God to-day through the Spirit is where believers are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the cross there is no material place of worship at all. To talk about places of worship is a very mistaken idea.

In Hebrews x., verses 1 and 2, you will notice that it is those who have been “purged” and who have “no more conscience of sins” who are worshippers of God. In Philippians iii. 3, it is stated “we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” A more accurate translation reads, “Who worship by the Spirit of God.”

We have the Scriptures, but we can only worship acceptably by (in the power of) the Spirit of God. Our expressions may be very Scriptural, but if not led by the Spirit of God from our hearts they are *not* acceptable to God.

Let us prayerfully consider the Scriptures which have been referred to, not only applying them to the Sects and Religious Organisations from which God brought Christians out a century ago, but also applying them afresh to the practice amongst the companies of Christians who profess to be gathered in accordance with the Scriptures, outside humanly organised Sects.

III. LIBERTY FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT, OR ORGANISED MINISTRY, OR A SET SERVICE.

Reading—1 Cor. xii. 1-13, xiv. 23-33.

One of the things that brought Christians out 100 years ago from the sects and denominations that existed at the time was that they found in the Acts, historically, something altogether different from what was actually going on in "churches" and chapels. And in the epistles they found teaching about believers coming together, and how gifts given by the Holy Spirit should be exercised, with which again what was going on was quite inconsistent. In almost all the Christian sects there was an organised ministry, and in many cases a set service, although it was not so in the Society of Friends, which was perhaps the only group who had not an organised ministry to run the whole service. If we look around to-day, we find the "Friends" still have no set service, and companies known as "Brethren" are also to be found without either an organised ministry or a set service.

In order not to be misunderstood, a few remarks are necessary about Gospel preaching, and lectures, and addresses for the edification of Christians. Gospel preaching is of a special character. It is an individual responsibility, though Christians collectively may have fellowship in it and support the preacher by their pre-

sence and their prayers. Each believer is responsible, according to his ability, to pass on the good news of salvation as opportunity occurs, whether to an individual or to a company. Such preaching may have the appearance of being "one man ministry," and organised. Somewhat similarly, addresses or lectures may be arranged and given from time to time. But neither gospel preaching nor addresses (or lectures) ought in any way to supplant the gathering together of believers in the Lord Jesus for the Lord's Supper, or for "prayer, praise, and thanksgiving," or for "edification, exhortation, and comfort," to all of which the instructions in 1 Cor. xii and xiv. apply.

There are seven verses in these two chapters which make it clear that when the epistle was written there was neither an organised ministry nor a set service in the assembly of Christians at Corinth, nor were they contemplated.

(i) "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone to profit withal" (chap. xii. v. 7). The Word of God does not say "is given to a select few for the profit of all," though that is the practical assumption in churches and chapels.

(ii) "All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will" (v. 11). An organised ministry is a practical denial of this.

(iii) In verse 13 the Spirit of God introduces the figure of the body and its members, to show that each has a function to fulfil for the good of the whole.

(iv) "Follow after charity and desire spiritual gifts but rather that ye may prophesy" (chap. xiv. v. 1). If an organised ministry or a set service were contemplated the Christians would surely not have been exhorted in these general terms.

(v) "If all speak with tongues . . . if all prophesy" (chap. xiv. v. 23, 24). These verses again make it very plain that neither organised ministry nor set service existed, and this is further confirmed by

(vi) "When ye come together every one of you hath . . ." (chap. xiv. v. 26).

(vii) Finally, "Let the prophets speak two or three. . . . If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one . . ." (v. 29, 30, 31). These words make it quite plain that there ought not to be an organised ministry or a set service, even as a remedy for confusion.

Let me now remind you that these passages are addressed (see chap. i. v. 2) not only "to the church of God which is at Corinth" but also "to all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." There is nothing between this verse and the verses we have been considering that limits their application. We have therefore reached the conclusion that when believers in the Lord Jesus are gathered together to-day in a scriptural way, and the Spirit of God is given liberty, there are gifts which are to be exercised for the edification of believers, and that there should be no human organisation to restrain this liberty. Such conditions are not found in "churches" or chapels, nor in any of the organised sects. Here I would remark that if we are found gathered in accordance with what we read in the Acts and find in the epistles, we are *not a sect*. A sect consists of people that break off from what God set up in the beginning, and by an "organised" sect I mean a company of Christians that has substituted the organisation of an appointed "ministry" or a set form of service, or both, for the free control of the Holy Spirit of God.

I was very interested recently in reading a booklet of letters written by one of the Christians who came out of the sects about 100 years ago. He said that he could no more have fellowship with a body of Christians that recognised clerisy (i.e., an order of "clergy" or "ministers" to take control of the services) than as an Israelite he could have taken part in the worship of the golden calf. The great point is that when believers in the Lord Jesus come together in the scriptural way, gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost is just as truly in the midst of them and in control as the Lord Jesus Himself was when He was on the earth and had His disciples around Him. That is a very wonderful fact. On the other hand, any human organisation that sets up

some other control or authority in a company of believers when they are gathered together is setting aside the control by God's Holy Spirit, which is surely a most serious and evil thing to do.

Most of you are no doubt aware that there is this great difference between the meetings on Sunday mornings of those whom the world knows as “Brethren” and the services in “churches” and chapels. In the former there is liberty for any brother, as led by the Holy Spirit, to give out a hymn, to read a scripture, to pray or to speak—in the latter everything is centred in certain humanly-appointed men.

We now come to a very important subject, the difference between worship and ministry. *Worship* is addressed to God; for example, in praise, thanksgiving or prayer. *Ministry*, on the other hand, is addressed to the saints. There are no gifts of praise, thanksgiving or prayer. All believers in the Lord Jesus have the same, and equal, title to address God. Our title is that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; we have been brought to God; we are His children; we are Christ's brethren; we are united by one Spirit into one body; by one Spirit we have access to the Father. When believers gather together for worship, therefore, there is liberty for every brother as led by the Spirit. This does not mean that anyone may give out a hymn because it is a nice hymn, or may pray *because* he has a right to do so. Each brother that gives out a hymn or prays or otherwise addresses God audibly, if led by the Holy Spirit, will thereby give expression to what suits the hearts of all. Similarly, if a brother prays in a prayer meeting, it should not be to pray about his private or personal concerns but to express audibly the requests and thanksgivings to which the hearts of all who are there can say “Amen.” A brother cannot know what suits the hearts of those present by his own natural intelligence. The guidance and control of God's Holy Spirit are absolutely necessary. It is far better that there should be a pause in a meeting than that a brother should give out a hymn or read a scripture because he thinks that some stranger will think the pause rather long, or for any other reason than that the Holy Spirit has led

him to do so. The very fact that we are sometimes conscious that (for example) an inappropriate hymn has been given out shows that the Spirit of God is working, or we should not be aware of it.

