

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

By
P. W. Petter

“ God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.”—Psalm lxxxix. 7.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE Assemblies particularly referred to in this book are those commonly known as the Assemblies of the Open Brethren.

I have used the words " Church " (in its local sense), " Assembly " and " Gathering " as synonymous terms, as indeed they are for all practical purposes.

We appear to have no one word in English which exactly expresses the meaning of the Greek word " Ecclesia," generally translated " Church," but also " Assembly," in both the authorised and revised versions of the Scriptures. The word " Gathering " most nearly does so, and though not found in Scripture as a noun, has the support of the very precious promise of our Lord that " where two or three are *gathered* together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION	9
I. THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN..	11
II. LOCAL CHURCHES OR ASSEMBLIES ..	18
III. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD ..	22
IV. THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY ..	28
V. THE SERVICE OF SISTERS ..	38
VI. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER ..	46
VII. MEETINGS FOR EDIFICATION AND PRAYER	57
VIII. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL ..	62
IX. THE TEACHING OF THE YOUNG ..	66
X. STRIFES AND DIVISIONS ..	70
XI. PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP ..	82

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is written for the Children of God ; for those who honour the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and who accept the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures, as I do myself with all my heart, soul and intellect. If I am asked for my definition of inspiration, I know of none better than that in 2 Peter i. 21, that " holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

The Lord promised His disciples that when the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, should come He should teach them all things and bring to their remembrance whatsoever He had said to them, and that He should guide them into all truth. How He instructed the disciples and led them on, at and after the Pentecost, is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles and it is evidence of His continued working that there should be in this twentieth century after Christ, Churches or Assemblies of Christians which have it as their objective to reproduce as nearly as possible, and in all essentials, in simplicity of worship, in conditions of fellowship and in faithful service, the Churches of the New Testament days, without addition thereto and without subtraction therefrom.

One great object before me in writing is that these Assemblies may be more truly in conformity with the New Testament pattern, in spirit as well as in conduct, and that their doors may be more widely opened to welcome all who come in the name of the Lord Jesus, so that beloved children of God who are finding it impossible to remain in Churches which are giving themselves over to ritualism or rationalism may be assured of a warm welcome and happy fellowship in

INTRODUCTION

Assemblies where the Lord is honoured and His Word revered.

While this book is intended primarily for Christians who are meeting in such Assemblies as are here described, I also address myself to all Christians and very especially to those who find themselves in uncongenial Church associations : in some cases it may be where innovations in ritual are obscuring the simple truths of the Gospel, in others where the Deity of our blessed Lord and the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures are denied. It surely cannot be the will of God that true Believers in the Lord Jesus should appear to sanction such things by their presence. As with Just Lot, their righteous souls are vexed within them, and many are puzzled knowing not what to do.

It is characteristic of the sheep of the Good Shepherd that "they know His voice," and they follow Him. That they may so walk as to please God is the Spirit-implanted desire in the heart of every true Believer. If any such, reading this book, hear therein the gentle voice of the Shepherd leading them out into closer fellowship with Himself, may they have grace to follow. To follow Him whithersoever He leadeth is the only path worth taking by the Child of God.

I am very conscious of the shortcomings of this book, which, however, I find myself unable to remove. I desire that it may be read in the Berean spirit, and that every opinion expressed may be brought to the searchlight of Holy Scripture.

May the great Head of the Church be able to use it for blessing to some of His loved ones.

AMEN.

CHAPTER I

THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

IN the Acts of the Apostles we have the record of the early days of the Christian Church in the new age or dispensation which was ushered in at Pentecost, and in the Epistles we have instructions as to our personal and collective behaviour in the Church of God. In the four Gospels we have the record of our Lord's Life and Teaching, and of His death, resurrection and ascension, and lastly in the Book of Revelation we have a prophetic vision or visions which carry us forward to the end of time, yet containing much instruction for us in the present age, especially in relation to worship.

And what about the Old Testament Scriptures? They were written of an age which closed with the Crucifixion of the Son of God. They relate primarily to a people who in unbelief rejected their true Messiah, and so have been cut off "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," but they were also written for our learning, and we remember how our Lord revered the Old Testament Scriptures, and how He expounded them to His disciples, and opened their understanding after His resurrection and showed them how the law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms all set forth the things concerning Himself.

If we accept these Scriptures in Old and New Testaments as given by inspiration of God, as a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path, and profitable for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," then we shall allow their light to shine upon our ways individually, in our personal life and conduct, and collectively in our Assembly service and worship.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

Some have thought and taught that the Scriptures themselves, and more especially the records of the early days of the Christian Church, are insufficient for our guidance, and that we must add to them the "traditions" of the early Fathers; that a principle of "development" should be at work, adding a kind of superstructure to the foundations laid by the Apostles and Prophets. If we accept that theory, then there is no limit to the wideness of variation from the Scripture pattern that may claim to be Christian worship, and indeed as we look around "Christendom" to-day, we see that there has hardly been any limit to the innovations, product of human imagination, which have been introduced into one branch or another of that which claims to be the Christian Church.

The claim that is made on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church and by Anglo-Catholics that their forms of worship, with their ritual and ceremonial, the vestments of their Priests and the sacrifice of the Mass are a natural development from that which we find in the New Testament, has no vestige of support from Scripture. There is no suggestion of these things in the New Testament. There can be no manner of doubt that the Spirit of Truth did guide the Apostles and teachers of the early Church, according to our Lord's promise, and that we have, in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, the record of their doings and teachings, so that these might guide the Church throughout the whole of this age. There is no room for "development," and there could be, and can be, no "development" which does not run directly counter to the divinely taught order.

This is why I emphasise the importance of the New Testament Pattern rather than appeal for guidance, as many do, to the writings of the "Fathers," meaning in particular those of the first four centuries of the Christian era. Long before the third and fourth centuries we find that there were not merely the seeds,

THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

but the vigorous young growth of those excrescences and heresies whose rank development has in later years to a great extent concealed the truth of God in so-called Christendom. Indeed, we find the commencement of these things even before the close of the era covered by the New Testament Canon. First there was the attempt to bind the yoke of Judaism upon the Gentile Christians ; and we owe much, under God, to Peter and James and Paul and Barnabas and those who stood with them, for their faithful defence of the liberty of the Gospel as recorded in Acts xv and elsewhere. But the fight continued, and the Epistle to the Galatians was written especially to combat this strong Judaistic tendency. Later, there came in the various evils referred to in the Epistles to the Seven Churches (Revelation ii and iii). We can see, therefore, that it is not safe to appeal to the Church of the early centuries or the writings of the Fathers. The only course of safety is to go back, as some one has said, to the "Grand-fathers," to the Apostles themselves and the inspired record of their acts, and to their inspired writings in the Epistles, which have been graciously preserved to us, and in which we have the promised teaching and warning of the Holy Spirit of God, and all necessary guidance for the Church, to the end of the age. This is all we need, and the nearer we can approach to the pattern shown to us in the New Testament, the more truly may we be assured that we are pleasing God.

It will, indeed, not be a matter of small importance to every true child of God that his form of worship may be such as God can accept. In the old dispensation God gave instructions even in minute details concerning the place of worship, the priesthood and the sacrifices, and warned Moses to make all things "according to the pattern." Earlier still, God had shown by His acceptance of Abel's offering and His rejection of that of Cain that worship, to be acceptable

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

to Him, must be rendered according to His instructions (for we cannot doubt that both Cain and Abel had been instructed ; indeed, this is implied in Gen. iv. 7). The exercise of the imagination of our own hearts as to what may be acceptable to God as worship can only lead to disastrous failure.

For worship in its true sense is an offering to God, and as with every gift the important consideration is not what will please the giver, but what will please the one to whom the gift is to be made.

In the New Testament we have God's pattern for Christian worship, and there is no other divinely given ; if, therefore, we desire to please God in our worship, we will not be led astray by forms and ceremonies, or by other things which may be attractive and appeal to the senses, but for which there is no authority in God's Word, and which we can have no reason to believe are pleasing to Him.

If we seek after that form of worship, of which we have the pattern in the New Testament, without addition or subtraction, we find ourselves in company with numbers of Believers who appear to have existed right through the intervening ages, who with hearts yearning after God have turned away from the forms and ceremonies of human invention, seeking a simpler form of worship, more acceptable, as they believed, to God, and a better expression of their own heart's devotion. They have been known under many different names and have generally been despised and often persecuted. The measure of their enlightenment was often limited, as might have been expected, for few were able to obtain access to the Holy Scriptures, but according to the light given to them they have sought to walk according to the will of God, and to worship Him according to His Word.

The Reformation was an era in which the hearts of multitudes were turned in this direction. The invention of the art of printing placed at the disposal of those

THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

devoted men who translated the Scriptures into the tongues of the people in Great Britain and on the Continent of Europe a means for multiplying the product of their labours. As the knowledge of what the Scriptures contained was spread, many began to see that they had been deceived by religious teachers who had imposed upon them, for their own ends, doctrines and ceremonies such as transubstantiation, penances, the sale of indulgences, and many other innovations, for which there was no warrant in the New Testament. Thus, men were led to turn from these vanities to worship the living God according to His own will, as set forth in His Word.

As we know, many of these, our fellow Christians, suffered every kind of privation and endured every form of persecution which wicked hearts could devise, even death itself, in their defence of the simple faith of the Gospel. They sought to spread the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord and counted not their lives dear unto them, and as a result of their faithful testimony multitudes of people were brought out of the darkness of medieval superstition into the glorious light and liberty of the children of God.

Another period of enlightenment began just a hundred years ago, when in Dublin, Plymouth and Bristol and elsewhere, companies of Christians began to meet together, and, sinking their minor differences they agreed to meet only as Believers in the Lord Jesus. The aim which they set before them was to order their form of worship so as to be pleasing to God, with the Holy Scriptures only as their guide. So rapidly did this Spirit-empowered movement grow and prosper, not only in the British Isles, but in many countries of Europe, in America and all over the world where the name of Christ was known, that it appeared as though it would have ushered in a new Reformation, as indeed in a measure it did. But alas, so great a work of God could not long escape the attention of the Wicked One.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

He found a means, by internal jealousy and strife, of hindering this great work of God, and of bringing it into a large measure of, I am afraid I must say, not altogether unmerited contempt.

Nevertheless, where the open Assembly (that is, open to every Christian walking consistently) has been maintained, and where the members have endeavoured to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the blessing of God has remained upon these Assemblies. They are numerous still, all over the world, active in Gospel testimony and missionary zeal. They have not denied the Lord's Name nor His Word, and they are as lighthouses whose light is not extinguished, but shines still in the growing darkness of organised Christendom, which is, alas, to an ever-increasing extent denying both the Name and the Word of the Lord.

In considering these Assemblies of God's children, their testimony in the world and their service, let us remember first that the unit of the Assembly is the individual. What manner of persons must we be to have the right and privilege of membership in such an Assembly? I referred to them as Assemblies of God's Children, and to be a child of God is a first essential. I am a child of God, not because I have been born in a Christian country, nor because certain ordinances have been performed upon me in infancy, or indeed as an adult, but because I have received Him, Christ Jesus, as my Saviour and my Lord, according to His Word, "as many as received Him, to them gave He power [right or privilege] to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name."

The children of God are those who have received the Lord Jesus, who have believed on Him, and have accepted God's testimony concerning Him as the Saviour of His providing, the Lamb of God who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify us unto Himself, His own peculiar people,

THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

zealous of good works. Such have the witness of the Spirit, bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God.

Reader, are you one of these? If you are, these pages are written for you, no matter what your Church association may be. But if you are not one of these, what better opportunity do you need than just now, to yield yourself unto God and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. He still says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me."

CHAPTER II

LOCAL CHURCHES OR ASSEMBLIES

THE Greek word Ecclesia, translated Church in the New Testament, means literally the "called out ones," and signifies those who have been called out from amongst the peoples of the world to the discipleship of the Lord Jesus to be a "people for His Name." The term "The Church" is used in the New Testament of the whole company of Believers in this dispensation from Pentecost to the moment when our Lord shall come, and the dead in Christ shall be raised, and those who are alive and remain shall be changed, and all together one Church we shall be caught up to meet our Lord in the air. The Church was referred to in this sense by our Lord when He said, "Upon this rock will I build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." It is very important to distinguish between the use of the word in this sense and its use to designate a company of Believers in any locality, because a great deal of confusion has arisen through taking what is said concerning the one Church Universal and applying it to the local assembly or group of assemblies or churches; indeed, this has been a basic error on which many of the false claims made by the Church of Rome and other similar organisations have been built.

That which the Lord described as "My Church," and of which He is the Head, has never yet been seen by man; it exists in the heart of God, and consists of every true child of God under whatever name he may be known or whatever his "church association" may be, in all this dispensation. In Ephesians, chapter ii, it is likened to a building under construction,

LOCAL CHURCHES OR ASSEMBLIES

which “fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.”

The use of the word Church to designate a company or assembly of Believers is very common in the New Testament, and in this sense alone is it used in the plural form—Churches.

In theory, a local Church should consist of all the Believers in the locality, and the early Churches of the New Testament times no doubt did so consist. Unfortunately, the enemy of God’s people has so successfully sown discord and caused divisions amongst Christians that we cannot now claim that this is so. There are many true children of God associated with Churches called by various names, who have never appreciated the privilege of meeting simply as Christians, acknowledging no other name, in such Assemblies as we are considering. Any company of God’s children who meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus, who honour His Word and who are willing to receive into their company all other fellow Believers in Christ who are living godly lives, may properly claim to be a Church or local Assembly in the New Testament sense.

I accept without reservation the definition of a Church contained in the nineteenth article of the Church of England, as follows :—

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in the which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same . . .”

This is a remarkable statement, worthy of careful consideration. In its plain meaning it allows the right of Church designation to any company of “faithful,” i.e. “believing” men in which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are duly administered ; and due administration

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

must surely be conceded to the baptism of adults on their confession of faith in the Lord Jesus, as is so frequently recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and to the administration of the Lord's Supper which follows in closest particularity the instructions given in the New Testament.

