

CHURCH TRUTHS

SIX BIBLE READINGS

BY

JOHN RITCHIE



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— and —
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Church Truths: Their Place and Value.

THE present is one of few opportunities afforded us to quietly examine the Scriptures, and seek to be mutually helped therefrom together, regarding some distinctive truths that are found in the Word of God. When I say "distinctive truths," I mean those parts of the Word which, although as truly inspired as the Gospel, and given for the "obedience of faith" of all God's people, throughout the entire course of the present age, are nevertheless neglected by very many, and regarded as obsolete or non-essential by others.

GOSPEL TRUTHS HELD IN COMMON BY ALL.

There are the great foundations upon which the faith of God's people in all ages has reposed, and of which they can never relax their hold, for their present peace and their eternal salvation depend upon them. But there are other truths, perhaps not of such personal interest to us, as they do not concern our individual salvation, yet of equal value in the estimation of heaven, because they are the

inspired words of the Eternal God, and they most intimately concern the place and honour of the Lord Jesus. I refer especially to

TRUTHS CONCERNING THE CHURCH,

her heavenly calling, distinctive position, privileges, and hopes, and concerning the gathering together of God's people here on earth. These He has revealed in His Word, with as much definiteness and precision as He has given the Gospel whereby men are saved, and He expects His people to receive and observe them, just because He has thus commanded. Were any man or company of men to rise up and propose to draft a new Gospel, another way of salvation to that found in the Word, or to insinuate that the old Divine way had become obsolete, he would soon find himself facing a thousand drawn swords. Yet, strange to say, in regard to other parts of God's truth, there is great laxity and profound indifference even among true believers.

I may say at once—especially for the sake of the young believers who are with us—that I rejoice to have and hold in common with every true believer in Christ on earth, the grand and glorious truths of the Gospel, and all that concerns our personal and eternal salvation, with the privileges and responsibilities of the Christian life, as regards the individual. But I am not prepared to give up, to modify, or to relegate to a place of secondary importance, those parts of God's eternal truth, which an All-wise God has given in His Word, to guide us in our gathering together and our fellowship as His people here upon

earth, and to instruct us how His Church is to be constituted, ordered and maintained, till the Lord shall come. I know full well that the very mention of such truths will at once make a cleavage between us and many of our brethren in Christ, and that the feeblest attempt to render obedience to them will probably separate us and expose us to the charge of being "narrow" and such like. But the responsibility of all who have been redeemed by Christ's most precious blood, and brought as subjects into His Kingdom, is to render prompt, unhesitating obedience to all that He has commanded, and to leave the results with Him. Friendships and fellowships, based on the neglect of God's truth, are unworthy of a blood-bought saint. In earlier days we heard more of these subjects than we do now. Those men of God who had to grope their way amid scorn and misrepresentation, outside the camp of the world's religion, to gather first as a feeble remnant in the Name of the Lord Jesus alone, bought the truth dearly, and they valued it. They loved it, rejoiced in it, and passed it on to others. Most of them have now passed away. Another generation who are "free born," so to speak, and never knew the exercise of soul their fathers had, have come upon the scene, and the tendency among such is to lightly esteem and let slip truths which their fathers held dear.

THE NEED OF PLAIN TEACHING.

There is need for plain and definite instruction on these truths. Some, it is to be feared, who are

nominally in assemblies professedly outside of all sects, and gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus alone, as distinct from all other names, have little knowledge of what that position involves, and what is sadder still (but nothing more than we have been forewarned to expect), some who once knew the truth and found joy and blessing in acting upon it. and in teaching it to others, are evidently giving it up, and going back in varied degrees to the systems from which they once came out. And when such becomes the practice of any, they must needs defend that practice by a change of doctrine, or by an utter silence on all distinctive truths, frequently coupled by slighting references to those who hold and practise them. By this means, young believers are perplexed and stumbled, and the position of those who are in association with various forms of apostate Christianity and worldly religion, is condoned and confirmed. In order to maintain an outward semblance of unity, and not expose the discords that exist on these matters, all reference to them is strictly avoided in general ministry. And at Conferences and other gatherings of believers, where once they were fully and freely ventilated, with much real help and blessing to souls, they are now strictly "ruled out." Need we wonder when the truth of God is thus suppressed, and generally neglected, that its importance in the minds of saints declines; that it ceases to exercise the conscience and control the path, and that the power and blessing which is coupled with obedience thereto, so decays, that the testimony is given up, or dies out?