Some may say, "Where do the sisters come in in all this?" Supposing one of the sisters is thinking of the pretty hat someone is wearing, what an interruption in the working of God's Holy Spirit! The hearts and thoughts of brothers and sisters alike should be in the control of the *Holy Spirit, who should be sovereign in the assemblies of the saints*. Is it not clear how important it is that the sisters should divest their minds of the various things of daily life, that they have necessarily been occupied with, when they come to the meeting? Do not get into the habit of just waiting and wondering if Mr. So-and-so will next pray or give out a hymn; do not get into the habit of thinking about the persons present. Rather pray that the Holy Spirit may guide your own thoughts so that they may be in communion with those of others. What a joy when there is really unity brought about by God's Holy Spirit, so that all can say "Amen" in their hearts to every sentence that is expressed aloud! That is acceptable to God. So while the scripture is very plain that the sisters are not to be the speakers in the assembly (1 Cor. xiv. 34), it is equally certain and true that their hearts should be under the control of, and in harmony with, the Holy Spirit if they are not to be a hindrance. This applies to the silent brothers also.

"*Ministry,*" or speaking to the saints, is quite distinct from worship. The Apostle Paul said about himself, "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues what shall I profit you except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?" (1 Cor. xiv. 6). He applies the test to himself that speaking should be to profit, although he was an apostle. We have seen that for worship believers are all on the same footing before God, but we learn that when it is a question of ministry to the saints it is a matter of gifts given by the Holy Spirit. We are not all equally gifted. We are not all teachers. The gifts are distributed to each one separately by the Holy

Spirit as we have already seen. There is no suggestion in Scripture that any one man since the Apostle's day is both teacher and prophet and evangelist—everything rolled into one. Further, it is a mistake to think that because God uses someone for a particular purpose on one occasion that man will be similarly used by God on every future occasion. In special circumstances the Holy Spirit may use someone who is not normally specially gifted. The apostle's exhortation to Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. iv. 5) is an example of this sort as it is implied that he was not specially gifted as an evangelist.

It is evident that prophesying and teaching are distinct. Both are referred to in 1 Cor. xiv. 6, and there is much about prophesying in that chapter. Some say that, since the Scriptures were completed, there are no longer prophets just as there are no longer apostles. In the epistle to the Corinthians, however, it seems clear that the meaning of *prophecy* is the delivering of a definite message under the guidance of the Holy Spirit appropriate to the particular time and circumstances, and to the condition of those to whom it is addressed (see 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). Such a message will, of course, be according to the Scriptures. *Teaching* is imparting to others what a man has learnt from God and made his own, without necessarily any direct application to existing time, circumstances, or condition of soul. Its object is to add to the hearer's knowledge of the things of God for use, it may be, at some future time. Teachers have the gift of knowledge (see chap. xii. v. 8). They can teach at any time. Sometimes, however, we hear a message which evidently comes direct from God through the speaker, and is exactly what meets our need at the moment; it touches our heart and conscience; it comes right home to us. It may not be new to us, but it comes home with fresh power to our souls. It is such ministry which corresponds with *prophecy* in 1 Cor.

While there should be no human organisation to fetter the activities of God's Holy Spirit working through whom He will in the assembly, order and consideration for one another result from this same working. As a practical example, it may happen that a brother has a Scripture

on his mind but does not remember exactly where it is, so he opens his Bible to look for it. If some other simultaneously has perhaps a hymn or a passage of Scripture on his mind, but sees the first brother looking for a passage, he will wait for that brother to find the passage or close his Bible. If the hymn or passage on his own mind is according to the Spirit, opportunity for it will occur in due course. On the other hand, search for a hymn or a passage should not be unduly prolonged. If it is according to the Spirit, the Spirit of God will guide the searcher. This is the principle of 1 Cor. xiv. 30, which assumes a remarkable subjection to the Holy Spirit in the speaker, otherwise how is he to know that "another that sitteth by" has something given him to say by the Holy Spirit? Emphatically there is goodly order where there is dependence on the Spirit of God.

The foregoing may seem more for the consideration of the brothers than of the sisters, but it is not really so. A right understanding of these things will enable the sisters to appreciate their responsibility to be controlled in their hearts and thoughts by the Holy Spirit so that He may not be grieved or hindered. Failure in this on the part of the sisters may contribute to failure on the part of the brothers. On the other hand, if all the brothers and sisters are subject to the control of the Holy Spirit, the resulting harmony and unity will make a very great difference indeed in any gatherings where it has been otherwise.

IV. THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Reading—1 Corinthians xi. 18-34.

The subject now before us is another of the important matters which brought Christians out from the sects 100 years ago.

In the Prayer Book of the Church of England the Service for Holy Communion is laid down in great detail except for the sermon (if any). It includes the recitation of the Ten Commandments, with the prayer "Incline our

hearts to keep this law”; a prayer for the King; the recitation of the “Apostle’s Creed”; various announcements by the clergyman; the “offertory”; prayer for the “church”; an exhortation; the “general confession” (i.e., a prayer for forgiveness); the pronouncement of absolution; the recitation of “comfortable words” by the clergyman; and many other items.

In the non-conformist “churches” and chapels the “service” connected with the Lord’s Supper is less complicated in varying degrees, and in some cases very simple. Among the Friends (Quakers) there was no such “meeting” at all.

When the Spirit of God led Christian men and women to compare practice with Scripture it became very clear that the former differed lamentably from the simple institution of the Lord’s Supper as recorded in the first three gospels, and from the teaching in 1 Cor. x. and xi. Although the “breaking of bread” was also referred to more than once in the Acts no suggestion of any planned or organised service is found connected with it. Many Christians accordingly then felt compelled to remember the Lord Jesus in the very simple way found in the New Testament. Some of them were still “in the Church of England” or some other body of Christians, but they used to meet in one of their private houses or elsewhere to “break bread,” and found much spiritual joy and a real sense of the Lord’s approval in doing so.

Most of you are very familiar with all the Scriptures concerning the “breaking of bread,” but it may be helpful to review them. You will remember that the Lord knew He was about to be betrayed by Judas and to stand mock trials before the High Priest, Herod and Pilate; to be scourged, buffeted and ill-treated and to be condemned to the death of crucifixion in the immediate future. He Himself was going to be the great fulfilment of the Passover feast. It was on the Passover night that He instituted this simple remembrance of Himself which we know as the Lord’s Supper.