It is a gracious provision of our Heavenly Father that His children should be gathered together in local Assemblies, so that they may be edified and taught in His Word, and so that they may mutually encourage and help one another along the heavenward way, and join together in service and have opportunity for united worship, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

An Assembly may be large or small : its minimum size has been fixed by the Lord Himself as consisting of "two or three" ; its essential characteristic is that it is a gathering of God's children in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and as such it is assured of His presence.

The first material necessity for an Assembly is a place in which to gather. From the earliest days, and still to-day, a room in the house of a Believer has often been the place of Assembly.

Whenever possible, however, and especially when numbers multiply, a more public assembly hall is to be preferred, and great responsibility rests upon those to whom God has entrusted this world's goods to see that the Assemblies of God's children are provided with suitable meeting places. It should not be considered that "any place will do." When the Lord entrusted Peter and John with the duty of finding the place where He should eat the last Passover with His disciples, He bid them find the "guest chamber" and there prepare, and they found the large upper room, furnished, and doubtless, as the guest chamber, the best room in the house. One cannot help wondering whether it was to this same "upper room" that the disciples repaired after our Lord's ascension (Acts i. 13).

The requirements of a meeting-place or assembly

LOCAL CHURCHES OR ASSEMBLIES

hall will vary to some extent, under the different conditions and customs of different peoples and climates. It should always, however, be as convenient of access as possible to the Believers who will assemble there. It should be suitably furnished, well lighted and properly ventilated, and if in a cold climate, warmed in winter. The Lord knows if any of these desirable conditions are beyond the reach of the Assembly, just as He also knows if a proper care for the Assembly and self-denial on the part of some would make them possible.

It is desirable that the meeting-place should have a neat exterior, and it is inexcusable that it should be anything but clean and tidy inside. The cloth provided for the Lord's Table should be clean and white, and the utensils kept as becomes such as are used in the Lord's service.

Concerning the provision of a suitable place for an Assembly of God's children, there are three scriptures which I think apply :—

1. Let all things be done decently and in order.
2. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.
3. Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

With regard to the ownership of the building, if this is not rented, but belongs to the Assembly, it is desirable that it should be legally vested in Trustees connected with the local Assembly. This is generally to be preferred to placing the property in the hands of Trustees at a distance, who could not be conversant with the local conditions.

The maintenance of the building externally and internally in all that pertains to the comfort and convenience of the members is part of the proper work of the Oversight Brethren.

CHAPTER III

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

I ESTEEM very highly those who give their whole time to prayer, the ministry of God's Word, visiting and other service in the Assemblies of His people ; who have prepared themselves for this service by waiting on God and patient study of the Scriptures. We ought to " esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake." They have not, in my judgment been valued generally as they should have been, and we have not communicated to them of our " good things " as we ought to have done, and as Assemblies we have suffered greatly in consequence. The services of Ministering Brethren, taught of God and able to teach others, giving themselves wholly to this work, should be valued and used, and the needs of those Brethren should be ministered unto with a sense of responsibility, as indeed is frequently enjoined in the New Testament Scriptures.

But I search the New Testament in vain to find anything like that which has become the common practice in Christendom in the matter of ministry. I mean that the whole of the Ministry should be undertaken by one clergyman or minister, while all the congregation sit in silence. It is a serious matter that there should be no opportunity for the exercise of gift in the Church by those who are qualified to minister. Moreover, the needs of God's people are so varied that they cannot be adequately ministered unto by one and the same minister, however devoted, constantly preaching to the same congregation. A study of such passages as the twelfth and fourteenth chapters of first Corinthians clearly shows that this is not the purpose of God. It would seem that the services of the early

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Churches were based largely on those of the Synagogue. Indeed, for a while Believers were accustomed to gather with unbelieving Jews in the Synagogues, and in Acts, chapter xix, we find that after three months' testimony in the Synagogue at Ephesus, Paul "separated the disciples," who found a new meeting-place in the school of Tyranus, where the Apostle "disputed" (or R.V., reasoned) by the space of two years. In the Synagogue, the reading of the Scriptures with exposition occupied a prominent place with prayers and psalms of praise. The Synagogues required no priest to minister, and when our Lord visited the Synagogue at Nazareth and indicated, by rising, His desire to read the Scripture portion, He was at once permitted to do so. So of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia we read that they went into the Synagogue and, after the reading of the law and the prophets, were invited, although strangers, to address the assembly.

But while we do not believe that ministry should be confined to one minister in the Church when God may have distributed His gift in ministry over a number of the Believers, and so have provided that diversity in ministry which would appeal to different states of heart and mind in the congregation, it was never intended that the meetings should be open for any one to minister without regard to his ability or gift. Neither will you find any support in the Word of God for the idea which has, unfortunately, got abroad in some quarters that preparation of an address, beforehand, should be discouraged as interfering with the "liberty of the spirit."

Ministry in the Assembly should always be for edification. Uninteresting, unprofitable and wearisome discoursing is not ministry, it is a discouragement and an offence against God's people. Ministry to be profitable, must be the fruit of study, and of predigestion; that is the thought behind our Lord's own words when He said, "He that believeth on Me as the

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

Scripture hath said, out of his belly (i.e. out of his digestive system) shall flow rivers of living water."

Very rarely will one be called of God to minister His Word if he has not used such opportunity as God has given him for careful and prayerful preparation and study. Even so, the brother who has been waiting upon God in preparation should come to the meeting (I refer particularly to the worship meeting) prepared to minister if he receives the leading of the Spirit so to do, and prepared to remain silent if God chooses to use some other servant on this occasion. How often, alas, has some set discourse, not on the lines of the leading of the Spirit, been forced by some unsubmissive brother on an Assembly. This is an offence not only against God's people, but against the Holy Spirit ; it is doubly wrong, for it inflicts an unprofitable discourse on the gathering, and by occupying time, it deprives the Assembly of the opportunity of hearing a God-given message from some other minister.

This subject of ministry is of such great importance that I must press its consideration earnestly upon my readers. *Study*, said the Apostle Paul to Timothy, "to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (teaching), neglect not the gift that is in thee . . . meditate upon these things ; give thyself wholly to them : that thy profiting may appear unto all " (1 Tim. iv. 13-15).

In ministry the servant of the Lord should remember that it is God's Word he ministers. That ministry is one of God's most important channels of Grace to His people. It is *their need* he should consider, and the abundance there is in God's Word to supply that need, and the pleasure it gives to the Lord that His people should be given "their meat in due season."

The circumstances of the occasion will affect

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

ministry. Some are qualified to speak in small Assemblies who would not be qualified to speak in larger gatherings. For instance, people cannot be edified if they cannot hear the speaker ; to minister in a voice which few can hear is equivalent to speaking in an unknown tongue. Moreover, our meetings are to be so conducted that if an unbeliever comes in, he, too, shall be impressed and report that " God is in you of a truth." Let all things be done unto edifying and let all things be done decently and in order.

There is an art to be learned in public speaking and preaching. It is important to marshal the facts and put them forward in proper order, it greatly assists the memory of the hearers and we have fine examples of this form of speech in Acts vii and xiii and elsewhere. It was a help to me in my young days to be told that " all speaking is public speaking, the only difference is in the size of the audience." When speaking to large Assemblies the voice must be raised, but shouting should be avoided. Clear enunciation is most important and more effective than shouting. Always face as large a proportion of your hearers as is possible. Do not speak too fast ; remember that your hearers have to take in what you say.

Expository preaching is the great need to-day, preach THE WORD, compare Scripture with Scripture, and show from the Scriptures the authority for your statements. This kind of preaching or teaching can only be the fruit of patient study and reading.

In all speaking the character of the speaker becomes more or less manifest and either adds to, or detracts from, the force or weight of his speech. In other words, " what you are " will speak as much or more than " what you say." In the ministry of God's Word or in preaching, which is speaking for God, as the Apostle Paul said, " We pray you in Christ's stead," this is not less true, but back of all there will be evident, Divine Authority and Power in the speech of one who is truly

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

speaking for God and giving himself and his voice as an instrument for the use of the Holy Spirit.

Ability to minister is not a matter of education, though I certainly do not despise education. It is said of Peter and John that the Sadducees “perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men.” Yes, but they feared the effect of their speech on the people, and “they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.” The one who learns of Him and becomes mighty in the Scriptures will not remain unlearned or ignorant. Neither should he fail to take pains to correct so far as possible defects of speech which may be the result of defective education. There have been many examples of those who have not had the privilege of much education in youth who have become mighty for God in speech, and to whom Christians and others of the highest culture have delighted to listen.

Under God the prosperity of Assemblies depends upon the supply of gifted and deeply taught ministers of God’s Word, and in more recent years there has been a serious lack in this supply. According to our Lord’s own word the ministry of the Holy Ghost is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us. Christ is the central theme of all the Scriptures, old and new. Spirit taught ministers through waiting upon God and searching the Scriptures, comparing Scripture with Scripture will be able to pass on to others the things they have learnt. Poverty-stricken ministers will turn to the same portions of Scripture constantly, and give expression to the same thoughts over and over again.

One word in conclusion on this subject. The ability to minister to profit is not so much a question of age as is generally considered; young brethren may have gift for ministry and may be called upon to exercise it. If they are manifestly taught and led of God let no elder put a stumbling block in their way or despise their youth. Let them rather be encouraged to stir up the gift that is in them. On the other hand,

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

common courtesy, a valuable quality in Assembly service, requires that younger brethren should defer to the elder, while older ones should encourage the younger. What opportunity there is here for Grace, and how the hearts of older Brethren should rejoice to see younger Brethren being led on in the knowledge of God and developing the gift of ministry.

Common courtesy also requires that when gifted ministers come as visitors to an Assembly they should be given an opportunity to minister. A fresh voice ministering the Word is rightly appreciated, and, moreover, fellowship is in this way encouraged.

The ability to minister God's Word to profit, I repeat, can only come as the result of patient study and waiting upon God. As in less important matters, practice and experience will help one on, only let such practice commence in the smaller meetings. At the same time, do not be less careful or painstaking because the meeting is small, nor speak without an appreciation of the importance of the occasion, and of one's absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God if one is to speak to profit. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing."

CHAPTER IV

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY

THE oversight or care of an Assembly of God's children, such as we have been considering, is a work of great privilege and responsibility, and we are not left without guidance in the New Testament as to how that care should be exercised.

Writing to the Colossian Christians the Apostle Paul said he rejoiced to behold "your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." Order, it has been said, is "heaven's first law," and our God is a God of order. This we behold in all His works. Now, order depends, on the one hand, upon government by properly constituted authority, and, on the other hand, on willing submission to such authority. The responsibility of government in the Church—and it is a great responsibility—is, according to the New Testament, entrusted to properly constituted Elders, otherwise called Overseers and Bishops.

The true Overseer is a Pastor or under-Shepherd acting for, and himself subject to, the Chief Shepherd, and all that pertains to the care of the Assembly is properly included in the work of an Overseer.

In Acts, chapter xx, we read how the Apostle Paul at Miletus, on his way to Jerusalem, sent for the Elders of the Church at Ephesus and gave them his last charge, bidding them to take heed to themselves "and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood."

The Apostle Peter (1 Peter v), writing as an Elder himself, exhorts Elders in similar terms, bidding them to take the oversight "not by constraint, but willingly, not

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY

for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords of God's heritage, but being examples to the flock."

All that pertains to the care of the Assembly may be truly included in the work of oversight. True pastors will watch for the souls of the flock, young and old, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief. And they will not neglect that very valuable form of service, visiting in the homes as they have opportunity. Visiting has been sadly neglected, but who can over-estimate its value. The visiting pastor will have a better understanding of the circumstances and trials and of the state of soul of the members of the Assembly than one who does not visit can possibly have, and his ministry will, in consequence, be more effective.

In the New Testament Churches we find not one Elder or Pastor, but a number in every Church.

Writing to Titus (chap. i. 5) the Apostle Paul states that his purpose in leaving him in Crete was that he might "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain Elders in every city as I had appointed thee." Thus it appears that Elders were properly appointed, and their position and authority was recognised in the Churches.

It is quite true that much shepherding service in the Assembly can be performed without any appointment by Brethren and Sisters alike, who have a love for the Lord and for the sheep and lambs of His flock, and there have been many true under-shepherds who have never been included in any oversight body. "Simon, son of Jonas," asked the Lord, three times, "Lovest thou me?" "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs. Great love for the Lord is *the* essential qualification in pastoral work.

Included in this service is the loving sympathy and care which will enter into the special difficulties of the young, and the encouraging or warning word fitly

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

spoken, often of such enduring influence. There is no need to wait for any appointment for such service; would that more in our Assemblies would devote themselves to it! No such service will escape the eye of the Great Shepherd, and none who have not the shepherd's heart can be true Elders in a Church of God.

But the lack of a properly constituted body of Elders has been one of the chief causes of disorder and disruption in the Assemblies of God's children; we cannot afford to despise God's provision for the care of the flock. The qualifications for Elders and Deacons will be found in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus: they are high qualifications, and require a shepherd's heart, an impartial and judicial spirit and much self-denial.

With regard to the appointment of Elders from Acts xiv. 23, and from the instructions given to Titus, it would appear that those who have been used of God to bring an Assembly into being have a responsibility to provide for the proper oversight of the flock, and also to provide for its continuance when they themselves are taken away. Neglect of this very obvious duty has led to many Assemblies being left as sheep without a shepherd, and for want of proper oversight they have dwindled and died.

It may be suggested that in Acts vi we have an example of the election of overseers by the Believers themselves. These seven, however, whatever their proper designation may be, were not Elders in the sense we are considering. They were especially chosen to supervise the distribution of money and to remove all possible cause for jealousy or complaint under the special circumstances which arose in Jerusalem, when multitudes were being daily added to the Church, and attention to this secondary work would have been a great hindrance to the Apostles in the essential spiritual work on which they were engaged. Such conditions as arose in Jerusalem at that time do not generally arise

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY

in our Assemblies now, and the work of oversight, including the distribution of money, can usually be performed by the body of Elders without hindering their spiritual work. It is instructive, however, to note the qualifications requisite in the men to be chosen, even for this secondary service ; they were to be men (1) of honest report, (2) full of the Holy Ghost, (3) and wisdom, (4) full of faith and, R.V., (5) full of grace and power. So essential is it that every vessel for the service of God should be sanctified and meet for His use.