MAKING TOO MUCH OF CHURCH TRUTH.

It has been said, that such truths have been made too much of in certain quarters, and their importance magnified beyond its measure, while matters of individual and personal godliness have been little cared for. This is possibly true, for the adversary will ever seek to unduly occupy us with one side of truth to the exclusion or neglect of the other; whereas the way of the Lord is, to grasp and be grasped by *all* the counsel of God, to exercise ourselves and be exercised, by *all* that the Lord has given for our obedience, individually and collectively, in the family, the church, and the world, saying with one of old—"I esteem *all* Thy precepts concerning *all* things to be right, and I hate every false way" (Psa. cxix. 128). But it is worthy of being remembered, that while no true believer will ever deny the importance at least in the letter, of what God has written regarding personal godliness and individual obedience, there are thousands who do not even know the most elementary truths regarding the Church's calling, or their place in the Church.

I do not plead for a continual reference to these subjects in public ministry, much less that they should be made a party badge, or claimed as a monopoly by any, to the exclusion of others, but I do affirm and maintain, that if the testimony of the assemblies of believers gathered in the Lord's Name, outside of all sects, is to be maintained, as it was begun, in the simplicity and freshness of obedience to the Word of the Lord, the truth concerning our

gathering together must be taught fully and definitely, and not kept in the background, until it comes to be regarded as of no importance, and the neglect or disregard of it as a small matter. What is required in every assembly of saints, however small, is wise and healthy ministry of the Word on all the truth. What bears on individual walk and life, and likewise what has been given by God to guide His people in their corporate privileges and responsibilities. If this were observed as God would have it, by those who minister the Word among His people, there would be less trouble with young ones running hither and thither, and more godly order, power and blessing in the gathering together of saints than there often is. May the Lord help those who know the truth, to remember that they are stewards of what God has taught them, and responsible to pass it on wisely and faithfully to others, especially to young believers, who will soon have to stand in the forefront of the battle.

The Church: Its Calling, Position, and Destiny.

I N seeking help from God on this subject, we must be guided by the inspired words of God, and not by the opinions and traditions of men. We have no definite teaching in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Church—save that which is found in type and shadow—so we turn to the New Testament.

The word which is generally rendered “Church,” and sometimes “Assembly,” is the Greek word—*Ecclesia*, which means “a called out thing” or company. It is used—

1. To describe a riotous crowd, called out from among their fellows, by Demetrius and others, at Ephesus, to oppose Paul and his companions and their work for God, and it is of this crowd thus gathered, that it is written—“The assembly (ecclesia) was confused” (Acts xix. 32).

2. The same word is used by the town-clerk of Ephesus, in speaking of those who came statedly together for the transaction of legal and public business—the council, the (ecclesia) “lawful assembly” (verse 39).

3. The word is used by the Lord Jesus to describe (a) the aggregate of those who are born again during this dispensation, and (b) as descriptive of a company of believers gathered together unto His Name and constituted by Him, His *Ecclesia*, His Church. He who calls: the persons who are called, and the

purpose for which they are called together, give character to the assembly—the Church.

A TWO-FOLD USE OF THE WORD.

The latter use of the word in this two-fold aspect, is that which specially claims our attention now. It may help us toward a better understanding of the truth, if we remember, that in the Scriptures of the New Testament, the word “church” is used *only* in this two-fold way, and not in any other. That is (1) of the whole company of the redeemed since Pentecost, the Body of Christ, the workmanship of God, into which He alone can bring, and out from which He never puts any: the Church in its Godward and Divine aspect. (2) Of believers gathered together, in any given place, unto the Name of the Lord Jesus, having His presence in their midst, into which man acting under Divine authority many bring (Acts ix. 26-28), and from which by Divine commandment man may put away (1 Cor. v. 11-13), and upon repentance restore to (2 Cor. ii. 7-8) again.