The first Passover was kept in Egypt before the Israelites were delivered from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. If the Israelites understood it—and some doubtless did—

it was clear they deserved the judgment of God just as much as the Egyptians, but the Lord in His grace and wisdom provided shelter for the Israelites by the death of a substitute in order that He might in justice pass them over when executing judgment on the Egyptians. The blood must be sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels. The lamb, roast with fire, must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The LORD said "When I see the blood I will pass over you." The ground of escape of the Israelite was the sacrifice offered in his stead. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." How beautiful, all this sets out in type the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, bearing the judgment of God of which "roast with fire" speaks, and enduring the bitterness of soul of which the bitter herbs are a figure!

I have gone into this in some detail because it surely throws light on the Lord's words "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." When He and the disciples had duly eaten the Passover lamb He took a loaf, gave thanks, broke it and gave to His disciples saying "This is *My* body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of *Me*." He then took the cup and gave thanks and said "This cup is the new testament (covenant) in *My* blood. Drink ye all of it." He thus substituted the bread and the cup, symbols of His body and His blood, for the commemorative Passover lamb. The broken bread speaks to us of the Lord Jesus Christ "who Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree"—the body in which He suffered. The cup speaks to us of His blood that makes atonement for the soul, the blood without the shedding of which there is no remission of sins, the blood that cleanses from every sin. The Lord's Supper commemorates the holy Victim who took your place and mine on the cross at Calvary, that great sacrifice which met all God's holy claims against us. It reminds us that we deserved judgment as much as anyone and that our only, but all-sufficient, shelter is the death of a substitute, God's own well-beloved Son.

It is evident from Acts ii that the response to the words "This do in remembrance of *Me*" followed immediately

on the Day of Pentecost and that the large numbers converted on that day, and after, "continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in *breaking of bread* and in prayers." The converts listened to the teaching of the Apostles and put it into practice. They thus enjoyed fellowship together; in the breaking of bread they remembered all that the Lord Jesus is and has done; and in prayers they acknowledged with thanksgiving their constant dependence on God. Mark that there is no suggestion of any ceremonial or ritual here.

Reverting to the institution of the Lord's Supper, when the Lord told Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover their immediate question was "Where wilt Thou that we prepare?" Your attention is drawn to this question because many Christians think it does not matter where you eat the Lord's Supper. These disciples had wisdom given them from God to ask the Lord "where wilt Thou." It is not a matter in which we should choose the place that seems nicest to us. Let me remind you that God has not left us to choose (1) our own way of salvation (2) our own way of coming together (3) our own way of worshipping Him, nor has He left us to decide for ourselves (4) how and where we will remember the Lord Jesus in response to His wish. We have no more right to do our own will in the last than in the first. He has given us guidance in all these things in His Word. The disciples found it exactly as He had said and there "they made ready the Passover." So these Christians who came out from the "sects" about 100 years ago met together to remember the Lord Jesus and eat the Lord's Supper in the simple way they found in the Scriptures. The words of the Lord Jesus, and the doctrine (teaching) of the Apostles as recorded in the New Testament, were sufficient for them. Are they not for us?

In Acts xx. we find the Apostle Paul journeying to Jerusalem and that he is in rather a hurry to get there by the Feast of Pentecost. He travels in a little sailing ship. He comes from Philippi to Troas and arrives on what we would call Monday morning. He and those with him stayed 7 days (they counted both the first and the last day of a period) because he wanted to be

with them on the first day of the week in spite of his hurry, so that he could be with them when they "came together to break bread." But 100 years ago, and even in some places to-day, the "communion service" was held once a month in many churches and chapels.

By law the Church of England is a National church—an idea unknown in Scripture. Every adult is supposed to take the Communion in the Church of England three times a year. The qualifications to do so are (1) baptism, i.e., a cross made with water on their foreheads, often in infancy, (2) confirmation in which among other things they are taught that in their baptism they were made children of God, members of Christ and inheritors of the Kingdom of heaven. In the confirmation service they also have to repeat a number of statements and to assent to many others, but nowhere in the confirmation service do they have to confess that their sins are forgiven only through the death and shed blood of the Lord Jesus. The statements as to baptism in the confirmation service are not supported by a single Scripture. On the other hand every reference to the breaking of bread or the Lord's Supper in Scripture is addressed to or concerns those who believe on the Lord Jesus as their Saviour through His death on the cross.

In 1 Cor. x. 15-17 we read "I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread (or "loaf") and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." The one-ness so plainly expressed in these verses had become lost sight of in the "churches" and chapels. The "loaf" was cut up into dice beforehand and, to-day "individual cups" are used on the ground of hygiene. These are only outward symptoms of the solemn fact that the unity of the body of Christ and the fellowship which embraces all those who are under the shelter of His blood are ignored. Human limits, national as in the Church of England, or sectarian as in the non-conformist "churches" and chapels have been substituted.

Is it any wonder that those who began by “breaking bread” in a simple way in private houses soon came out from the Church of England and the other sects altogether?

The words of the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal have been preserved for us. Through the Apostle Paul He repeated them to the Corinthians and “to all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their’s and ours.” Have you responded to His expressed desire? It is such a simple memorial. It brings before us the body of our Lord Jesus Christ in which He suffered and bore our sins, and His blood which was shed for us. He asked us to “do this” in remembrance of Him. He is now in the glory and we do not know how soon He is coming again. Do you not think it would be a sad thing for a believer to go into His Presence without having carried out His own expressed wish? If a dear friend of yours, before going to a distant country, asked you to do some simple thing periodically “to keep his memory fresh in your mind,” would you not do it? How much more for One Who gave His life for you! An English Christian woman, married many years before to a German, was in Germany all through the last war. She was able, with only about two weeks’ interval, to “break bread” every Lord’s Day. She recently wrote that this remembrance was “unique and precious” to her throughout.

Finally, the weekly remembrance of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread is not the time and place for an exercise of gifts or a sermon or a gospel address, but a time of *remembrance*. The Holy Spirit brings before our hearts and minds the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, He brings to our remembrance what we have learned. We cannot remember what we have not previously learned, so it is necessary daily during the week to read and learn in the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit what has there been recorded concerning the Lord. At the “breaking of bread” we gather to remember, and as we remember our hearts overflow in praise and worship. We do not come to get something for ourselves, though the Holy Spirit does teach us. Our qualification is that we know Him as our Saviour. There

are practical qualifications as well for we are told to "examine ourselves." These practical matters will be considered subsequently.