According to the New Testament pattern, however, it does not appear that Elders are to be appointed by election of the members of the Assembly ; that would be fraught with considerable danger, but rather, as I have said, that those who have been used of God to found an Assembly are responsible to provide for its oversight, and the appointed Elders have in turn their responsibility to provide for its continuance. The founder or founders of an Assembly should watch carefully, and when they note one or another showing pastoral care for the flock and manifestly qualified by the Holy Spirit for such service, they should ask such an one to join them in the work of oversight as being already marked out by the Spirit for this service, and they should notify the Assembly accordingly. How much better this is than to invite (as I have heard done) those " who feel a responsibility for oversight " to come of their own accord, and attach themselves to the oversight " body." That, it seems to me, is the very negation of order. It leaves it open for unqualified and undesirable men to take upon themselves work for which they are not called and not qualified.

What should Assemblies do, in cases where there is no oversight body, to put this matter in order. I would suggest that they wait on God in prayer for this purpose, and then ask those who have evidently, though unofficially, been taking care of the flock to accept the

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

Eldership of the Assembly, and let these invite any who are evidently qualified for this service, from time to time, to join with them in the work on the lines I have indicated above.

Elders should hold regular meetings, and after waiting upon God for help and guidance, should survey the whole work of the Assembly. There is nothing of small importance in the work of God, and little things may affect the peace of the gathering.

It will be necessary to appoint one of the Elders to act as secretary and correspondent for the Assembly. For this important service special qualifications are required, and the brother appointed should be one who can be depended upon to attend to the clerical work promptly and efficiently.

It is very desirable that a proper minute book should be kept in which the decisions arrived at by the Elders should be recorded, the minutes of the previous meeting being read and approved at the commencement of each meeting in the usual way. The meetings should be conducted in a businesslike and efficient manner—it is the Lord's business. Long drawn-out desultory conversations should be avoided. The "children of this world" usually appoint a "chairman" for meetings of this kind, whose duty it is to keep members to the matter under discussion. I think they are wiser, in this respect, than the "children of light" who, on no Scriptural ground so far as I can see, refuse to have a chairman. Matters concerning which a difference of opinion presents itself, should be discussed with every respect for the opinion of those who differ, and if the general good of the Assembly is the aim of all, a solution will generally be found in matters of difficulty. Elders need to pray for what I would call the "grace of common sense," the spirit of a "sound mind" (2 Tim. i. 7), which is of great value in dealing with Assembly matters.

Amongst the many matters to which the Elders

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY

would give their consideration, the following would generally be included :—

1. The reception of Believers into the Assembly.
2. Enquiry with regard to any who may be absenting themselves, or who are a cause of anxiety, with a view to their restoration or help.
3. Circumstances relating to any who are sick or in need.
4. The conduct of the different meetings, etc., as to whether they are profitable and fulfilling their intended purpose.
5. The services of any who are manifesting gift in one direction or another, and as to whether any such should be invited to join in the work of oversight.
6. Matters relating to finance, distribution of funds, etc.
7. Matters relating to the premises or affecting the comfort and well-being of the Assembly.

A list of members of the Assembly should be kept, and kept up to date. The names should be gone over at meetings of Elder Brethren, and any who have been absent from the meetings, or who may appear to need special care, should be noted with a view to their being visited or otherwise helped.

It is most important that when any who have been in touch with the work of the Assembly, are leaving the neighbourhood, whether they are “in fellowship” or not, they should, wherever possible, be commended to the care of an Assembly in the district to which they are going. The letter of commendation should give as much information as may be necessary. This will enable other Christians to get in touch with them in their new environment. For lack of this very obvious care, many have been allowed to drift, and have got out of touch with Christian work.

Elder brethren should have a watchful eye and take

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

note of the little things which are liable to come in, like "little foxes," and spoil the fruitfulness of the work. These matters when dealt with in their early stages may often be put entirely out of the way, but if neglected, they are liable to become causes of serious trouble.

The well-being of an Assembly requires that general meetings of all members should be held at regular intervals, say once a quarter, when they may be informed on all such matters as ought to be generally known : the closer the contact between the Elders and the members of the gathering, the greater will be the interest, and fellowship will be promoted.

Great grace is needed in cases where any member of the gathering has to be dealt with in a disciplinary manner. "Considering thyself lest thou also be tempted," should be in the heart of every Elder under such circumstances, and in all cases they should endeavour so to deal with the offender that he may be brought to contrition and restored.

In Assembly matters it is the duty of the Overseers ever to consider the welfare of the flock. With this in mind they will exercise great care as to whom they ask to join them in the work of oversight : they will not lay hands suddenly on any man and they will avoid asking such as are likely to cause division or narrow the basis of Assembly fellowship, and they will be especially on their guard against any who would undermine the foundation truths of God's Word. Notwithstanding every care, however, such is the artfulness and craft of our enemy, that such an one will sometimes creep in unawares, and in such a case the Elders have a clear duty to perform ; they should act as the circumstances require, without partiality, as those responsible to God, and call upon such an one to withdraw from the Oversight of the Assembly, failing which he should be removed. A disturber of the peace of the Gathering ought not to be allowed to remain on the oversight body. It is the duty of the Overseers to *guard the flock*.

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY

The Elders have a special responsibility in connection with all the meetings of the Assembly. First they should by their presence set a good example; secondly, they should endeavour to be punctual and they should also take care that meetings are closed at the proper time, or if it is desirable to continue a meeting beyond its usual time, they should see that opportunity to retire is given to those whose duty may call them elsewhere; and lastly and most important, it is their duty to see that meetings are conducted in a seemly and orderly manner, and unto edification.

In the exercise of their work of Oversight the Elders are entitled to the loyal support of the members of the Gathering. "Remember them which have the rule over you . . . considering the end of their conversation," and again, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves." There would have been less strife and fewer divisions if this rule had been more closely followed. The Elders are not always able to give the reason for their actions, they have sometimes to deal with matters of great privacy; but if they are men of God, giving themselves to the care of the flock, they should have the confidence of the members and should be upheld in their work and constantly remembered in prayer.

I would here deal with a matter of very great importance in connection with these Assemblies of Believers, and that is their essential independence. There is no suggestion in the New Testament of any association of Assemblies, or of any joint control or responsibility in connection therewith. And this is very remarkable because from the days of the tower of Babel the human idea has tended towards association and confederation, the gathering up of control through a great organisation in the hands of a central authority. In the world it is considered that this makes for strength. It is the form of organisation that was adopted by the Church of Rome in a great endeavour to bring all

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

Christendom under its sway, and it has been adopted by many other Churches also, and by a once large section of those known as the "Brethren," whose experience has proved it ultimately to be, not a bond of union, but an endless source of division.

The essential independence of the Churches is most clearly implied in the New Testament. It is implied in all the Epistles, where there is no suggestion that any local Church should interfere in the affairs of another local Church, and there is no suggestion of confederation or of central organisation. In the letters to the seven Churches in Asia in the book of Revelation, no Church is rebuked for another Church's shortcomings, neither is any Church deputed to interfere or act in relation to the affairs of another Church in view of such shortcomings. The Lord who walked in the midst of the seven candlesticks awards praise or blame to each Church independently, according to what He saw of its service or failure. The Lord is still in the midst of the Churches. He sees and knows all that is going on. Responsibility is direct to Him, and He will act, if needs must, even to the removal of the "lampstand."

Every Church should jealously guard its independence. No other Church and no central authority has any right of interference. Organisation and centralisation lead inevitably to a more or less pronounced Popedom.

The Divinely appointed independence of the Churches, which is, from the human point of view a weakness, is the kind of weakness which God has chosen, and which He endows with divine strength. It is protective against the rapid spread of heresy. It is also protective, in countries where government is hostile, against the efforts of rulers to crush the Assemblies. It is comparatively easy to deal with a centralised organisation, it is almost impossible to stamp out a multitude of independent units, especially as new

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE ASSEMBLY

independent units may be formed as quickly as others are destroyed. Lastly, it is a great protection against the spread from one Assembly to another of those troubles and causes of division, which, alas, arise in Assemblies. Let us, therefore, guard the independence of the Assemblies. If in large towns or cities there are several Assemblies, the independence of each should be similarly respected.

While I emphasise so strongly the importance of independence so far as authority in the Assemblies is concerned, I would as strongly emphasise the importance of love and fellowship in the mutual relations of all Assemblies which are seeking to walk according to the New Testament pattern. Such fellowship may result in joint action, as for instance, in the arrangement of joint meetings or conferences or in joint contribution of funds for some special purpose, only it must be clearly recognised that any such joint action is the act of independent Assemblies working together only for this special purpose.

This independence carries with it great responsibility. Overseers, as under-shepherds, are responsible to the Great Shepherd of the flock, in all their service for the Church. If self comes in, or pride or partiality, great evil may be wrought. Humanly speaking the task is impossible, but all things are possible to those who seek their help of God. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

The Editors of "Echoes of Service" at Bath, in their valued service, collect information from all parts of the Mission field and circulate it to the Assemblies through their journal. They also receive contributions from the Assemblies which they distribute amongst the Workers in the Mission field. In this way they are helpers of the work, but they do not seek to exercise jurisdiction or control, either in the Mission field or at home.

CHAPTER V

THE SERVICE OF SISTERS

THE service of sisters in the Assemblies of God's people is of such importance as to deserve our very careful consideration.

I have already referred in the previous chapter to the important service which sisters can render in connection with the care of the flock. Sisters can do very much in the Assembly to help and encourage young Believers, and, if they are wise and careful, to smooth over difficulties. On the other hand, sisters, by unguarded talking and criticism, or by self-will and quarrelling, can do much harm. What beautiful service Priscilla rendered with her husband Aquila, to the Church at Corinth, when she took the Apostle Paul into her house, and afterwards when they (both) took unto them Apollos, and "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."

Evidently, these two were given to hospitality, and hospitality is valuable service, and whether in the Assembly or in the home, its labour falls chiefly on the sisters. Some lay themselves out to invite strangers visiting the Assembly to their homes and entertain them. As one who has frequently been refreshed by such hospitality, I can speak warmly of its value. Others, or perhaps the same, open their homes to young people, lonely ones perhaps living away from their homes, welcoming them on the Lord's day or at other times, entering into their interests with love and sympathy. This is indeed most valuable service.

Our Lord fully appreciated the services of those godly women who ministered to Him during His earthly life, and in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles, the value and importance of the service of

THE SERVICE OF SISTERS

sisters is very evident. There were women who laboured in the Gospel with the Apostle Paul, and in the beautiful last chapter of the epistle to the Romans, five women, his fellow helpers, are mentioned by name. Indeed, a godly, wise and active sisterhood is an inestimable blessing to any Assembly, and foolish indeed are those who seek to repress the Sisters in their proper activities.

Now we must come to the oft-debated question, Should sisters preach or teach or pray in the meetings of the Assembly ?

Generally, I think, both the tenor and teaching of Scripture indicates that primarily the responsibility for teaching and preaching rests upon men. There were some " prophetesses " in the Old Testament days, as in the New, but in comparison with the prophets they were few in number.

It should be remembered that God does not, as we often do, bind Himself by hard and fast rules in such matters as we are now considering. When our Lord made His one triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise with loud voice, saying, " Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," and some of the Pharisees asked the Lord to rebuke His disciples, He answered, " I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." I think of that sometimes in prayer meetings, when there are few Brethren able to lead in prayer, and gifted sisters well qualified to do so, but restrained.

As I have said, in the Old Testament dispensation there were Prophetesses as well as Prophets, the last of whom was Anna, who publicly gave thanks in the temple, at the presentation of the infant Saviour, and spake of Him, " to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." So that although Prophetesses were rare in Israel in comparison with the number of the Prophets, they were certainly not unknown. This is

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

important in considering the Corinthian passage where the Apostle definitely refers to "the law" (verse 34) in support of his ruling, and the law, we see, did not prohibit the ministry of Prophetesses.

It was a woman who went from the Lord's presence into the city of Sychar, and so spoke to her men friends that many of them came to Jesus and believed on Him. A good messenger of good tidings was that woman. And it was to the women who came to the Sepulchre very early on the resurrection morning that the Lord gave His message to the disciples that they should go into Galilee, and He would meet them there.

The Day of Pentecost has been rightly termed the birthday of the Church. It was the coming of the Holy Ghost and the enduement with Power from on High through Him that led to that mighty ingathering of precious souls, and commenced a movement which has been going on ever since. The wonderful manifestations of that day led some mockers to say, "These men are full of new wine." Nay, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on My servants and *on my handmaidens* I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

Philip the Evangelist had, we are told, four daughters which did prophesy, and as not one word of rebuke is addressed to them, we have every reason to believe their prophesying was of God, and pleasing to Him. It should be understood that the word prophesy, as here used and elsewhere in such connection, means not to foretell the future, but to forth-tell God's Word, that is to preach as messengers of God. If women are to keep silent at all times, and under all circumstances, how is the prophecy of Joel to be fulfilled in this the era of its fulfilment?

THE SERVICE OF SISTERS

But—you say, and it is quite a proper question—how do you reconcile this with the fourteenth of first Corinthians, and the second chapter of first Timothy? Does Scripture contradict itself? Nay, verily.

Let us take the Corinthian passage first. And at starting, let us note that there is an eleventh chapter of first Corinthians as well as a fourteenth. In the eleventh chapter (verse 5) instructions are given as to how a woman shall have her head covered when she *prayeth or prophesieth*. Now if we are told how a woman should be clothed when she prays or prophesies, then surely it cannot be said that she is forbidden to do either. Some will say that she must only pray or prophesy in private, or in the presence of other women only; the Scripture does not say so. Indeed, from the context it is very clear that the Apostle is referring to the public service of the Church. Does the fourteenth chapter then contradict the eleventh chapter of the same epistle? Impossible! If we look carefully at the fourteenth chapter, and endeavour to understand its application, we see that there were grave disorders in the Corinthian Church. The public meetings had become something of a scandal. The gift of tongues was being grossly abused, many were speaking in language which no one understood, and it even appears that many were speaking at the same time. Women were adding to the Babel by interposing their questions and talking one with another. Altogether, there was the utmost confusion, and their meetings were neither creditable to themselves, nor profitable or glorifying to God.