There is no other circle to which the word “Church” is applied in Scripture, although among men, and even among believing men, it is made to mean many other things, as, for example—(a) All believers on earth at any time, (b) all the Christians in a town or city, (c) all the baptised, (d) the building in which people meet to praise and pray. It is scarcely necessary to say, that these are all unscriptural, therefore misleading. Yet hundreds and thousands of believers having learned them, hold them, use them, read Scripture through them—as one reads through coloured spectacles—tradition

and usage thus giving colour to God's words, and entirely subverting their meaning and application. It is by this means that such a variety of thought, of expression, and of conduct is to be found among the people of God ; for wrong thoughts received and cherished, *must* result in wrong words, and in wrong practices.

THE FIRST MENTION OF "THE CHURCH," is found in Matthew xvi. 17-18, R.V., where the Lord Jesus, in answer to Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," says—"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." And then He adds to that revelation which Peter had received from heaven, this further revelation, which had not before been made known to any man on earth—"And I ALSO say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." It is worthy of notice, that in this first mention of the "Church," the Lord speaks of it as "*My Church*"; that He *Himself* is the Builder; and that at the time these words were uttered, the building was yet *future*. It had not then actually begun, nor could it begin, until His death and resurrection had been accomplished, and the Holy Spirit had come down from heaven. Its formation began at Pentecost (Acts ii. 1). Such is the Church in its Divine aspect, in which man's work has no place: into which every believer is brought on the day of his new birth, by the sovereign act of Divine grace and power, and in which he remains for ever.

THE BODY OF CHRIST.

The names given to the "Church" in this aspect, are instructive, as they are Divine.

1. It is "the Church which is His Body" (Eph. i. 23, Col. i. 24) formed by the Holy Spirit. So we read—"In one Spirit were we all baptised into ONE BODY, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free" (1 Cor. xii. 13, R.V.). Of this vital unity, Christ Risen is the Head (Eph. v. 30). "There is *one* Body" (Eph. iv. 4)—not many. Those who form its members are called out from their natural and national standing, as Jews and Gentiles, to form this "one new man" (Eph. ii. 15), to be "fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body" (Eph. ii. 6), and this is the only "membership" known to Scripture. We read nothing there about "membership of a church:" this is man's theology—man's tradition. As the Risen Christ is the Head, so He is the "saviour (that is, the preserver) of the body" (Eph. v. 23). It cannot be marred or divided by men or demons; its unity is Divinely constituted and Divinely maintained—"the gates of Hades *shall not prevail* against it."

THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

2. It is God's Building, and groweth in continuation as stone is laid upon stone, into a temple (Eph. ii. 21), in which He will dwell for ever. This aspect of the Church is so wholly Divine, so completely the work of Christ the Builder, that not one stone can ever be removed, and nothing but genuine materials shall ever be brought into it. The temple built by Solomon on Moriah, the place of sacrifice offered

and judgment stayed (Gen. xxii. 2 ; 2 Chron. iii. 1), of prepared materials, is the type of this.

3. It is always in the singular, never "bodies" or "temples," for as it cannot be marred, neither can it be multiplied. Although the formation of the Church, as the body of Christ, began at Pentecost, the full revelation concerning it, was not given until Paul had been converted, and called to become, not only a "minister of the Gospel" but also of "the Church" (Col. i. 23-24). To him the mystery which had been hid for ages past was made known (Eph. iii. 8-10, and in his Epistles it has come down to us. The Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians are specially devoted to the unfolding of this aspect of the Church—the former with the body, the fulness (or completion) of Him who filleth all in all, and the latter with the Head, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. ii. 10). We are not told to keep the unity of the body, or to "gather on the ground of the body," or to confederate assemblies or frame a system of discipline thereon; simply because in the Church as the body of Christ, all is in Divine keeping. It has been revealed to believing men in order that they might "see what is the stewardship of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God" (Eph. iii. 9, R.V. margin), and that heavenly principalities and powers may learn through the Church, "the manifold wisdom of God." For although saints can neither make nor meddle with the Divine workmanship, they are called to walk and act according to it, and to have their affections towards fellow-saints fashioned thereby. They are

Church Truths.

to "walk worthy of the vocation" (Eph. iv. 1), where-with they are called, and not according to nature's relationships or worldly maxims. If saints of God get a grasp of this from God Himself, as it has been made known in the Word, they will be saved from many a pit-fall and by-path, into which earnest and well-meaning men have stumbled, just because they failed to see the distinct and heavenly calling of the Church according to the eternal purpose of God.