V. THE CENTRE OF GATHERING.

Reading—Deut. xii. 1-14; Matt. xviii. 19-20.

All of you, I am sure, are familiar with Matt. xviii. 19-20, and many think so much has been said on these verses that the subject has become a little threadbare, with the result that the wonderful realities contained in them have lost their power over many hearts. But I want to show you that what the Lord Jesus said then is a continuation in New Testament conditions of Old Testament truths. That is one of the beauties of the Bible. The Old Testament and the New Testament are not two separate libraries, but one collection of books indited by the same Person all the way through. In all the 66 books the writers wrote as they were led by the Spirit of God. Consequently the recorded words of the Son of God when He was here on earth are entirely consistent with all that is in the Old Testament and all that is in the New, although God has made a fuller revelation of Himself in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus and in the rest of the New Testament, through the Apostles, than He did through the writers and prophets of the Old Testament.

We have read in Deut. xii. 5 "But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come." There are three points in that verse to which I draw your attention. First, the Lord Himself chooses the place. It was not for Moses or Joshua or David or Solomon or a prophet to choose it. The people were not to choose it by vote or general agreement. It was the place which *the Lord* would choose. Secondly, He would put His Name there. It is not that man would put up a fine building (? with a spire) and dedicate it and say "This is the Lord's House." It was the Lord Who would put His Name

there—nobody would, or could, do it for Him. Thirdly, He would make that place His habitation, obviously a matter over which man had no control. These three points are of the highest importance.

Now turn to Matt. xviii. 20. “For where two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst of them.” Can you not see that the same three things are found in that verse? He has *chosen*, not a city or a town but, a company having a particular character—the character of being gathered in *His Name*—as the place on earth where *He will be present*.

Some may say they cannot find anything similar to Matt. xviii. 20 elsewhere in the New Testament. Even if this be so there are very many other verses like it in the Old Testament. If the Lord has said the same thing over and over again in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus has said it once in the New Testament, is that not enough to show that the principles stand for to-day? I think you will all say “it is good enough for me.”

Thus Matt. xviii. 20 became another of the abiding truths recovered 100 years or so ago which brought believers out from the sects. They did not find Christians gathering together according to the principles of this verse. Christians were neither recognising the sovereign choice of the Lord, nor gathering in His Name.

It is very interesting and profitable to go through the Old Testament (using a concordance) reading the passages in which the Lord says He would choose the place, would put His Name there, and would dwell there. Sometimes only the first point is mentioned, sometimes the first two, occasionally all three as in the verse we have read. When Israel had entered into possession of the land and had rest from all their enemies, it became apparent that Mount Moriah (where Abraham had offered up Isaac) was the place the Lord had chosen. David understood this when he said “For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation; this is my rest for ever; here will I dwell for I have desired it” (Ps. cxxxii. 13 and 14). Thus David took up the same points in connection with the place where the temple was to be built by Solomon.

The very fact that the Lord chooses the place makes it the only place. Israel were reminded that they were going into a country where the inhabitants worshipped idols just where they pleased—"upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree" (Deut. xii. 2)—but Israel were distinctly told "Ye shall not do so unto the Lord your God" (v. 4), and again "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest" (v. 13). People say to-day "I do not see that it really matters where one worships. I go where it is most convenient—or where my friends go. What difference does it make as long as I go in order to pray and to sing God's praises, and to worship Him?" This passage in Deuteronomy makes it very plain that Israel had no right to go where *they* pleased, and Matt. xviii. 20 implies the same restriction for to-day. For Israel, their meat offerings, peace offerings, heave offerings and burnt offerings were to be brought to the place which the Lord would choose to put His Name in. These are all primarily "worship" offerings. Collectively we too should be in the right place to bring our worship to God acceptably.

Resuming now the consideration of Matt. xviii. 20 in detail, we must remember that the Lord Jesus had been speaking of "the church." The Greek word so translated primarily applied to a company of called-out free men. It was used in this sense in the time when the Lord Jesus was on earth for the freemen of a city called together to deal with the city's affairs. So when the Lord Jesus said "My church" (Matt. xvi.) we may understand the word to mean those whom He had called out and called together—*His* freed ones. In a city it was the town clerk who called the free men together when required. In Acts xix. we read that the town clerk at Ephesus, who had the responsibility of calling the assembly of free men together to deal with the city's affairs, was very concerned about the vast disorderly mob which shouted for two hours "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." When he could make himself heard he told them that if there was a matter which really concerned

the city then a lawful “assembly” would deal with it. In the end he dismissed the “assembly.” (This is the word translated “church” elsewhere.)

Who calls the assembly of Christians together when they gather scripturally? Speaking with all reverence, I think we may say that the Holy Spirit acts like the Town Clerk. *He* calls the meeting together, and it should be the Holy Spirit who decides when the meeting ends—not some brother who has an appropriate hymn or prayer ready with which to close the meeting when the time is up by the clock. I repeat that it is for the Holy Spirit to decide when the meeting begins and ends; all who are subject to Him will be of one mind about it.

Further, when Christians are gathered together it may be that they have met for conversation, or to hear an address by some Christian, or for various other reasons. But when the Holy Spirit gathers the church together He gathers them to a definite centre. The Lord Jesus said . . . “are gathered together in (or more accurately translated “to”) My Name.” In the New Testament five different Greek prepositions are used after the verb “gather.” They may be translated “before,” “around,” “in” (or “in the power of”), etc. The preposition used in Matt. xviii. 20 is the same as (for instance) in Revelation xvi., where we read of armies being gathered into a place called Armageddon. There can be no misunderstanding about that. The armies came from various unnamed places to Armageddon. It is more than simply being gathered in Armageddon. They must leave all the other places. It is that exclusive meaning that I want to emphasise. In order to gather *to* the Name of the Lord Jesus we must leave all other centres, whether they be creeds, individual preachers, famous buildings, religious systems, or anything else.

A Christian with whom I was recently talking said too much was made of being gathered to the *Name*. His view was that gathering to the Name was Old Testament truth, and that Christians should gather to the *Person*. This idea seems to be based on a misunderstanding of what “the Name” means. The Name is used in the Bible over and over again as what sums up the attributes

and characteristics of the person. In the Psalms, for example, the Name of the Lord is likened to a strong tower—"the righteous runneth into it and is safe." Here "the Name" sums up all that the Lord is as the faithful and true Protector of the righteous. The Name of the Lord Jesus sums up all that He is—the One Who loved us and gave Himself for us; Who is holy and separate from sinners; Who is the very expression of God's Person, Light and Love—in fact it brings before us all His wonderful characteristics. "His Name shall be called Wonderful," etc. Secondly, the fact that we should gather "to His Name" adds much beauty to His promise that "there am I in the midst of them." What a wonderful act of grace and consideration that He should come into the midst of poor creatures, such as you and I are, when we gather to His Name! Let us examine our own hearts, first whether we really gather to His Name and to His Name alone, then whether we are consciously in His very Presence.