Such a state of affairs demanded and received the stern rebuke of the Apostle. “Why” (I paraphrase) “if an unbeliever came in, he would say you are mad, your meetings are pandemonium, it is all confusion, and God is not the author of confusion, but of peace and order.”

So he takes up the various points. Let not any one

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

speak in an unknown tongue, unless there be some one present to interpret, otherwise how can it be for edification? If some one has a hymn, and another an interpretation or prophesy, let them take their turn; you may all speak, but one at a time, not all at once. As for your women, paraphrasing verses 34 and 35, "let them be quiet in the churches, it is not permissible for them to talk, they must be under control, as also says the law, and if they have questions to ask, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for women to talk in the meeting."

It is a shame for women to talk and to disturb a meeting, but was it a shame for Mrs. Catherine Booth to preach, or Mrs. Henry Denning, through whose preaching multitudes in the West of England were truly converted some fifty or sixty years ago, or for many other gifted women preachers who might be mentioned, whose labours the Lord has blessed and is blessing? To ask such a question is surely sufficient to indicate the answer. It is not a shame, the seal of God's blessing has rested upon their work. That we have a right to appeal for witness to this manifest blessing of God on such service is manifest from Acts xi. 17.

The fact of the matter is, that the Apostle is not discussing the question whether women may, or may not, preach, teach or pray in the Church at all; he is dealing with disorder, and he says that they must not disturb the quiet of the meeting, and they must not interrupt with their questions. He had already given instructions earlier in the epistle with regard to women prophesying and praying, and how their heads must be covered when so doing.

Now if we turn to the second chapter of first Timothy, we shall see, if we examine the passage carefully, that the Apostle is not so much dealing with the behaviour of women in the Church as in the home. In the ninth verse we have instructions as to women's attire and adornment, in the tenth an exhortation

THE SERVICE OF SISTERS

(as becometh women professing godliness) to good works.

In the eleventh and twelfth verses the position of women in relation to man is emphasised.¹ She is not to usurp authority over man, but in quietness she is to be in subjection to him, not his teacher, but a learner. This is based on two circumstances reaching far back into the history of the race, first that Adam was first created, then Eve: the man was not made for the woman, but the woman for the man, to be his helpmeet and companion; second, that woman first fell under the beguilement of the Wicked one. Finally, there is a promise to women in connection with childbirth, for in the home she is not only the helpmeet and companion of her husband, but also the mother of the family.

All this is very important, as showing the true relationship between man and woman according to God's gracious purpose, but except as it sets forth a principle which covers their whole sphere of service, it does not refer to the subject under consideration, namely whether women shall be permitted to pray and prophesy in the Assembly.

If I have rightly understood these passages, it follows that Sisters are not excluded from praying or prophesying in the Church, on the contrary, in this Pentecostal age, we should expect some to do so. They are not, however, to exercise authority over men, and that would exclude them from the Eldership, which is essentially an office of authority.

However, as we find that in old dispensation days the number of Prophetesses in comparison with Prophets was relatively small, so we would expect the number of women called to teach or preach in the Assemblies of God's people to be relatively few.

Sisters have occupied a position of increasing im-

¹ On a strict and literal interpretation of these injunctions, if they are held to refer to the assembly meetings, women ought not to be allowed to sing.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

portance in the Mission Field in recent years. Many more women than men have been offering for this service. Some who deny to women the privilege of ministry at home acquiesce in their sharing in this service in the Mission Field.

We need to be on our guard against personal prejudice or likes and dislikes in this matter of women's ministry. The Apostle John told the Lord how they had forbidden one, apparently unauthorised, to cast out devils in His name, and He said, "Forbid him not." There is something in our nature that seems to make us like to see others restrained ; exclusion and repression are very attractive to the flesh ; let us take care that we do not restrain what the Lord would not have to be restrained. Whatever our interpretation of the passages in first Corinthians and first Timothy may be, as we have seen, these two passages do not by any means include all that the New Testament teaches on the subject of women's ministry in the Assembly of God's children.¹

While there are many who believe, however, that the Scriptures to which I have referred do definitely exclude women from public prayer and ministry in the Assembly, it behoves Sisters to be very careful how they exercise this privilege. In the world woman has claimed her "rights." In the Church we are to submit ourselves one to another. "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient," wrote the Apostle.

Let the sisters seek their sphere of service from God, who giveth to every man his work. If the Brethren in any Assembly do not concede the privilege of leading in prayer or of ministry in word, the situation should be accepted with patience and with prayer. Authority rests with the Brethren, and in the exercise of that authority they are responsible to God. If God allows

¹ Some teachers consider that the injunction to women to "keep silence in the Churches" applies particularly, and only, to the meeting around the Lord's table, this being essentially the coming together of the Church in one place.—1 Cor. ix. 20 and xiv. 23.

THE SERVICE OF SISTERS

one door of service to be closed, He will open others. The exercise of patience will be made a blessing to them. This applies generally both to brethren and sisters, who often have to submit, for the time being, in their Assembly life to conditions with which they are not wholly in accord. The perfect Assembly has not yet been found, and if it were found, it would be no place for such imperfect Christians as we are.

There are special exhortations in the New Testament with regard to sisters in the matter of their dress, and deportment. These should have the very careful consideration of all sisters who desire to serve God in the Assemblies of His people.

The meek and quiet spirit, which is far better than any extravagant earthly adorning of clothes or jewels, is, in the sight of God, of great price, and good works are most becoming to women professing godliness. If in these matters we put God first, and seek to please Him rather than ourselves or our fellow creatures, doing all to His glory, He will not fail to note the acts of self-denial which may be involved. For even Christ pleased not Himself. Oh, how good if in any small measure we, who wait for our Lord, can share with Enoch the blessed testimony which he had before his translation, that "he pleased God."

CHAPTER VI

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

I DO not think it is necessary to say very much on the subject of Baptism. In the Lord's last commission before His ascension, the disciples were commanded to baptise Believers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and in the Acts of the Apostles we see how this commission was obeyed. It is difficult to see how any Believer taking the Word of God only as his guide can assent to the baptising of infant children. It is in accordance with the mind of the Spirit as revealed in Scripture that a Believer should make a public confession of his faith in the Lord Jesus by submitting himself to the ordinance of baptism, that is by immersion in water, thus giving sacramental evidence of that which is already an accomplished fact, his death, burial and resurrection with Christ.

An infant cannot, either directly or by sponsors, give evidence of that which for him cannot be an accomplished fact. The baptising or christening of young children has, without doubt, led many to a sense of false security in the mistaken belief that having been "christened" in infancy, their eternal salvation was assured, and this is very especially the case where "confirmation" has followed as a matter of course, without a true conversion or change of heart.

On the other hand, it would seem to be very right and proper for Christian parents to invite members of the Assembly to join with them in dedicating their infant children to God. This may preferably be done as soon as the mother is sufficiently restored to be able to take part in the service. We may surely believe that the prayers of the Church and of believing parents who

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

seek to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord will in due time be answered.

On this subject of baptism there has, unfortunately, been so much difference of opinion, and such differences are so strongly held by those who claim the authority of God's Word for their belief, that it would not be right to exclude from the fellowship of the Assembly those who do not see what the majority of us believe to be the will of God in the matter of baptism. If they are Believers desiring to do the will of God, according to His Word, let them be accepted, hoping that God will reveal even this to them, and the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they may be led to take the step of confessing Christ in baptism by immersion, which is generally such a means of grace to the obedient disciple.

The Lord's Supper

No Assembly of Believers, desiring to worship as the Church of the first century worshipped, can place the communion service, the Feast of Remembrance, anywhere but in the central position. In the first place, we remember that the Feast was instituted by our Lord Himself on the night before He suffered, and we have both His invitation and His command, "This do in remembrance of Me." It is for this dispensation what the feast of the Passover was to the Israelite, a constant memorial of our deliverance out of the hand of the Enemy, and a constant reminder of the cost of our redemption, "not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ."

And, moreover, we recognise that it was for our help, as strangers and pilgrims also, that the Lord gave us this memorial, lest our hearts should be cast down, because of the burdens and difficulties of the way, or, what is more dangerous, become forgetful on account of the occupations of life and the attractions of the world.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

The Lord gave us no hard and fast rules with regard to the keeping of this Feast. There are some who assert that the Feast should be kept only at night, or in the evening ; others that it should be kept only in the morning, and then fasting¹ The Lord said neither, and the Apostle Paul who had a special revelation from the Lord on this subject simply said, " For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

It appears, however, from Acts xx, verse 7, and from 1 Corinthians xvi, verse 2, that in the early days it became the custom of the Church for the disciples to come together to " break bread " on the first day of the week. We can well understand this. It was very early in the morning on the first day of the week that those faithful women had come to anoint the body of their Lord and had found the empty tomb. It was the morning of the resurrection, and it was to the resurrection that the Apostles gave witness with great power at and after Pentecost.

The resurrection of their crucified Lord had made all the difference and turned a sorrowing, disappointed and stricken little company of disciples into rejoicing, expectant, faithful and fearless witnesses. It is an axiom in science that there can be no change without an adequate cause. What was the adequate cause which brought about the change from the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian first day of the week as the Holy Day ? It was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the day of the exertion of God's power, " even that mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead," the same power which He is ever ready to exert on behalf of the weakest of His Children to enable them to walk in newness of life.

Thus we find that it was on the first day of the week, the day no doubt designated by the Apostle John as the

¹ It would indeed appear from 1 Cor. xi. 34 that the Communion should not be taken fasting.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

“ Lord’s Day ” that the early disciples were accustomed to come together to break bread, and that has usually been the custom in such Assemblies of God’s children as those of which I write.

Self-examination before coming to the Lord’s table is enjoined on all the Lord’s people. “ Let a man examine himself and so let him (not stay away), but so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.” “ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily (that is lightly, thoughtlessly) eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” Solemn words, not intended to keep any away, but to encourage us to come with hearts prepared.

The “ Communion Service ”—I like that term, and it is Scriptural (1 Cor. x. verse 16)—is a service of worship, at which, while remembering our blessed Lord in His sufferings and death, and also in the hope of His coming again, we desire to render to our Father in heaven that worship in spirit and in truth which He seeks from His children. It is a service of remembrance in order that as the outcome of our remembrance of Himself it may be a service of thanksgiving, an offering of the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks (or confessing to) His name.

At this service, therefore, it is desirable that there should be the fullest permissible liberty, always, however, subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit. If one has a psalm, a doctrine, an interpretation God given, and, therefore, suitable to the occasion, he should be free to give it. Here is great scope for the “ flesh,” and often has the flesh triumphed. Should we, therefore, abandon the “ open worship meeting ” ? God forbid ! But the Elders have their responsibility, and offenders, especially constant offenders, should be restrained. Such restraint, which requires great grace, both to give and to receive, should be exercised by the whole body of Elders, not by individuals.

There are some who object to any ministry of the

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

Word at the Communion Service. Others, and they are more numerous, consider that ministry is acceptable, and even desirable, *after* the bread and wine have been taken. The service is primarily one for worship and for remembrance of our Lord. Ministry that extols the wondrous love of God, and brings back to memory the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, drawing out the praise and adoration of our hearts, can surely not be out of place before or after the communion, so long as it leads towards worship, and does not take the place of worship or unduly occupy time that should be devoted to worship.

It was at the institution of the supper in the upper room that the Lord laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself, and gave His disciples the lesson in feet washing. And it was there that the gracious words of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of St. John's Gospel were spoken ; and there it would appear, He offered the high priestly prayer of chapter xvii. Can we think that subjects that were not out of place on that occasion can ever be out of place when His disciples gather together in His name to keep the Feast according to His Word.

It is the Lord's table. We have lent Him the guest chamber, where He may gather a little company of His disciples. The table is covered with a clean, white cloth. The bread and wine have been provided, and the guests are assembled. There is no service like this, and if we gather with prepared hearts, the Lord will give us a foretaste of the days that are to be, when He shall gather us all together in His heavenly home.

As the Lord gave thanks before He passed round the bread and the wine, so should we, but the brother who voices the thanksgiving of the Assembly simply acts as the servant of the Assembly in this service. If he breaks the loaf into convenient pieces or pours the wine into different cups, in doing this his position differs in no respect from that of the other members of

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

the gathering, each one breaks bread and takes the cup according to the Lord's ordinance for a "remembrance of Himself." It is desirable that this service should be performed by different brethren, and not always by the same, because we know that out of this simple memorial feast there sprang in very early days the idea that the minister performing these services was something more than just one of the Believers: that he was a sacrificing priest standing between the Believers and their Father God. It followed that as a sacrificing priest he must have a sacrifice, and, therefore, that the bread and wine must be a renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary, and from this there came the doctrines of transubstantiation and consubstantiation, with their intermediary earthly priests; doctrines utterly contrary to the whole teaching of the New Testament, in the repudiation of which hundreds of thousands of Believers have been called upon to lay down their lives. It is true that all Believers are members of a "holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," but no one is called into a special priestly position to offer sacrifices on behalf of others, for there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who by "one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

Let the brother who performs this service see that he has clean hands as well as a true heart. Is it necessary to give this word of counsel? I think it is, for I have known it otherwise.

Who shall be allowed to come to the Lord's table? Surely the answer is, All those for whom the table is provided, and that is every believing child of God. Is the Lord's table for "perfect" Christians only, or is it for imperfect ones? It is for the imperfect, else who of us would be there? Have we sufficiently considered this? Tests have been imposed, perfection of understanding and doctrine has been expected. Where is

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

the authority? We have a High Priest who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, and it is His table, not ours. If we shut Believers out until they have perfect knowledge and perfect understanding, how can they be instructed? Teaching is another matter, and we ought not to allow those to teach who are uninstructed or unsound in doctrine. But at the Lord's table all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity should be received. They may have what we believe to be wrong ideas, wrong thoughts, they may not be entirely free from their "grave clothes." If they are Christ's they have a right to a place at the Lord's table. The man who had fallen amongst thieves was not fully restored when he was brought to the inn, the innkeeper was told to take care of him, and to spend of his substance for him, and "whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee."