The Church thus viewed, is not to be regarded as synonomus with local "Churches" of which there are many. By confusing these, and the titles by which they are described in the inspired Word, a perfect jargon of terms has been put into currency, which makes it well nigh impossible for those who are bewildered thereby, to have any definite and Scriptural conception of the Church in either of its aspects. But the words of the Lord are "pure words," and the business of the man of God, the diligent reader and student of the Scriptures is, to "prove the things that differ" (Phil. i. 10, R.V.), and to be "rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Tim. ii. 15).

THE CHURCH'S CALLING.

We will next seek to gather from the Word some of the distinctive and peculiar blessings and responsibilities which belong to the Church in its Divine and heavenly aspect, in other words—to all believers of this dispensation.

There are certain blessings common to believers of all dispensations—those which have preceded, and those which will follow the age that now runs its

course. On these we need not dwell. Abel, Abraham, David, Daniel, John the Baptist, Paul, and martyred saints of days yet to come, although the days of their earthly pilgrimage were spent in different dispensations of God's dealings with men, were all saved by grace through faith; they were all quickened by the one Spirit, and by virtue of the one sacrifice of Christ on which their faith rested, which, although dimly foreseen by some of them, was ever before the eye of God their sins were forgiven; they were permitted to walk with God and serve Him on earth, and when earthly life was past, they were welcomed to a place of rest and comfort in the world beyond. These, and other blessings, with a part in the first resurrection, and a share in heavenly glory, are common to the saints of all past ages, of the time that now is, and of an age yet to come (see Rev. xx. 4).

But that which is peculiar to the Church, is beyond all this. It was a *mystery* to saints of all the ages past, a mystery which from the ages hath been "*hid* in God," and which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. iii. 5, R.v.). To men in the flesh, unregenerate men, it is a "mystery" still, beyond the natural man's grasp, but revealed to saints "through the Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. ii. 10). To the Apostle Paul, who was by God's call the chosen vessel to unfold this mystery, it was made known by "revelation" (Eph. iii. 3), and in order

that those to whom he wrote might receive and understand the full meaning of his words, he prayed unceasingly that to them also "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" might be given.

What then is this mystery, and what are those distinct and peculiar operations of God, which belong to the Church alone?

First and chief, "That the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ through the Gospel" (Eph. iii. 4-6, R.V.). In a former dispensation, God had drawn a sharp line between the Jews in covenant relationship with Himself, and the Gentiles afar off: a middle wall of partition kept them apart, so that they had nothing in common, but now that middle wall has been broken down, and God is gathering out from both Jews and Gentiles by the Gospel a people who are being formed into "one new man." This does not mean that saved Gentiles are admitted to share Jewish privileges, but that Jew and Gentile are alike severed from their national and natural standing, and formed into "one new man"—which expression, as another has aptly put it—describes in a word the Church's "*unity, novelty, and diversity.*"

This Church is *one*. There is *one body* (Eph. iv. 4) and *one head* (Col. i. 18), and these together form "*The Christ*" (1 Cor. xii. 12, see Young's Version.).

The Church is *new*. This is more than recent, it is new in kind. As one has said, "There are two words in the Greek language translated 'new.' One means *new* as to *time*, another *new* as to *quality*."

This word is the latter—a new kind of man; not of Adam's standing, but having the position and glory of the Risen Head.

The Church is *heavenly*. "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. iii. 30). She has no portion on the earth. Neither lands nor benefices belong to her; she is a stranger here. Like her Head and Lord, she has no resting-place beneath the sun. Heaven is her Fatherland; heaven is her home.