You will realise that, in one aspect, the Lord Jesus is everywhere—available as the Saviour to hear and respond to every sinner who cries "Lord, save me." In another aspect He is with His own—those who know Him as Saviour—all the days. They can have communion with Him at all times. He is "at hand" or "near" them. But in a third aspect He is present in the midst of those who are gathered to His Name, the object of their heart's collective adoration and praise, adding the fragrance of His Person to the praise and worship they offer to God the Father, and the authority of His Name to their prayers.

VI. ONE BODY, OR A CIRCLE OF FELLOWSHIP, OR INDEPENDENT GATHERINGS.

Reading—Ephesians iv.

We will now go further into the great truth of the Unity of the Body of Christ to which reference has been made more than once already. We have read that there is one body, and also, among other things, we have read

of the unity of the Spirit and the unity of the faith. We are exhorted “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” There are several other unities, all of equal importance, mentioned in the chapter we have read.

What was the position in Christendom from this point of view 120 years ago? In the “*Church of Rome*” there was some expression of outward unity because its claims are that it exclusively possesses the truth, and all true believers all over the world ought to submit without question to its teaching. It restricts the access of the common people to the Holy Scriptures and puts ritual before faith in Christ. It claims infallibility. In the middle ages it put to death as heretics those who did not submit to it, and although this has not been done for many years, doctrinally it maintains the same position. The “*Church of England*” as by law established had its origin in the rebellion of the King against the moral control of the Church of Rome, but incorporated in a revised ritual many of the great truths recovered from the Scriptures at the time of the Reformation. It is organised on a territorial basis, and the very fact that it is unscripturally called the Church of *England* is evidence that it does not recognise the unity of the body. Comment on the unscriptural character of its ritual has already been made. The remaining *protestant sects*, speaking generally, erect barriers by their very constitution, by their defined creeds, or ceremonial, or the method of appointment of “ministers,” which separate them from one another and are a denial of unity.

In recent years considerable *inter-communion* has developed between the different Protestant bodies which superficially appears to be a step towards unity, but in practice is just laxity. An outward appearance of unity based on tolerance of one another’s “opinions” may satisfy the modern plea for broadmindedness, but is essentially different from unity which results from obedience to the Word of God and subjection to the Holy Spirit—the true “unity of the Spirit.”

Let us review several Scriptures to see what the teaching and practice of unity are as detailed in the New Testament. In Matt. xvi. the Lord Jesus said to

Peter, "On this rock I will build My church"—not "My churches." This unity was then in the future, and the building of it continues from the day of Pentecost to the moment when the Lord Jesus comes and all who believe on Him are caught up in the cloud to meet Him in the air. Everyone who truly believes in the Lord Jesus as his Redeemer is included in that church.

In Matt. xviii., when the Lord Jesus is speaking of one brother trespassing against another (not a brother by natural relationship, but in the sense of Matt. xiii. 50, "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven"). He says "Tell it to the church." For physical reasons the disciples could only tell it to the local company of the Lord's called-out free men, gathered to His Name, but He does not say "tell it to the local church" or "to the nearest church" but "to the church." The local assembly represents the one church. There is unity, although geographically there may be separation.

There are many passages in the Acts showing that the disciples recognised the unity of the church in practical ways. In Acts viii. 14 we read "Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John" (v. 17). "Then laid they (i.e., Peter and John) their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost." In Jerusalem there was already an "assembly." In Samaria there was a new company. The attitude of the Apostles and other Christians in Jerusalem was not that the new company was "the church of the Samaritans" but the very reverse. There was to be an evident expression of the unity of the Spirit. The link was first made clear through the two Apostles visiting Samaria and laying their hands on the converts there. This laying on of hands was an act expressing identification and unity, not one of consecration, etc., as commonly taught. (You will remember that in Lev. vi., when offering the sin-offering the man who had sinned had to lay his hands on its head. This was an expression of identification. He expressed by this act, as it were, "that lamb and I are one in the sight of God. The lamb is about to die for

me.”) When the Apostles had thus identified themselves with these new converts, God confirmed their action by giving the believers in Samaria the Holy Spirit. The unity was thus doubly confirmed.

After the death of Stephen “they that were scattered abroad travelled as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch” (Acts xi. 19). They preached to the Jews and then to the Grecians. A great number believed and turned to the Lord. The assembly at Jerusalem when they heard about it sent Barnabas down. He was not an apostle, but was one in whom the assembly in Jerusalem had confidence. He thus linked these new converts with the older assembly in Jerusalem, again illustrating the unity of the church. The believers in Jerusalem were distinctly and successfully endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit.

In Acts xv. we find that intruders started teaching doctrines in Antioch which the new converts there felt were not right. They sent Paul and Barnabas up to Jerusalem to make enquiries of the assembly there about this teaching. In verse 22 we learn that the Apostles and elders with the whole assembly at Jerusalem sent chosen men to Antioch with Paul and Silas to communicate to the “brethren which are of the Gentiles,” there and in Syria and in Cilicia, their conclusions on the whole matter, with the solemn words “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.” In this incident there are several practical recognitions of unity, viz. (a) in the Christians at Antioch consulting those at Jerusalem, (b) in the matter being brought before not only the Apostles and elders, but the whole church at Jerusalem, (c) in the decision being reached under the guidance of the Holy Ghost—“there is one Spirit,” (d) in the conclusions being sent not only to Antioch where the questions had arisen but, generally, to the new Gentile converts in the whole neighbourhood.

The three foregoing incidents cited from the Acts are beautiful examples of the practical recognition of unity in the early days of the Church.

Later the Apostle Paul was led by the Holy Ghost to write to the assembly at Corinth because evil was being

allowed there. The reality of the unity is evidenced in that he and his companion Sosthenes were concerned, and not only so but the letter was addressed to "all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." All the companies, world-wide, were concerned, because the body is one. The man who had been the cause of the trouble afterwards repented, owned he had been wrong, and desired to come back into the assembly at Corinth. Then Paul writes, by the Holy Spirit, "To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also" (II Cor. ii. 10), for there is one Spirit.