The attitude of some stalwarts towards the Lord's table and towards the fellowship of the Assembly is that of a company of soldiers defending a fort. Everyone who approaches is looked upon as a possible enemy. The sentry challenges, and if the password is not quite correctly spoken, there is no admission. I doubt not these things have been done by those who think that they do God service. I say of them as the Apostle Paul said of Israel, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" or grace. They think they are guarding the Lord's honour, but anything more unlike what, it would seem to me, the Lord Himself would do or desire, I cannot conceive.¹ Bring them in, the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, if they are Believers in the Lord Jesus, not that they should remain poor and maimed and

¹ Did not our Lord deal with this question of exclusion in the parable of the Tares (Matt. xiii. 24-30)? There it was a question of tares (false wheat); still He warned the servants "lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

halt and blind, but that through your fellowship and faithful ministry they may be enriched, made whole, able to walk so as to please God and enlightened in those precious things which God the Holy Spirit will reveal to them.

If we turn to Proverbs, chapter nine, we find, Wisdom having builded her house and furnished her table, spreading wide the invitation, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither : as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come eat of my bread, and drink of my wine."

Would that it might be so in our Assemblies. The parable of the lost sheep has its application inside the Church of God. We are so favoured in our meetings with such deep teaching from the Word of God, let us have pity on fellow Christians who have not had our privileges ; uninstructed they may be, sitting, as often they do, under unconverted ministries, but if they are true Believers in the Lord Jesus, let them be assured of a warm welcome if they come amongst us.

Two classes cannot be received at the Lord's table ; the first, any that come and confess not that Jesus the Christ of God is come in the flesh, that is, they deny the deity of our Lord Jesus, they are not true Believers, and are not entitled to be called Christians ; the second, any living in the open sins of 1 Cor. v. 11 ; they may be called "brethren," but their works belie them.

But if sincere Believers are turned away from the table for causes other than those which the Lord commands, then it is open to serious consideration whether such a table has any right to be called the "Lord's table."

You cannot touch a child of God without touching the Lord Himself, and it is a solemn thought that He Himself may be excluded in the person of "one of the least of these My brethren." This subject is of great importance : such infinite harm, such tremendous wrong has been done in Assemblies by the exclusive spirit.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

It is most desirable that one or more brethren should be at the door of the Assembly hall in good time to welcome all who come, and especially strangers. It is good for visitors who come from other Assemblies, unless well known, to bring letters of commendation ; it should not be essential, but such can be received without question to the fellowship of the Assembly, and the announcement of their names helps that fellowship. Others will come without such letters, generally there is little time for many questions ; I would ask two only :—

1. Are you a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ ?
2. Do you desire to partake with us at the Lord's table ?

If the answer to these two questions is in the affirmative, who has any right to refuse ? Later, if they are remaining in the Assembly, some further enquiry with a view to promoting fellowship may be made. Subject to the exclusion of the two classes I have referred to above, all Believers should be received and welcomed, and made to feel at home. Remember that in this matter of reception you are acting for the Lord ; it is His table, and His disciples are there at His invitation.

It is good, if it can be conveniently arranged, to have the table in the centre of the room so that all may sit around. It does not seem right to me that the table should be deserted and every one apparently wishing to sit as far from it as possible, and yet one has often seen this. I cannot think that it is pleasing to the Lord ; it looks as if the table, for some reason, was being shunned. If it is humility, as in some cases it may be, I do not think it is a proper expression of this grace. All who are taught of God will, no doubt, feel their unworthiness to draw nigh, but it is not in our worthiness we come, but His, and we may be encouraged in the words of one of our hymns :—

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

“ Why stand we then without in fear,
The blood of Christ invites us *near*.”

The Lord's table is a place, surely, where families may sit together ; how good to see father, mother and children around the table. The enquiring minds of the little ones asking, “ What mean ye by this feast ? ” And early learning the answer, they will generally desire, in due course, to become partakers themselves.

Oh, most precious institution ; ten thousand thanks to our blessed Lord that in the same night in which He was betrayed, He gathered the little company around Him and instituted this feast for a remembrance of Himself. How it brings us back constantly to first principles, reminding us of the cost of our redemption. How it sets our hearts aglow as He makes Himself known to us in the breaking of the bread and keeps us in joyful expectation as we hear Him say afresh, “ I will come again and receive you unto Myself.” “ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.”

The first day of the week is also the day for the collection (1 Cor. xvi. 1-2). The collection is a giving, not unto men, but unto God. The rule is, “ Let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him.” This is not an unimportant part of the service, it is placed in its proper order in Hebrews xiii, after the “ sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips.” “ But to do good and to communicate, forget not ; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” In this connection we should consider 2 Cor. ix. 6-15, and other like passages. The Christian only possesses means as a steward for God, and he must give account of his stewardship. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver. There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty ; poverty both of spirit and pocket.

The greatest care should be exercised in connection with money matters. In the first place, the money should never be counted by one brother alone ; always

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

by two or more acting together, and the amount and the purpose for which it was contributed should be entered at once in a book. Proper accounts of receipts and disbursements should be prepared, and submitted to the members of the Assembly at regular intervals. Assembly funds are in a very special sense Trust Funds, and should be treated as such. A notable example in this respect has been set from its first institution by Muller's Orphanage of Bristol. Every amount received is accounted for with meticulous care down to the last penny, and equal importance attached to the small gifts as to the large.

The making of announcements in the meeting may appear to be a small service, but it is not unimportant. Announcements should be made in a clear voice, and names should be correctly given. When meetings are announced, this should be done in an inviting manner ; this has a greater bearing on the response than is often realised.

CHAPTER VII

MEETINGS FOR EDIFICATION AND PRAYER

A CHURCH should be full of activities. It is a company of living souls and should manifest life in all kinds of Christian service. The more the work is spread over the membership the better ; a busy Church active in service will generally be a happy Church. In the energy that comes from waiting upon God in prayer, it should provide for the edification of its members, the teaching of the young and the preaching of the Gospel.

A Church which stands as a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, and to the value of His atoning blood, will prize the written Word, which from Genesis to Revelation tells of Him, and will make provision for the exposition and study of the Scriptures. The Word of God is milk and meat for food, a light for the path, and a sword and shield for conflict, and a pillow for the comfort of the child of God.

Under the teaching of the Holy Spirit it is the source of all knowledge concerning the mind of God in relation to our earthly life and work. It is our only source of knowledge concerning God Himself ; no words of mine are needed to emphasise the importance of Bible study. Every Believer in good spiritual health should find himself with an ever-growing appetite for the Word of God, with an ever-increasing delight in its teaching. That much tried Prophet Jeremiah was able to testify that God's Word was to him the joy and rejoicing of his heart.

It is by the Word of God that Believers are built up, and every Assembly desiring the edification of its members will provide meetings for Bible study and Bible instruction. Without laying down hard and fast rules, I would say that a meeting for Bible study

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

generally requires as leader, one well instructed himself in the Word and apt to teach. Bible study can be made intensely interesting under the leadership of one who knows the Word and who assists in unfolding its wonders. On the other hand, one has known such meetings to be desultory and uninteresting and without leadership, wandering about all over the Book, making little or no progress. Of such meetings even Christians tire, and the numbers attending decline.

Meetings for the study of God's Word afford a convenient opportunity for instructing young Believers in the work as well as in the Word of God. The ministry of God's Word is of such great importance in the Assembly that advantage should be taken of every opportunity to assist younger ones to prepare themselves for this service, and to develop such gifts as they may have.

In 1 Corinthians xiv. 3 we have the threefold purpose in ministry of God's Word : edification, exhortation and comfort. I have referred to edification ; exhortation is an appeal to the heart and conscience, which bringing home to the hearer the greatness of the blessings which have been procured for him, calls for that corresponding answer which God expects. An exhortation whose appeal is not thus founded on God's Word is of little value.

If we note the example of the Apostle Paul we see that in most of his epistles he first deals with the great foundation truths, the grace of God, the love of Christ, the preciousness of the promises of God, etc., and having laid this good foundation, somewhere towards the latter part of the Epistle, he comes to the words of exhortation based on what has gone before. Thus Romans xii. 1 :—

1. " I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

MEETINGS FOR EDIFICATION AND PRAYER

and in 2 Corinthians vii. 1 :—

2. “ Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,”

and Galatians v. 1 :—

3. “ Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Notice the “ therefore ” in all these passages which links them with what has gone before ; the strength of the appeal rests upon the unfoldings of the Grace of God which have preceded it. Also see in 1 Cor. x, the same principle, though not quite so pronounced.

That is the kind of exhortation that reaches the conscience.

Ministry is also to be for comfort. It has been said that there is so much of comfort in the Word of God because God knew how tried and difficult the lives of many of His children would be. There is abundance of comfort for His children in all their circumstances ; and this comfort should be *ministered*. It can and it does soothe the troubled heart. It is there for the especial purpose, and what a precious privilege to be a minister of Divine comfort to troubled children of God.

If the meeting for Bible reading or Bible study is important, the meeting for Prayer with which it should be closely associated is no less important. The prayer meeting has been called the power-house of the Church, and so it is, or rather, so it should be. Pentecost was preceded by long continued prayer and supplication (Acts i. 14). If we could trace the source of those revivals which from time to time have refreshed the souls of God's children, and have been the means whereby multitudes were brought into the Kingdom of God, I think we should find in every case a prayer meeting. It may have been of very few, but some one, or some company had prayed and God heard and answered.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

But I do not think that all the prayer meetings I have attended have been profitable. In fact, as in all service, there are great dangers in the prayer meeting. There is the danger of praying in a desultory way for things we do not really desire, prayers that are forgotten as soon as they are uttered. There is the danger, too, of making the prayer a preaching, and there is the perhaps graver danger of which our Lord warned us, lest we should pray as the Pharisees prayed, long prayers, but rather to be seen or heard of men than heard of God.

Whether in public or in private, prayer should only be uttered under the impulse of a consciousness of need. That consciousness of need must be based on knowledge. That is why some suitable ministry is never out of place in the prayer meeting. If we have some knowledge from the Word of God of the sad lot of the unsaved around us we will pray for them. If we have lifted up our eyes and seen the fields of earth white unto harvest with labourers so few, we shall not fail to pray the Lord of the Harvest to send forth labourers and to maintain and succour those already in the field. If we have some understanding of the need for suitable ministry for the saints in the Assembly or teaching for the children in the Sunday School, then we shall be glad to unburden our hearts in prayer. Likewise in those cases of special need, as in sickness, bereavement, etc., which occur in every Assembly, of which the imprisonment of Peter (Acts xii) when "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him," is a good example ; if we enter into the need of the afflicted one, we shall not fail to pray. Let us then bear in mind that acceptable prayer must be based on knowledge and a sense of need.

It has been found helpful in many cases if an Elder Brother reads out (not necessarily all at once, but from time to time during the meeting) subjects calling for prayer. This prevents undue repetition. Long prayers in public are to be avoided. It is not necessary for one

MEETINGS FOR EDIFICATION AND PRAYER

voice to lead the prayers of the gathering on every subject that can be called to mind, indeed it is very undesirable.

There are two more conditions that should apply to prayer; first it should be accompanied by thanksgiving: this is very important (Phil. iv. 6), and second there should be a watching (Eph. vi. 18) for the answer. If a thing is worth praying for, the answer is worth watching for.

The little girl who took out her umbrella in the time of drought, after prayer for rain, understood this better than we older ones have often done. But our "watching thereunto" will be helped if we keep in mind the rule, never to pray except under a sense of need.

It is helpful to study the numerous examples of prayer which are recorded in the Old and New Testaments. With what reverence is the approach made to God, as for instance in Eph. iii. 14. What a comprehensive prayer this is, and all in nine brief verses. With regard to the prayer known as the Lord's Prayer, the only reason that I know why this is so little used amongst us is, that this prayer, especially taught to warn against "vain repetitions," has been so much vainly repeated, as if there could be anything pleasing to God in repeating the words over and over again. From this, we have reacted and gone to the other extreme of not using this prayer at all.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

THE preaching of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God is an essential part of the service of every Assembly. Its authority rests upon the commission of our Lord Himself, given to His disciples immediately before His ascension. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." The disciples were told to begin at Jerusalem ; I take it that means for us, begin in your own locality amongst those nearest to you. While the work of an Assembly will be chiefly directed to the need of the people in its own neighbourhood, the interest of the Assembly should embrace the work of God all over the world. Those who have left home and friends to labour in the mission field, and their service, will surely not be forgotten. I quote the following from a missionary magazine :—

"There is no doubt that a Church which has lost the spirit of enterprise, the urge to advance, and therefore contents itself with consolidating the ground already won, is certain to suffer spiritual loss. Just as the usefulness of an individual Believer depends on whether he continues to grow in the knowledge of God, so a Church which loses the vision of the Son of God going forth to war, which has ceased to realise its responsibility for the 'regions beyond' where He is not named, must inevitably decay and decline."

No one who is truly living in the joy of God's salvation can fail to have a deep desire that others may be brought into the enjoyment of the same great blessing, and this will lead to personal and collective effort to win souls for Christ.

Not every child of God is called to be a public

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

preacher, but all are called to be witnesses. Preaching calls for its special gift, and the Lord distributes His gifts as He sees fit in the Assemblies. "As every man hath received the gift, even so let him minister." The trouble is we are sometimes in danger of belittling the gift which God has actually given us, and desiring to minister in some other way, for which He has not given us the gift. We need to be on our guard. But the gift of an evangelist, what a privilege it confers, and what a responsibility. "How shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach unless they be sent?" I think the fact that an evangelist requires a special gift has been somewhat lost sight of in Assemblies; it ought to be more clearly recognised. When people are invited to come and hear the Gospel preached, whether indoors or out, the preacher should be one sent of God, and therefore, qualified for the service. There has perhaps been too much "taking of turn" amongst us and of the idea that every saved man is necessarily a preacher.

I have felt very uncomfortable sometimes at open-air Gospel meetings. There has been no leadership, and there have been long, I may say painful, pauses between rambling addresses for which obviously there has been no preparation. This is not treating the Gospel fairly, and it is not even treating the audience with proper respect.