The Church is *diverse*: not one member, but many; the utmost variety, yet the most perfect unity, embracing in its scope all believers of every clime, some known, most unknown to each other; yet all embraced within the same eternal purpose, all formed and indwelt by the same Spirit, and all destined to share the same eternal glory.

Union with a glorified Christ in heaven by the Holy Ghost and with each other as members of His body constitute the distinctive blessings of those who are of the Church.

It was this "mystery" which the Apostle Paul was called to unfold, and of which he was in himself so manifestly and marvellously a "pattern" (see 1 Tim. i. 16). Arrested on his way to Damascus by the word of the Glorified Christ—"Why persecutest thou *Me*"—a word that told to him and tells to us how close the bond, and how vital the union between Christ and His own. And that day he was called out from his *Jewish* nationality and religion (Acts xxii. 3; Phil. iii. 5), and from his *Gentile* citizenship (Acts xxii. 27) to form part of the Mystery, the One Body, the Church, and his natural and national

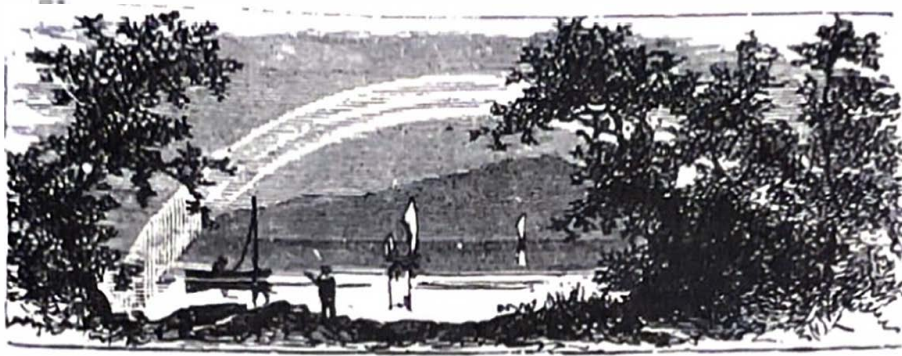
pride and religion were abandoned, for suffering and reproach with Christ. A theoretic knowledge of this—like any other truth—may be gained, with no corresponding practice, but he to whose heart and soul it comes in the unction of the Holy Spirit, and as the very voice of God, will under its power be fashioned and transformed, so as to answer in spirit and in character in some measure to the heavenly position, and to walk worthy of the high and glorious vocation wherewith he has been called.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

It is taught by some that all believers from Abel to the end of time are included in the Church. Can this be proved from Scripture?

No. As we have sought to show, the *Ecclesia* is a distinct and definite outcalling which began at Pentecost by the descent of the Spirit (Acts ii) and will end at the descent of the Son of God from heaven (1 Thess. i. 10; iv. 17). There were saints before, and there will be saints after, but not of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Is it right to speak of the "Jewish Church," or the "Christian Church, as if there were several? Scripture does not so speak. "The Church in the Wilderness" (Acts vii. 38) was the congregation of Jehovah in whose midst the tabernacle stood, with its ritual, sacrifices, priesthood, all of which came to an end at the Cross. Israel was an earthly people; the Church is heavenly. The latter is not an improvement or elongation of the former, but an entire contrast to it, alike in its calling, position, worship, and hope.



The Local Assembly : Its Constitution and Functions.

FEW words have been more perverted from their Scriptural use and meaning, than the word which is generally rendered "church" in our English Bibles. In common phraseology, people speak of (a) "going to church," which means a building set apart for religious purposes; (b) of "joining the church," which has reference to becoming a member of the congregation of people who meet in it; (c) of "Mr. B.'s church," which means the people over whom he presides, besides other uses of the word. The word is used by the Lord Jesus first in Matthew xvi. 18, where He uses the words "My Church" in reference to the entire company of His people of the present dispensation, and next in Matthew xviii. 17, where it has reference to a local and accessible company of believers, who statedly assemble together and can act unitedly. These two first uses of the word are

especially worthy of our consideration, as they indicate the two main uses of the word in the Epistles, as being applicable (1) to the body of Christ (Eph. i. 23), and (2) to a local company of Christians in the habit of assembling together in a city (Acts xiii. 1; xiv. 27), or in a house (Rom. xvi. 5; Col. iv. 15).