From II Cor. iii. we learn that it was the practice to give letters of commendation to Christians who were travelling about. The incident referred to in the previous paragraph shows the necessity for this. If the man who had sinned and had been "put away" at Corinth, still unrepented, had wanted to go to another city where there was an assembly, the assembly at Corinth would not have given him a letter of commendation. To have done so would have been to deny they had put him away from among them as a wicked person (I Cor. v. 13). And if matters were in godly order at the place to which the man came the assembly would not have received him without a letter. To have received him would have involved them in the same trouble that had occurred at Corinth, and moreover would have been a denial of unity. This is a hypothetical case, but I am sure you will agree that it is a fair conclusion to draw from the two passages. The Apostle Paul, guided by the Spirit of God, emphasises the need for letters of commendation in general cases by the reasons he gives for their being unnecessary in his (Paul's) exceptional case.

The lack of practical response in the Sects of Christendom to the teaching of the Lord Jesus and His apostles, and to the practice of the early disciples as recorded in the Acts—some examples of all these have been given above—was among the reasons which led Christians to leave the Sects a century ago.

When they came out they were soon faced with three possibilities:—

(a) Each little local company could act as a self-contained independent unit. Many adopted this position sooner or later. Others however saw from the Scriptures that such an attitude was entirely inconsistent with the truths that "there is one body and one Spirit," etc.

(b) Such companies, separated from human religious organisations, owning fully the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus, could recognise one another and maintain practical fellowship between themselves, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit. At the same time they could acknowledge as members of the one body of Christ all who truly believed in Him as their Saviour who remained in the Sects of Christendom.

(c) Very soon, alas, because some companies adopted the course at (a), and in others evil doctrine was tolerated, the tendency developed to have a "list of meetings" and to assume that all the meetings in the list and no others, were right scripturally. This tendency has all the dangers of creating another "sect," consisting of those who arrogate to themselves the position of being the only ones who are right!

Consideration of I Cor. x. 15, etc., will throw light on these alternatives. "The cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Communion is that which binds together in unity. There is not a soul saved except by virtue of that precious blood. It is a bond of unity which exists between all believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. "The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread (loaf) and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." In the "breaking of bread" (the Scriptural expression used in Acts, etc.) there is primarily the remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, but the symbols (the one loaf and the cup) are also reminders of the unity of all believers on the Lord Jesus, both as being all redeemed by the same precious blood and as being all members of the one body of Christ. There is a place in the company that comes together scripturally to eat the Lord's Supper for every true believer, because he is redeemed by the

precious blood of the Lord Jesus and is a member of His body. To gather on any other principle is not according to Scripture. That place may remain empty because the believer concerned is negligent of his privilege, or is scripturally excluded by his evil ways, evil doctrines or evil associations, but his place is nevertheless available at the Lord's table. Only the clear warrant of Scripture, or physical infirmity, should account for his place being empty. Is yours?

VII. SEPARATION FROM EVIL, PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE.

*Reading—Haggai ii. 10-13; I Cor. v. 6-13;
II Tim. ii. 19-22.*

The unity of the Body of Christ, one of the great truths which brought Christians out from the "churches" and chapels about 100 years ago, is closely connected with the breaking of bread. There is one loaf, which speaks not only of the body of the Lord Jesus which was given for us, but also of the fact "we (believers) being many are one loaf, one body" (I Cor. x. 17). Yet the very Christians who so strongly profess to recognise the unity of the body of Christ are divided to-day into various companies which are not in full fellowship with one another. How has this state of affairs come about?

The Scriptures we have just read, which we shall be considering in detail with others later, bring before us the importance of being separate from evil individually and of excluding from the "assembly" those who live evil lives or teach evil doctrine. Satan has used, through our failure, the very Scriptures that instruct us how to deal with evil to bring about division after division among even those who desire to gather entirely according to the Scriptures.

There is, of course, no division in the body of Christ. Even if a brother in the Lord is to be put away from a company of believers, as we have read in I Cor. v., he does not cease to be a member of the body of Christ.

There is no such thing in Scripture as cutting him off in that sort of way, and consigning him to Hell, and we must not make any mistake about that.

Let us now consider the effect of evil upon the individual and upon the company of Christians gathered together. In I Cor. iii. 16, 17, we read “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” In I Cor. vi. 19, 20, we also read “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” The first of these passages deals with the “collective” aspect of the matter, and chapter vi with the individual. As it will be necessary to say more about the “collective” aspect, we will take the individual aspect first.

Each one of us who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is reminded that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is God, He is the *Holy Spirit* of God, and He dwells in you and me. This brings before us our responsibility in regard to our daily life and walk. You and I (alas!) do defile our bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit, when we think and say and do things and (it may be) go to places which are not suitable for one who is the temple of the Holy Ghost. We are told in I Cor. iii. 17 that “if any man defile the temple of God him shall God destroy.” Greek scholars say the verb translated “defile” is the same as that translated “destroy.” If a temple is defiled by evil, its character as a temple is destroyed. So we must remember our responsibility. God acts in grace and does not withdraw the Holy Spirit from us, but if we in that sense defile His temple (our body) the Holy Spirit is hindered from using us and blessing us, and filling us with joy. Therefore personal separation from what we know to be evil is immensely important. Our conscience tells us so, and it is taught generally in “churches” and chapels that believers in the Lord Jesus ought to keep clear and separate from what is evil.

It was however the instruction in the Scriptures about dealing with evil in the "assemblies" of believers that was re-discovered about 100 years ago and, among other truths, brought Christians out from the "churches" and chapels. In I Cor. iii. 6 it is primarily to the "assembly" at Corinth that the apostle says "Ye are the temple of God." The local assembly, gathered in Corinth, of the Lord's called-out freed men are spoken of as the temple of God. Somewhat similarly the company of believers in Ephesus were told they were "an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22). When believers in the Lord Jesus come together in the scriptural way, gathered to His Name, He is in the midst, as we have seen earlier. Such a company is the temple of God. If what is known to be evil is brought into that company, and is tolerated there, the company ceases in character to be the temple of God because it is defiled. It makes no difference whether it is evil living, evil doctrine or any other form of evil. This fact is clearly not recognised in the "churches" and chapels.

In Corinth there was a man in the assembly who was guilty of gross evil living. People might say (as some do to-day) "That is his concern, nothing to do with the other people in the assembly." The passage teaches us just the contrary. It concerned all the Christians gathered in Corinth. It concerned Paul and Sosthenes who were far away. It concerned "all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." In short, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." What is to be done about it? The Corinthian believers are told to "put away from among them that wicked person." He was a believer in the Lord Jesus, as his penitence and implied return to the assembly, referred to in II Cor., show. Nevertheless—until truly repentant—he was put away from among them. He was not, of course, cut off from the body. In fact, it was not inconsistent with the truth of the unity of the body of Christ to put him away as a wicked person. The two principles do not clash.