It is a great honour to be entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel, and it calls for the best efforts of the preacher. Not words of human wisdom are required, but that which the Holy Ghost teacheth (1 Cor. ii. 13), and the ability to compare spiritual things with spiritual. That ability is the fruit of patient labour and study. Of Stephen it is said that "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts vi. 10), and of Apollos that "he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing *by the Scriptures* that Jesus was Christ" (Acts xviii. 28).

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

These are examples of effective preaching based on the exposition of the Scriptures ; that kind of preaching requires knowledge, and we used to be told in our young days that there is no " royal road to knowledge," knowledge can be acquired only by study.

It is far from my wish to discourage beginners or to depreciate their service. On the contrary, I esteem it very highly. After all, the way to learn to do anything is to start doing it, and we all have to learn by our failures. I do, however, urge the beginner, as indeed the experienced preacher, to spare no effort in preparation beforehand, for the serious work of preaching. Let the young preacher then study with prayer and supplication, that utterance may be given to him, and let him then go forth with all boldness and preach, believing that God will speak through him.

Gospel testimony should be the work of the Assembly as a whole ; it cannot properly be delegated only to the preachers. Whether in a Gospel hall or out of doors, the more the Assembly is identified with the preaching the greater will be the blessing. When Peter preached at Pentecost he had the support of the eleven, who stood with him. It is a tremendous help to a preacher to have the presence of a company of Christians who uphold him in prayer while he preaches. Preaching is conflict, it is a definite effort to wrest precious souls out of the hand of the Enemy, and it needs concerted effort.

Preaching will open up the way for personal conversation, and it is often by this means that the most effective work is done. The personal approach to strangers requires a courteous and gracious manner, and when so made is rarely resented. If it is evident that conversation is not desired, it should not be pressed.

We make a mistake when we try to hurry the work of God. It is the Spirit of God who works, and He can keep the word spoken in the memory of the hearer and cause it to bring forth fruit after many days. But

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

we should let it be known that we will gladly speak with any who so desire. It would be a salutary check to some preachers if they would remember that they should never say from the platform or pulpit to an audience what they would not be prepared to say to an individual in personal conversation.

In closing this chapter I would add a few words on the immense value of the personal word. If we look at the example of our Lord, we see how He, who often spoke to multitudes, was also ready to speak to the individual. Many examples of this will be found in the Gospels.

There is a Divine art in leading a conversation to the things of God. Let us study the Lord's methods. We note the gentleness of His approach, yet at the same time the faithful words which searched the heart, laying bare the hidden sin. "I will make you," said the Lord, "fishers of men!" How careful the experienced fisherman is to choose the proper fly or the most suitable bait. How skilful he is in throwing his line, how he keeps himself out of sight. And yet what a contrast. When the fisherman catches fish it is death to them when the Christian brings a sinner to the Saviour it is life everlasting for him.

CHAPTER IX

THE TEACHING OF THE YOUNG

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of the Sunday School to an Assembly. It is the nursery of the Church, and the opportunity of gaining the interest of the children and teaching them, at the time of their lives when they are most open to receive the Word, is one which every Assembly should embrace to the uttermost. Children so soon grow up. A very few years separate the child from the young man or young woman, but what important years they are, and how pleasing it must be to the Lord that the children should be gathered together to be taught in His Word, and brought to Himself.

The Sunday School will generally consist of the children of Christian parents, together with others from non-Christian homes, whose parents for one reason or another allow their children to attend the school. While the Sunday School can be a great help to Christian parents in bringing up their children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," it can by no means relieve parents of their responsibility, and the help which children receive at home is of the utmost importance in supporting the work of the Sunday School teacher.

Here, let me, as a parent myself, advise parents that they should on no account criticise the meetings, or the Sunday School, or preachers or teachers in the presence of their children. Incalculable harm has been done at the meal table, after a meeting, through such criticism. We should cultivate an appreciative attitude of mind towards those who are endeavouring, however imperfectly it may be, to carry on the work of God. It

THE TEACHING OF THE YOUNG

should be a golden rule never to criticise before the children, and indeed not at all unless you are sure that it is your duty to do so, and that your criticism is true, kind and necessary.

The children of unbelieving parents attending the Sunday School are entitled to the special sympathy and patience of the teacher. Their home influence may be anything but helpful, it may be definitely antagonistic, for they may be sent to school just to get them out of the way. But for whatever reason they may come it is a great privilege and opportunity to have them there. It has led in numerous cases, not only to the conversion of the children, but also to whole families being saved.

The work of the Sunday School teacher calls for great patience and perseverance. It will be doubly fruitful if the work in the school is followed up by visits to the homes of the children. Sunday School work is a sphere of service open to young believers. I was myself a teacher at the age of fourteen, having charge of an infant class under a godly superintendent in a Church of England school. The experience was invaluable to me, and I can bear witness to the fact that Sunday School work is not only a means of grace to the taught, but also to the teacher. It teaches the teacher to be a teacher, and a teacher is a valuable servant in the Church of God. I think the exhortation of the Apostle Paul (Gal. vi. 9) is particularly applicable to Sunday School teachers, "Let us not be weary in well doing ; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

Anniversaries and Conferences

There are many other activities in which an Assembly may be engaged such as Men's Schools, Mothers' Meetings, Working Meetings, etc., to which I will not refer here particularly. Each Assembly should decide for itself what operations will best suit its own circumstances and surroundings. I think, however, a few words

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

might be said with advantage with regard to Anniversary Meetings and Conferences, which have multiplied greatly in recent years.

Anniversaries and Conferences are holy convocations with strong scriptural warrant. We should be enterprising in arranging such occasions for the instruction and edification of God's children in His Word. It is usual to invite Believers from neighbouring Assemblies, and generally such meetings are well attended and they can be very helpful.

There is the vexed question whether the ministry at such meetings should be "open" or "invited"; that is, whether it should be open to any who feel led so to do, to minister, or left only to those who have been invited for the purpose. Personally, I am not prepared to suggest that one plan is more scriptural than the other. It seems to me that the Assembly inviting the Conference is fully entitled to decide on which plan it shall be conducted. It is surely absurd to suggest that an Assembly is not entitled to invite Christians to come together to hear certain specified teachers, and it is equally absurd to suggest that an Assembly should not convene a Conference at which the ministry of the Word shall be left open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the time.

I must confess that my personal preference is strongly towards the "open" platform, especially in the smaller meetings. But, alas, it has been greatly abused, and on such occasions unprofitable ministry is very difficult to control. That it should be controlled I have no manner of doubt on the lines of 1 Cor. xiv. 29. It is a shame to let a Conference be spoilt by unprofitable ministry, and the responsibility lies with the Elders of the Assembly convening the meetings to see that this does not take place. I suggest that they should appoint two or more of their number with the special duty of intervening if necessary, and graciously but firmly putting a stop to what may be considered unedifying ministry.

THE TEACHING OF THE YOUNG

In the case of the larger Conferences it seems to me that edification and order will be best served by inviting special speakers for the occasion. When that is done, it is best to leave it to such speakers themselves to arrange the order in which they will speak, and if they are truly depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit they will give place to one another as the particular line of ministry may require. If it is thought that a Chairman would be helpful, why not have one? If there is any Scripture against such, I have yet to find it. I have already referred to this in the matter of meetings of Elders as one in which the "children of this world are wiser than the children of light." If God hath set some in the Church with the gift of government (1 Cor. xii. 28), why not let them exercise it? With a Chairman it is quite possible, and I am not sure that this is not the ideal method, to combine the two plans, letting the invited speakers speak first, and then throwing the meeting open under the supervision of the Chairman.

Meetings for special occasions such as marriages and funerals, which will probably be attended by the unconverted, require special care so that there may be nothing which would appear to be unseemly. Generally, it will be desirable to arrange the order of such services beforehand. These occasions are opportunities for setting forth the truth to those who may rarely hear it, and they call for solemnity and dignity, with nothing that would transgress the Apostolic plea for decency and order.

CHAPTER X

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

THE conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Zealot persecutor of the early Church, brought to an end for the time being the persecution which had culminated in the death of Stephen, and we read (Acts ix. 31), "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied." Christian Assemblies walking in the fear of the Lord, the members being in love and unity one with another, have such possibilities of blessing for the members and of successful witness in the world, that they become the special mark of the Enemy who desires to overthrow anything so pleasing to the heart of God.

The attack from without, as for instance in persecution, has always failed. In the first place it tends to draw the Christians closer together. The common danger shared increases their love for one another. In the second place, when it leads to a scattering, those who are scattered carry the testimony with them, often into unlikely places, and Believers are multiplied. The blood of martyrs has ever been the seed of the Church.

But there is another form of attack more subtle and, alas, more successful ; it is the attack from within, working through jealousy or pride, and leading to strife and division.

I think it would be impossible to exaggerate the harm which has been done by this means in Assemblies of God's children. They are particularly open to this form of attack, and in modern times (I mean during the last hundred years) the more so, because they have to a great extent been deprived of the Divinely intended

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

protection afforded by duly appointed Elders, recognised as being entrusted with the care of the flock. This has arisen, it appears to me, through a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation of the Scriptures which deal with the appointment of Elders, their work and responsibility. They were intended to be the shepherds tending the sheep and guarding them from the wolves which the Apostle Paul foretold would come in and devour the sheep. For want of duly appointed Elders many flocks have been left as sheep without a shepherd and have become a prey to many evils.

Behold, says the Psalmist, how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity. Let that unity be disturbed, says the Wicked One, let quarrelling and bitterness take its place and all the "blessing" will vanish. And, alas, how easy it is when love is growing cold for even a child of God to lend himself, all unconsciously, to Satan for his wicked purposes. Indeed, the power for evil which may rest in even one discontented brother or sister is such that we all need to be constantly on our guard.

The Apostle Peter little thought, when he rebuked the Lord for telling them of the things that He must suffer, that he was really doing the Devil's work until the Lord rebuked him saying, "Get thee behind Me, Satan."

There are many warnings in both the Old and New Testaments against being a cause of strife and division. It is a thing which God hates, yet there is hardly an Assembly which has not suffered at one time or another from this evil.

"It must needs be," said the Lord, "that offences come, but woe to that man by whom they come." "I would that they were even cut off that trouble you," said the Apostle, as he contemplated the havoc wrought by false teachers and strife makers.

Membership in an Assembly of God's children is a great privilege, and it carries with it the responsibility

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

on the part of every member to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What lowliness and meekness and forbearance and love this will require ! How manifest were all these qualities in the Lord Jesus ! And all these are included in the walk which is worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, the vocation of discipleship of our blessed Master. But how often has His new commandment been forgotten. “ That ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

Differences of judgment and of opinion are sure to arise. It has been said that if we were all guided by the Holy Spirit there could be no such differences, but that is a counsel of perfection, and we are not yet perfect. Moreover, these differences afford an opportunity for the exercise of grace, and this is glorifying to God. Generally, individual opinion in non-essential matters should give way to the opinion of the majority. It is a species of self-conceit when in non-essential matters individual opinion or preference is pressed to the extreme of risking the unity of the Assembly.

Frequently strife has been caused in an Assembly through personal differences. Some family disagreement or business difference has been brought into the Assembly, the meeting has taken sides and division has followed. High sounding names are given to these quarrels, it is said that the honour of the Lord is at stake, and the grace of “ yieldingness ” is therefore impossible.

Those who cause these quarrels are of the sort of people described in Romans ii. 17-24 ; they make their boast of God and claim to know His will ; being instructed out of the law they make their boast of the law and forget the “ new commandment ” that ye love one another. By reason of them and their unlovely deeds and words the name of God is blasphemed amongst the unconverted, and the work of God is hindered in the Assemblies.

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

It is bad enough when this kind of thing breaks out in the flock; it is far worse when it occurs amongst the Elders who ought to be examples.¹

“These six things doth the Lord hate: yea seven are an abomination unto Him,” and this is the seventh and most emphatic:—“he that soweth discord among brethren.” Think of this!

God knows the right and wrong of every matter. He searches the heart and knows where pride and envy are masked behind a claim for loyalty and truth. All these things will be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ.

A true child of God, desiring to walk so as to please Him, will shrink from being a cause of strife in an Assembly of God's children. He would rather suffer wrong than be responsible for such a hateful and evil thing. He will “seek peace and ensue it.”

It is when hearts have grown cold and the constraining power of the love of Christ is no longer felt that the “works of the flesh” begin to manifest themselves, and amongst these none are more far reaching in power for evil than “hatred, variance, emulation, wrath and strife.” “Of the which,” says the Apostle, “I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

In the attitude of the Elder Brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke xv), we have an illustration of what hurt pride and jealousy can do. He was bitterly jealous at the welcome which had been given to his once erring, but now restored brother, and this jealousy caused him, so far as it was in his power, to mar the feast. He “would not go in.”

Alas, the spirit that he manifested has shown itself

¹ Alas it has too often been amongst the Elders that strife has commenced and spread into the Assembly. The Apostle Paul warned the Elders of Ephesus, “Also of YOUR OWN SELVES shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” How solemn the responsibility of such Elders.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

many times in the history of the Assemblies. It is a really terrible thing when such an evil spirit occupies the heart of one of God's children. When Satan, operating through jealousy, hatred or some such passion, enters the heart of one or more in the gathering, then indeed we have a situation of the utmost gravity. In such cases it frequently happens that no appeal to Christian love and forgiveness is of any avail; there is no consciousness of the harm that is being wrought, or if there is, there is a sullen determination to carry on the feud to the bitter end. I do not think I have overstated the case, as it has happened times out of number. Behind spiritual jealousy and hatred there is, I have no doubt, Satanic power. I say this as one who has felt that power in my own heart. I pity the brother or sister who has yielded to it, their power for mischief is very great, they can put a damper over all the activities of the Assembly, and sometimes they are so bitter and so irreconcilable as to make one wonder if they really can be children of God at all. We are brought to the point reached by the Apostle Paul when he wrote, "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth [I do not] them that are His"; and "let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

What is the remedy? First of all I would say that things do not generally reach such an extreme state as I have described above, unless they have been allowed to go on, undealt with, far too long. There was just a little discord at first perhaps, like that which drew out the Apostolic entreaty, "I beseech Enodias and beseech Syntyche that they be of the same mind in the Lord." "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water," said the wise man, it is a thing that needs to be stopped at the source. And here the Elders of the Assembly have their opportunity and responsibility. They are to guard the flock from these attacks of the Enemy. When, alas, one or more of their number may

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

be involved in the matter, it becomes still more difficult. The others, however, should take it in hand, and being careful to avoid taking sides they should, with singleness of purpose, deal with the matter in a judicial spirit. They will direct their efforts towards securing, if possible, a reconciliation of the disaffected parties.