Earlier the fact has been stressed that believers in the Lord Jesus should gather to His Name, and that this

excludes any other centre of gathering. Unity would result if all believers did so gather in fact. But such a way of gathering involves separation from every form of evil, and it is equally true that “separation from evil is God’s principle of unity,” which was the title of a largely circulated tract issued many years ago. The two truths are complementary—Gathering *to* the Name of the Lord Jesus, separation *from* evil. If every believer in the town in which you live did either, he would do both, and the result would be the unity of all the true believers in your town. How different this is from man’s way of forming unity, which is generally “If you will take no notice of anything I am doing or teaching which seems wrong to you, I will reciprocate.”

The Corinthians were told to put away from among them that wicked person, but it was *moral* evil. What is to be done about other kinds of evil, for instance, evil doctrine? There are those who limit the instructions to moral evil and do not “put away” on account of evil teaching, because I Cor. v. is dealing only with “any man who is called a brother” if he is a fornicator or covetous or a railer (one who is always running down other Christians) or an extortioner (a workman who tries to get all the money he can for as little work as possible, or an employer who tries to pay as little money as possible but to get as much work as possible out of his employee), and so on—all forms of moral evil. In the epistle to the Galatians, however, it was *evil doctrine* that the Spirit of God had to rebuke through the Apostle Paul, which was an effort to bring the Gentile Christians in the assemblies in Galatia under the bondage of the law given to the Jews—one of the principles found to-day for instance in the oft-repeated prayer “Incline our hearts to keep this law.” The Apostle quotes the same fact in connection with this doctrinal evil as he did in Corinthians in connection with moral evil—“a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Gal. v. 9). The Lord Jesus Himself warned His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and was referring to their doctrine. It seems therefore quite clear that the principles which apply in I Corinthians to moral evil should also

be applied to *evil doctrine*. The guilty person should be put away.

Satan has taken advantage of our weakness and failure, both as regards moral and as regards doctrinal evil, and more especially in regard to doctrine. An example will illustrate his method. Someone propounds strange teaching about the Person of the Lord Jesus, subjecting Him to the analysis of human reasoning. Some support him, some oppose his teaching. Two parties develop. Each professes to separate from those who hold evil doctrine, so they separate from one another. Sad to say it is often the intellectual brother, not the simple child of God, who has allowed his reasoning and intellect to pull to pieces the Person or the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and to draw simple souls after him. Those sublime subjects are not within the comprehension of the human intellect. The Scripture says "No man knoweth the Son save the Father." Our part is to bow in worship and adoration to Him, not to attempt to dissect His deity from His humanity, nor to pull to pieces the complex perfection of His atoning work.

Our natural inclination is to be attracted and interested by something new, like the Athenians at Mars' Hill (Acts xvii. 21), and to think because it is new it is good. We were, however, reminded earlier that we should test everything by the Scriptures—"to the law and to the testimony."

In two other epistles we are instructed what should be done with one who teaches evil doctrine. A man who is a heretic (one who chooses his own ideas) after being warned is to be rejected (Titus iii, 10). "Who-soever transgresseth (literally "goes forward") and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ" is not to be received into the house nor to be bidden God speed (II John 9, 10). He is a man who is not content with what God has revealed in His word. If we are not to receive him into our house, surely it follows that he is to be put away by the assembly just as the man in I Cor. v.

If the Scriptures had been acted upon when evil teaching first appeared, in each case, division would not have occurred, but directly the enemy succeeded in

forming parties the way was prepared for division to occur. The sad position to-day is that there are several companies professing to gather to the Name of the Lord Jesus, and to separate from evil, which are nevertheless not practising unity with one another. If someone is persuaded before God that he is connected with a company of Christians where evil doctrine is allowed what is he to do? The instruction to the Corinthians to *put away* does not apply, but the position is similar to that of 100 years ago when Christians *came out* from the "churches" and chapels. The passage read in II Timothy reminds us that when matters get corrupt in the "great house"—no longer strictly recognised as the House of God as in I Timothy—the individual path is to purge oneself from the vessels unto dishonour. If we do so we may find others have done the same, and we can then "follow righteousness, faith, love and peace *with them* that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Let us now consider certain practical applications in connection with an assembly of believers who endeavour to carry out these truths. Suppose someone comes from (say) the "Church of England" and wants to remember the Lord with them. The first point that arises is that they, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have (in effect) come out from every human organisation. Does the one who comes from the Church of England and says "I would like to break bread with you this morning" still maintain that the system of the Church of England, with its organised services and one-man ministry, is the right thing? If so, the assembly cannot consistently receive him among them without building again the things they have destroyed and so making themselves transgressors (Gal. ii. 18). The same principle applies if someone, who usually is associated with a company of believers holding and teaching doctrine concerning the Person or work of the Lord Jesus which the assembly sincerely believe is unscriptural and evil, comes to them saying, perhaps, "We have no meeting in this town so I should like to remember the Lord with you." To receive him is to condone the evil teaching, and to become partakers of his evil deeds (see II John). The world and a great many Christians argue on opposite

lines. The passage read in Haggai teaches us that if a priest carrying holy things touches food, etc., the contact does not make the food holy, but if something unclean touches the food it makes the food unclean. A company tolerating evil is not sanctified by the presence of true believers but defiled by the presence of evil. Yet many say they do not believe in defilement by association. They say if someone comes from a place where there is evil teaching but we know him to be a true Christian, we should receive him. There are, however, many other passages in Scripture which make it quite plain that the presence of evil defiles the whole company until they deal with it in judgment—"a little leaven leavens the whole lump." Because Achan disobeyed God all Israel were defeated by their enemies. The Lord withdrew His support although the sin of Achan was not even known to the nation. "*Israel* has sinned." David numbered the children of Israel contrary to the mind of the Lord, and plague fell upon *the nation*. A very evil deed was done in the time of the Judges in the town of Gibeah. Not only that town, nor even the tribe of Benjamin to whom Gibeah belonged, but *all Israel* suffered the judgment of God for that evil deed. These Old Testament examples may suffice to underline the divine principle that the presence of evil defiles all who remain in association with it.