It is not always true that there is fault on both sides. Sometimes a wrong-doer will attack one who is entirely innocent of offence. Generally, the latter will present the meek spirit and the desire for reconciliation, while the bitterness is manifested in the wrongdoer, for there is something in conscience that causes the wrongdoer to hate the wronged. It is for the Elders of the Church to deal with these matters, as I said before, in a judicial spirit.

If an offender in spite of all entreaty proves to be irreconcilable and persists in his malicious ways, he should be suspended from the fellowship of the Assembly, according to our Lord's own words (Matt. xviii. 17). And this can, I believe, be properly done by the Elders acting on behalf of the Church. It is not necessary, neither would it be desirable in many of these cases, that all the details should be discussed before the whole Assembly. It would be a shame to discuss these matters before the lambs of the flock. The Elders act for the Church; they are set in their position for this purpose. It was concerning such matters particularly that our Lord gave the promise, "that where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." In dealing with these matters the Elders should have the full support of the Assembly, and they should be constantly remembered in prayer, that all needed grace and wisdom may be given to them.

Necessary judicial action towards any member of an Assembly should always be exercised by the Elders as a body and not by individuals. In this way the danger of strife and division is greatly reduced. And

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

the ultimate aim in all judicial action should be restoration, when God has granted repentance to the erring one.

If matters are dealt with promptly as they should be by the guardians of the flock, they will not usually lead to a division in the Assembly, but this often follows where a wound has been allowed to fester for a long time.

There is a practical side to this matter ; there is such a thing as incompatibility of temper, and it manifests itself sometimes, even amongst Christians. While we should love all the Brethren and be courteous and kind to all, if we find that certain ones are inclined to "rub us up the wrong way," or still more if we find that we seem unconsciously and unintentionally so to affect them, it might be better to recognise this and not to cultivate too close an association in such cases. It was no doubt better for Paul and Barnabas to part and go their different ways than it would have been to continue together with Mark as a constant source of contention between them.

If these pages are read by any who have been concerned in Assembly strife, may there be searchings of heart. Remember how the Lord said, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has ought against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." It requires much humility and great grace to retrace one's steps and confess to wrong doing or wrong speaking. The Lord will supply all needed grace to those who seek it from Him. It may be the confession will not be well received ; that is not your concern, it is yours to see that it is made in the right spirit. That passage from which I quoted in Romans ii, speaks of "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men." If there is a "secret" of this sort, in your life or in your heart, let it be brought out into the light now, and let all possible restitution be made.

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

From a great number of passages in the New Testament urging upon us the importance of love and consideration one for another, as brethren and sisters in Christ, I quote the following : " Let all bitterness and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice ; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you " (Eph. iv. 31, 32).

The Elders of an Assembly have the responsibility of dealing with doctrinal error or grave moral failure if these become manifest.

With regard to doctrinal error it is very necessary to distinguish between denial of the Scriptures and denial of an interpretation, even it may be, a commonly accepted interpretation of Scripture teaching. Many have been charged with the former offence, who were only really guilty of the latter. It is not fair to draw all the inferences which might possibly be drawn from a certain line of teaching, and say that the offender holds or teaches them all. Very probably he does not.

I wish to speak with charity of those who have divided Assemblies on doctrinal questions or differences, sometimes of such nicety that they are extremely difficult to comprehend, but that they have marred the work of God, and caused the way of truth to be evil-spoken against, there can be no manner of doubt. Where there are " damnable heresies,"¹ denying the Lord, the course is clear, and none can gainsay it, but to magnify small differences in interpretation or of judgment, and treat them as " heresies," is to destroy the work of God in the sense of Romans xiv. 20.

We can have no fellowship with those who deny the coming in the flesh of the blessed Son of God. Such

¹ Such was the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes which, abusing the liberty of grace, taught freedom for idolatry, and moral licentiousness. This is the evil referred to in 2 Peter ii. and in the epistle of Jude, " which thing," saith the Lord, " I hate."

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

an one cannot be received as a Christian, and we cannot have fellowship with those who deny the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, they would undermine the very foundations on which our faith is built.

I do not know of any other doctrinal cause for excluding a professing Christian from the fellowship of the Assembly. There may be great ignorance, and doubtless there was in many of those who were added to the Church at Pentecost, but our Great High Priest has compassion on the ignorant, and those that are out of the way. Do not, therefore, exclude a Believer because he is ignorant ; if you refuse fellowship you deprive yourself of the opportunity of instructing him in the way of God more perfectly. There is a difference between receiving into fellowship a Believer who may hold doctrines contrary to that which we believe to be most clearly taught in the Scriptures, and allowing those doctrines to be taught in the Assembly. I judge that the Elders are exercising their responsibility properly when they forbid any line of teaching which they believe to be contrary to the Scriptures, or even if they forbid any ministry at all by one holding erroneous doctrine. In so doing, they would be rightly guarding the flock.

We need to be very careful not to act as though our Assemblies were only for a particular type of Christian, for those who see eye to eye with us on all points. They are, or should be, open for all Believers. Subject to the two essentials to which I have referred, they should be inclusive, with wide open doors, wide as the heart of our blessed Lord, who said, " Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

With regard to moral failure in a child of God, it should be borne in mind that this is generally evidence of grave heart declension. We are all liable to temptation and none of us has any guarantee of safety except as we

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

are kept by the power of God. Therefore, let us lay aside every weight and (the) sin which doth so easily beset us, for they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof. When beset by sore temptation let us remember the words of one of old who said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" and also that our risen Lord is the succourer of them that are tempted.

But when a member of an Assembly does fall into open moral sin, the Elders have a difficult but necessary duty to perform. The one who has been overtaken is to be dealt with in the spirit of meekness (considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted), with a view to his ultimate restoration, but grave sin cannot be passed over lightly as though it were a matter of little account. The Corinthian Church was condemned by the Apostle (1 Cor. v) for retaining in membership one who was living in sin such as was not even named amongst the Gentiles, and told to put away from among them that wicked person. In the second Epistle (chap. ii) we have the sequel, the offence having been sufficiently punished, they are bidden to forgive and comfort the offender, "lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow."

When hidden sin is brought to light there is usually a great expression of sorrow and repentance which may be perfectly sincere, but it is desirable to give opportunity so that the wrongdoer may demonstrate the sincerity of his repentance, and in the meantime he should be suspended from the fellowship of the Assembly. Yet he should be treated, not as an enemy, but with kindness as a brother under discipline. He should be given every encouragement to turn from his evil ways, and if he shows true contrition and brings forth fruits meet for repentance in humble submission to those responsible in the gathering, they will, in due time, rejoice as good under-shepherds to be able to restore him to fellowship. In this way

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

there is a demonstration, firstly to the one who has been overtaken in sin, and secondly to all in the Assembly, and lastly, if the matter has become public to those who are without, of a proper sense of the gravity of sin and failure in a professing Christian.

It may be asked : if God forgives instantly on confession of sin, and He does, may we not do the same ? The answer, I think is, we may and we should forgive, but a period of probation is required in which the offender may demonstrate the sincerity of his repentance. God alone knows the heart ; it is not always easy for us to distinguish between sorrow for being found out, and sorrow for the sin itself. It is necessary, not least in the interest of the offender, that he should be so dealt with that he will realise the seriousness of his sin, and yet always with a view to his ultimate restoration.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter v, verse 11, there are enumerated particular sins for which an offender must be excluded from the fellowship of the Assembly, until such time as he has manifested sincere godly sorrow and repentance. There is no need to dwell particularly on the grosser sins therein mentioned. There are two, however, on which a few words might be said with advantage.

Railing and coveting. These seem to refer back to the ninth and tenth commandments of the Decalogue. A railer is one who maliciously bears false witness, and in the Christian sense, especially one who does so against a brother. Evil speaking and slander is a very serious sin in God's sight. It is obvious that such action on the part of a member of an Assembly must destroy fellowship and the offender ought to be excluded until such time as he is brought to repentance. On the other hand, extreme care is necessary, for accusations of railing have sometimes been most unfairly brought against those who have been doing no more than properly rebuking sin. A railer is a malicious evil speaker, one

STRIFES AND DIVISIONS

who persistently and wickedly defames another with evil intent, and railing is the practical outcome of envy, hatred, or malice in the heart which in a Christian should be filled with love. To defame a brother or even to expose his faults unnecessarily to others is grievous sin in the sight of our Heavenly Father ; well may we pray, " Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth ; keep the door of my lips."

The sin of coveting covers a wide ground, and it is evidently a more grievous sin in God's sight than we are accustomed to regard it. So far as it refers to this world's goods or wealth it appeals both to those who have possessions and those who have them not. We know that there is no satiety in the greed of the natural heart for the things of this world. The greedy, grasping and ungenerous spirit is far removed from the spirit of Christ, and there is need in our Assemblies of the warning voice against that love of money and greed of gain which is so unbecoming in a child of God.

The antidote to covetousness is that satisfaction, peace and contentment which the Lord delights to give to those who come to Him and trust Him wholly. Many exhortations on this subject will be found in the Epistles, and not least in the Epistle of James, an epistle which is perhaps not sufficiently drawn upon for teaching in our Assemblies. But seeing that the sin of covetousness is one so grievous to God that it justifies exclusion from the Assembly, let us each judge ourselves that we be not judged.

CHAPTER XI

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

IN this last chapter I desire to put forward some considerations affecting personal discipleship, and first of all let me say that personal discipleship is the only kind of discipleship there is. We were, each one of us, if we are Christ's, called and chosen individually to follow Him. We are brought together collectively in Assemblies that we may unite in worship and in service, and be helpers one of another, but the spirituality of the Assembly will depend on the spirituality of the individual members, no grouping of unspiritual individuals can ever make a spiritual Assembly. How very important, therefore, is this matter of personal discipleship.

In the word disciple we have the thought both of a follower and a learner. "If any man will come after Me," said the Lord, "let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." And again, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me." So a disciple is one who follows the Lord, gets harnessed into His yoke, and as he goes on in service with, not merely for, the Lord, he learns of Him and becomes like Him, meek and lowly in heart.

How beautiful an illustration of discipleship we have in the story of Ruth the Moabitess widow in her love for her mother-in-law, and in the language of Ruth many a disciple of the Lord Jesus has found the best expression of his own heart's devotion (Ruth i. 16, 17).

The true disciple will love the Lord, and he will love His Word; he will love His people wherever they may be found, and He will love His work and be glad to hear of it prospering, not only in his own sphere but in all parts of the world.

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

Personal love and devotion to the Lord is the main-spring of all acceptable service. It may be, and indeed it should be, accompanied by a strong sense of duty which is an appreciation of the debt we owe to God, but love is the greatest force in the universe ; it was the love of God bestowed on us that made our salvation possible, and it is some faint but true reflection of the great love of Christ that will make us desire to serve Him in an acceptable manner. Every Believer has, in some measure, this personal love for the Lord Jesus ; unto us who believe He is precious, yet I suppose we all feel like singing sometimes, " Lord, it is my chief complaint, that my love is weak and faint." Love for the Lord will be deepened just as human love is deepened by seeking and enjoying the company of the loved one. If we are really yoked with Him in service it will be with us as with the disciples on the way to Emmaus : " Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way ? " And then in the resting time like Mary we shall chose the good part, and sit at His feet and hear His voice. We shall hear Him speaking to us as we read the Scriptures, and we shall enjoy sweet communion with Him in prayer.

Remember this, that as far as you are concerned, you are everything to your Lord, and He is deeply concerned in your life and service. Humility will cause you to esteem others better than yourself, and your service perhaps of little importance to Him. A proper understanding of our importance to Him, however (not self importance, which comes of pride), will make us very careful in all our ways, and will help us to persevere under difficulties. We feel it to be a dreadful thing when a great leader stumbles and falls and dishonours the Lord, and so it is, but there is not a single Believer whose walk and life is not of tremendous importance to the Lord. It matters to Him if we stumble and fall. I stress this strongly, praying that no reader will ever think lightly of his importance to the Lord. He has

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

called you and chosen you for Himself, it is your part to be faithful.

Let my youngest reader think of this. We are apt to think of what we will do when we are older. But childhood, or boy or girlhood is an important part of your life in which you can do a work for God that you cannot do when you are grown up. You cannot then be a Christian child in the home, or in the school. So whatever your age, begin at once, if you have not begun already, and ask the Lord what He would have you to be and to do for Him. You are very important to Him and so is your life and service.

In this connection the twelfth chapter of first Corinthians is very instructive. We learn there that members who seem to be less important are nevertheless essential. God sets us in our various spheres, some as prophets or teachers, others as "only!" helps; but what an honour to be a helper in God's work. Every member and every sphere of service is necessary for the well-being of the Assembly. A quality of particular importance in all service is dependability. Whatever the duty that is undertaken may be, whether it be opening the doors, dusting the seats, lighting the fires, welcoming the strangers, or what not, it makes all the difference if the brother or sister who has undertaken the duty can be depended upon to fulfil it; or if unavoidably prevented from so doing on any occasion, to see that some other suitable person is there to do it. If we remember that it is God's work and that however humble the sphere, we are "workers together with Him," we shall be very careful not to neglect any service that we have undertaken.

Combined with dependability; of equal importance is the spirit in which the service is rendered, the essential spirit of love, to which the above-mentioned twelfth chapter leads us up; love, the crowning grace, without which even to speak with the tongues of men or of angels is to be as "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal."

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

But if the mainspring of acceptable service is personal love for the Lord Jesus, power for service is given through the indwelling Spirit of God. Let us ponder the precious truth that the Spirit of God does indeed dwell in the inmost being of every true child of God. His mission, like that of Abraham's eldest servant (Gen. xxiv), is to fill the hearts of Believers with love and longing for the heavenly Isaac, whom we shall ere long see face to face, and of whom meanwhile we are able to testify that having not seen yet we love, and "in whom believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." The indwelling Spirit of God is our power for service. He makes the spoken word reach the heart of the hearer. Every preacher, every teacher, and every personal worker, longs that His voice may be heard, for that remains in the memory when our words are forgotten, and causes the seed of the Word to germinate and bless the hearer.

Sometimes we are much concerned about other Christians' service. "What shall this man do?" we ask with Peter. "What is that to thee, Follow *thou* Me," we hear our Lord say in reply. So let us get our sphere of service from the Lord, who gives, with the call, all needed qualification for it. If we hear His voice calling, "Whom shall I send?" and answer with deep consciousness of unworthiness, "Here am I, send me," we shall assuredly find that His commanding carries with it His enabling.

Now let us consider some matters affecting our lives in connection with discipleship.

Our Daily Work

Of every honest and honourable occupation—and in this I include what the world would consider the most humble spheres—it may be said, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called," that is unless or until the change of occupation should come from God. "Art thou called being a

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

servant ? Care not for it ; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.” Barnabas was a landowner and he gave up his land. Paul a tentmaker by trade, and he continued in this calling and laboured for his own support. Both were called to work as ministers of the Gospel, and a great work they did. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide *with God*. There are some occupations which are obviously unsuitable for the Christian, in which he cannot abide *with God*. At all cost these must be given up. With regard to all lawful occupations, whatsoever the Christian finds to do he must do it with his might, but his business must not be allowed to occupy the first place in his heart. It is a sad thing to see a Christian man so engrossed in money making, that he has no time and no heart for the work of God ; yet he is to be “ not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,” yet remembering our Lord’s own words, “ Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things (necessary things such as food and raiment, of which God knows your need) shall be added to you.”

“ *Worldliness* ”

What is worldliness ? It is a difficult question to answer, because in essence it lies in the secret of the heart. The man of the world orders his life to please himself, without any reference to God. The ambition of the Christian is to please God. So far as we fall short of that in aim (not necessarily in achievement) our lives are worldly. Worldliness is a state of heart in which the affections are set on things below, on the business, the ambitions, the pleasures and the fashions of this passing world, whereas the Christian should have his affections set on things above. “ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ; if any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him.” We are sure this does not mean that we are not to enjoy the beauties of God’s creation of sunrise and sunset, of

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

land and sea, of mountain, vale and lake, or of music or art, or the wonders of scientific knowledge, the secrets of God's creation. Our Lord referred to the spirit of the world, its pomp and vanity, and pride, its independence of God and its rejection of Christ. How can any man be a friend of that world and not be an enemy of God? For all that is in this world spirit, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world."

"Be not conformed to this world," writes the Apostle, "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

One sometimes hears speakers exhorting Believers to "separation *from* the world." This, however, is not a scriptural phrase. Hermits have tried to separate themselves from the world and have found that they cannot do it; if they get away from the "world" around, they find they have the "world" within. Our Lord prayed, "I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them *from the evil*, they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We are *in* the world, we are not to be *of* the world. A different spirit is to actuate us from the spirit which operates in the men of this world. A different mind is to be in us, the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Not self will, or self-pleasing will be the moving spirit in the child of God, but a steadfast purpose and desire to do the will of God. In measure he will be able to say with his Lord, I delight to do thy will, O my God, Thy law is within my heart.

It is very important to understand what separation according to the will of God is, and what it is not. It is a separation from evil as in 2 Cor. vi. 14-18; it is not a separation from the world's need. How can it be if we are to follow the steps of Him who went about doing good?

There are some who refrain from contributing to

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

public subscriptions for the relief of distress and to hospitals and such institutions, not from a lack of generosity, but because they consider that joining with others in such charities is a "mixing with the world." This, it seems to me, is a great misapprehension. To stand aloof from such public charities as those to which I have referred gives quite a wrong impression to the world of what is Christian discipleship.

Let me tell a story, and as I go along ask some questions, leaving the reader to supply the answers.

Suppose you set out on board a small ship as one of twenty passengers for a distant land. Such a small company of passengers will soon get to know one another, and form a little community of travellers, of which you, perhaps the only Christian, will be a member. Are you going to say, "These people and their circumstances except only their souls' salvation are no business of mine?" Are you going to say, "I will preach to you, and I will pray with you, but I will not join you in your simple pleasures or in social intercourse"? And if you do, do you really expect them to give much heed to your preaching and praying? Did the Lord act like this when on earth?

If they ask you to join in the daily sweepstake frequently organised on board ship, or in gambling or amusements involving evil, then your course is quite clear, you will graciously but firmly indicate that in these matters you are in the community, but not of the community.

A little way out a mother goes sick, leaving her children uncared for: is that any business of yours? A storm comes on and the ship springs a leak, the captain calls for help to man the pumps: is it "joining with the world" to take your turn with others? The ship is wrecked, but all escape to shore on a desert island; huts must be erected; are you going to help? Alas, a fire breaks out, the huts are being destroyed, a line is formed to pass buckets of water from one to

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

another to the scene of the conflagration : will you decline to stand in the line with those unconverted people and pass along the buckets ?

I will not add more, and I have no doubt what your answer to these questions would be. The truth of the matter is we do belong to the little community in this world by which we are surrounded. I have a Heavenly Father and I had an earthly father to whom also I had obligations. I am a citizen of the Heavenly country, I am also a citizen of an earthly country, placed by the will of God amongst earthly people, not to stand aloof from them, but to love them and bless them and to do good to them. In this way I may show that I am indeed a child of the Heavenly Father, who maketh His sun to shine on the evil and the good.

To be worldly is to live for this present world : to aim at wealth or power or position, at pride of place, or extravagant fashion. A Christian will not love these things or have his heart set on them, he will seek above all to do the will of God and as far as he has opportunity he will be good unto all men.

Acting on this principle and, as I believe, according to the will of God, having regard to my business responsibilities in my native town, some years ago I became a member of the Town Council and for two years occupied the position of Mayor. Such Councils are chiefly concerned in supplying the essential needs of the community such as water supplies, sanitary service, housing, recreation grounds, child welfare, etc. It does not seem to me that there is anything essentially "worldly" in such service or in other kinds of public work any more than there is in supplying other needs, as for instance, as a shopkeeper. If the aim be personal aggrandisement in the one case, or the pursuit of wealth in the other, these are essentially "worldly" aims. The Christian should seek purity of aim that in whatsoever he does he may do all to the glory of God. The fact that such positions are difficult is not an argument

THE ASSEMBLY SERVICE

against them. Does not God call many of His servants to occupy difficult positions, and if He does, is not His grace sufficient? Far be it from me to suggest that all or even many Believers are called to this kind of service, but if here and there one is, let us rather seek to uphold them in prayer that they may glorify God, than condemn them as worldly-minded.

As the Christian goes about amongst men in the spirit of Christ, he carries something that cannot be hid, the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God." It will shine in the words he speaks, in the acts he does, and in the way he does them. He will reflect something of the beauty of the Lord, and men will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus.

No, it is not in separation from the world, to this we are not called, but in keeping from its evil, and manifesting the essentially different spirit that actuates him, that the Christian will glorify God and bless his fellow men.

Recreations and Amusements

Recreation is necessary for both young and old, and amusement, if we understand thereby innocent enjoyment, is delightful in its proper place. "When I was a child," said the Apostle, "I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things." There are many things given to us to use in moderation in which excess becomes sin. Recreation, if it be a turning aside from heavy duty for relief of mind or exercise of body, is good for us all. You must not keep a fiddle fully strung all the time; there are limitations in our mental and physical powers which must be recognised. Young men, especially, need severe physical exercise and must have it to preserve the "mens sana in sano corpore." Shut out from this physical exercise in the company of their fellows, as they have been by the misguided exhortations of some

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

leaders, many have suffered physically and mentally, and not a few young men have, much too early in life, formed attachments with the opposite sex which have not been for their good in any way. I tremble when I hear preachers denouncing games to the young. I am persuaded that a young man can glorify God in the cricket field, or on the tennis court or football ground and manifest there the spirit of Christ. As to what forms of recreation or amusements are permissible to the Christian, I do not intend to particularise further, except to say that they must not be such as involve moral injury to those who provide them. Each one must decide for himself or herself, and we must be on our guard always against excess. Recreation is not the serious business of life, it is relaxation with a view to restoration of physical and mental power. If and when it comes to occupy a too prominent place in our thoughts or lives, it tends to evil.

Even in Apostolic days there were differences of judgment as to the keeping of days, eating of meats and such like matters. In all these things we have a responsibility to others as well as to ourselves. Things may be lawful but not expedient lest they be a stumbling block to others. "Happy is he who condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth."

But strict as we may be for ourselves, we need to be very careful how we judge our fellow Christians in these things. The manufacture of "sins" has ever been an attractive occupation for religious people; it was so in our Lord's day and the Pharisees had a compendium of them, but our Lord rebuked them for teaching the ordinances of men as though they were the commandments of God.

As we go on in the Christian life we learn that some things not sinful in themselves are hindrances, they are weights to be laid aside in the Christian race. If we denounce such things before inexperienced Christians who have not got as far as we have, we shall very likely

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

only do harm. Be patient, let the Spirit of God lead them on, they will learn. It is wonderful how quick progress can be under shepherd love and gentleness, but if the shepherd is always setting the dog after the wayward sheep the most probable effect will be to drive them further away.

On Guidance

Young Believers are often perplexed in this matter of God's guidance in their lives. There are many promises in God's Word in relation thereto. Indeed, the Word of God is given to us for guidance, it is a "Lamp to our feet and a light to our path." "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way" (Ps. xxxvii. 23). The most frequent cause of error, next to self-will, is impatience. The Lord often keeps us waiting a while before making known His will. This is good for us. Many have got themselves into serious trouble through impatience. You will find a great deal in the New Testament about patience and its beneficent work. Wait on the Lord and wait for the Lord. To those who do, I believe that the Lord will always give most unmistakable guidance concerning all the affairs of life. "When He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, *for they know His voice.*" "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye" (mine eye shall be upon thee).

Too often, however, self-will asserts itself. Parental control perhaps is resented, situations are given up because they are not altogether to our liking, and new paths are entered upon without waiting for the Lord. This leads to sorrow and disappointment which our Shepherd would so gladly have spared us if we had only waited for His gentle leading.

Personally, I have found that in waiting upon God for guidance and reading His Word, there has ultimately,

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

and always in time for the necessities of the case, been given to me an absolute assurance as to what is God's will in the matter in question. I have proved this in personal matters, in business matters and in Assembly matters, and when I have waited for this assurance and acted on it, I have never known myself to have been mistaken.

Marriage

The marriage relationship is the only one in which we have the opportunity of choice, and a very important choice it is. By marriage Christian homes may be established in which children may be reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to bless, if the Lord tarry, another generation. It is unthinkable that any Believer walking with the Lord would ever desire union in the close association of marriage with any other than a fellow Believer. How can there be heart union when there can be no communion or fellowship in those things which are nearest and dearest ? Alas, Christians whose hearts have become cold often take the irrevocable step of marrying an unbeliever, but it leads to much sorrow and disappointment, generally for both parties, and it is a grievous sin in the sight of God.¹

But when marriage is "in the Lord" and the two are brought together united in love for one another and united in love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and in their desire to serve Him, that is a union which He delights to bless with His presence, not only at the wedding, as He did at Cana of Galilee, but in the home which thereby is established. What a blessed place is a Christian home and what a privilege it is to have such

¹ Nevertheless God does graciously overrule even this grave error in many cases, and the unconverted husband or wife is converted through the godly life of the partner. I say this for the comfort and encouragement of any who have made this mistake. But let no one wilfully take this false step with this expectation before them. Marriage with an unbeliever is an "unequal yoke" and the two so united are bound to pull in different directions.

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

a home, sanctified by the Lord's presence and by prayer, and by the honouring of God's Word. If children are given, what blessings come with them; they are "an heritage of the Lord," and His reward. But the modern world has its own ideas with regard to families, ideas very contrary to God's Word. Things are being introduced into the marriage relationship with the object of frustrating the Divine purpose. It is a shame even to speak of these things which are done of them in secret, let them not be named amongst us as becometh saints. Not only its sanctity but the very institution of marriage itself is being wrecked upon these rocks. God's laws cannot be broken with impunity. The harvest of these practices on those who practise them is a bitter one, and I cannot too solemnly warn young Christians against them.

There is ample guidance in the New Testament to enable Christians to live together in the married state with mutual love, self-control, respect and consideration for one another, and a holy union of two of God's dear children may be verily, as the Apostle Paul wrote, a miniature of the holy union between Christ and His Church.

The necessary provision for and care of children, their upbringing and education will afford much opportunity for self-denial. Many luxuries and pleasures which the unmarried or childless can enjoy will often have to be foregone, but the parents will be fully rewarded when they see their children follow their steps, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, to be a godly seed on the earth when the parents are called home.

If the Lord withholds children, that is an entirely different matter, and a cause of sorrow to those who would desire otherwise, yet the Lord has His compensations for such in greater freedom for service in other directions. I wonder, however, that married Christians who are childless do not more frequently adopt orphan or homeless children and bring them up

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

for the Lord. Where this has been done, it has often proved a great blessing to all concerned.

But all are not called into the married state, yet is there no quality of affection given to be wasted. The father love or mother love that cannot expend itself on children "according to the flesh," will find an ample scope in the Church of God. There have been "mothers in Israel" who never nursed their own children. They have been "mothers" to many, and rich will be the reward of their unselfish service.

There is an exhortation to Titus intended first of all for bondslaves, that we all do well to remember. It begins by enjoining obedience, patience, honesty and fidelity, that they might "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," wonderful that even a bondslave should be able to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, to make it beautiful, attractive. Some have made it ugly, unattractive, even repulsive. They have misrepresented the doctrine of God our Saviour, though it may be unintentionally. They have not let their light so shine before men that they should see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven. What a pity!

Let us reflect on our Lord's earthly ministry; how the multitude followed Him, how they listened to His gracious words as He went about doing good. Even to-day multitudes who have not a good word to say of Christians have not a bad word to say of Christ.

I close by completing the quotation from Titus :—
"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."