Ignorance is another matter altogether. Sometimes someone comes who is feeling his way out from the sects. He is struck by the difference in the "service," and is conscious of the reality of the presence of the Lord Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But perhaps he does not come out immediately or entirely from the sect or company with whom he has been associated. Let us not (so to speak) slam the door in the face of such a one, but rather show patience and encourage him. Similarly someone may come amongst us who clearly loves the Lord but uses in his prayers expressions that are not quite Scriptural and may even be wrong doctrinally. He has no intention of teaching or insisting on such error but expresses it in ignorance, as the result of past associations. The Lord knows his heart, and we say amen to the spirit of his prayers.

This subject of separation, especially when it involves separation from those who are truly the Lord's, is a very sad one—not to be shirked because of the sorrow it brings, but a matter that should humble us before God. We all fail, we are all of us ignorant, we now know in part, but as far as God has been pleased to make known His mind and will to each one of us we are responsible to act on it.

VIII. CONCLUSION.

The generation that came out from among the sects 100 to 120 years ago has gone. Very soon, if the Lord does not come, there will not be any left who are direct links with that generation, though others are constantly being led out from human organisations on similar principles. It is consequently a responsibility, for those who have learnt from their predecessors, to pass on to others the truths which were used by God to bring Christians out of the sects in those days. The writer is deeply conscious how much he owes to the wise teaching of his father, who was brought out from the “Established Church” in 1874 and knew personally and intimately in their old age many of those who came out 30 years or so before. You in your turn will be responsible, if the Lord tarries, to hand the truth on to those who follow, so it is very important that you too should make it your own from the Scriptures.

The general subject has been considered under seven headings and the most earnest endeavour has been made, with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, to present a balanced summary of the truths dealt with. At this stage it is necessary to warn you to be on your guard in what you read. I recently came across a booklet which professed to deal with the same subject. Much in this booklet is interesting and good, but I want to make use of it to illustrate some of the truths we have been considering. I found in it this serious sentence:—“These brethren formed themselves into a little company on such a basis that they could admit every believer all over the world, so that if any one presented himself, they

simply tried to find out whether he was a saved person or not, and, if he was, they said,, 'You have as much right as we have to remember Christ, for it is the Lord's table, not ours.' "

Superficially this sounds good, but on careful consideration it is found to be a dangerous half-truth, inaccurate both as to fact and as to scriptural teaching. First, they did not "form themselves into a little company"—which would merely be making another "sect," but gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus, as the Christians did in the Apostles' day. Secondly, it was not the practice, nor would it have been scriptural, to receive at the Lord's table anyone living an evil life, holding evil doctrine, or setting aside by human organisation the control of the Holy Spirit, though he might be "called a brother." Thirdly, it is not scriptural in phrase nor in principle to claim a *right* to come to the Lord's table. It is a wonderful privilege. All these points have already been covered, but perhaps attention might again be drawn to the emphatic teaching of Scripture in regard to the leaven of evil.

Further, the booklet states, "The divisions of Brethren are the greatest scandal we see in the Church of God; they are the result of the want of grace shown one toward another." As regards the first part of this sentence, the fact that there are several companies of believers in the Lord Jesus professing to gather to His Name and to be subject to the Holy Spirit, yet not in full fellowship with one another, is indeed a matter which should humble us before the Lord for our mutual failures, and for the bad testimony we bear in practice to the truths in the Scriptures. But the second part of the sentence is not even a half-truth. Neither evil living nor the propagation of evil doctrine, concerning the Person or work of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to be dealt with primarily in grace. "Put away from among you" is not grace, nor is "Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed." Persistence in evil, accompanied by partisanship, is what has caused the divisions, and the divisions would not have resulted if the evil had been dealt with according to Scripture. The time for

showing grace is when the evildoer, etc., repents and abandons his evil deeds, evil doctrine or evil associations.

One more quotation might be mentioned as regards this booklet. “We should always wait and try to discover what turn the meeting takes. It may be that a hymn sung, or an expression used in prayer may suggest apt thoughts to someone present,” etc. How different is this attitude from simple dependence on the guidance of the Spirit of God! “Try to discover,” “apt thoughts,” are expressions of the activity of the natural mind and intellect, not of the control of the one Spirit. Alas! we have to confess failure from time to time on these very lines when gathered together, but let us acknowledge that it is failure.

The booklet had its origin many years ago. It has its warning value to-day in showing how soon after the calling out from the “sects,” to gather to the Lord’s Name, the seeds of looseness, of ignoring evil in order to attain a semblance of unity, and of other noxious weeds began to germinate.

Let us, in conclusion, turn to a happier aspect of things. Obedience to the great truths re-discovered under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was honoured by God in a most remarkable way. A vast number of other precious truths were brought out from the Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which have been recorded for us in many books, written by those who came out from the “sects.” It is astonishing to compare these books with the religious books which preceded them. The earlier books are full of men’s thoughts and speculations, though often combined with very real and devoted piety. The books written by those who “came out” are characterised by close adherence to the Scriptures, which are treated as living and powerful, given by inspiration of God, adequate and beyond challenge.

The names and authors of many such books might be cited, but this would savour of advertisement. The glories and beauties of the Person and work of Christ as typified in the multitudinous ways in the Old Testament; the counsels and purposes of God in His dealings with men individually, dispensationally, and nationally; the

blessings of this present dispensation of grace and the distinctive place the church has now and in the glory with Christ; the coming of the Lord for the church as the immediate hope of the Christian; these and many more, redounding to the praise of the glory of God's grace, were "re-discovered" (as it were) in the Scriptures. The coming of the Lord for His own before His manifestation to the world in power and great glory may be taken as an example. This grand truth is clearly set out in many places in the New Testament. Yet for centuries it had been ignored and overlooked. When those whom the Lord led out from the sects began to teach this truth it met with strong opposition even from earnest Christians. As a young man I remember an aged Christian who said the teaching of the "rapture" (the term often used for the "catching up" of the saints, out from the unbelievers who will be left behind) had done very great harm. Yet this same truth is accepted to-day by ministers and preachers in most denominations, though there are many also who still reject it. So with many of the truths brought to light at that time. The "churches" and chapels have accepted some of them. They cannot however accept others (such as gathering to the Lord's Name alone, separating from known evil of every kind, and imposing no humanly-devised restrictions on the liberty of the Holy Spirit) without destroying the very basis of their existence as sects and denominations.

May the Lord bless this endeavour to set out some at least, of the truths which liberated some of His redeemed from the fetishes and limitations of the sects of Christendom, and at the same time guarded them against tolerance of evil for the sake of a semblance of unity. There has been, and always will be, failure in practising the truth we know, but let us not abandon the truth because of our failure, but rather be stimulated to greater faithfulness in practice, and to earnest prayer that we may be obedient to the Word, and may bring honour to the Name of Him Who loved the church and gave Himself for it!