HOW IT IS FORMED.

The means through which such local companies come into existence is plainly set before us in the Word, especially in the Acts of the Apostles. In fulfilment of the commission given by the Lord (see Matthew xxviii. 19, 20; Mark xv. 15, 16; Luke xxiv. 47-49), His servants preached the Gospel—first to the Jews (Acts ii. 22) and later to the Gentiles (Acts x. 42-48). The result was that sinners believed and were saved, becoming disciples of the Lord (Acts xi. 26; xiii. 62; xiv. 21, *mar.*) These being baptized, were led on in the ways of the Lord, being taught “all things whatsoever” (Matt. xxviii. 20, with Acts xviii. 11; xx. 31) He had commanded, both in their individual and assembly life, with the result, that in each place to which the Gospel of God was carried and preached for the conversion of sinners (1 Thess. i. 5-9), and the Word of God taught and received for the instruction and edification of saints, there remained after the preachers had gone on to other parts, assemblies composed of believers formed according to a Divine pattern (1 Thess. ii. 13, 14) When one was

converted in early times, he had no need to ask what church he should join, or with what local company he should seek to be identified. There was only one assembly in each place, or if there were various meeting places—as in larger cities and towns there may have been—they were the same in character and constitution, not various denominations bearing different names and holding different doctrines as now, but simply and only churches of God, assembling in the Name of the Lord Jesus, according to Matthew xviii. 20.

THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM.

As the result of Peter's preaching in the city of Jerusalem on the Pentecostal day, the Word was received by about three thousand Spirit-convicted souls, who immediately were baptized and added to the one hundred and twenty disciples who were together before (Acts i. 15), and of these disciples it is recorded that "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts ii. 42). To this company is given the name, "the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts viii. 1), that is, the local assembly there, into which they had been brought, to share the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship of the saints, the breaking of the bread and the prayers, in all of which they "continued stedfastly." Such words could not be applied to membership in the body of Christ, which is a position in which "continuing stedfastly" has no meaning. Into the

local assembly one is brought by his own desire in seeking such a place (see Acts ix. 26), and by the act of the assembly in receiving or welcoming him "in the Lord" (Rom. xvi. 1, 2). On the part of the one desiring thus to be identified with the local assembly, there will be some exercise of heart as to the importance of the step he desires to take, and some perception of the fact that he is seeking to share the privileges and responsibilities of God's assembly, while on the part of those who receive, there will be such discernment and care exercised as is worthy of so important and responsible an action.

RECEPTION TO THE ASSEMBLY.

The receiving or welcoming of a believer to the fellowship of saints, although in itself a joyful as it ought always to be a hearty act, is not to be regarded as a light matter, or hurried through with little thought or care.

In the case of one newly converted, nothing beyond clear evidence of conversion with a desire to learn and do the will of the Lord would be required to ensure his hearty reception. In days of much empty profession, time for godly discernment and care may be necessary, or if personally unknown, the testimony of one like Barnabas, in whom the Lord's people have confidence. He was able to testify how Paul had (1) "seen the Lord in the way," and (2) "preached boldly at Damascus in the Name of Jesus" (Acts ix. 26, 28)—in other words, of his conversion and his practice. The

evangelist—naturally a sanguine man in estimating the reality of those who profess to be converted under his ministry—ought not to hasten the reception of his converts, but leave this to others having fuller opportunity of knowing their ways. And when one is received, he should then be lovingly cared for and “taught the way of God more perfectly” (Acts xviii. 26). There is ample scope for such Priscilla and Aquila service amongst young believers, and evidently fewer to share it as the years go by.

With one who has been in a sect, greater care is needed. First, regarding his conversion. Many who have not been born of God, are in full membership of “the churches,” and while a profession of conversion may be required in some, in others the standard is so generally low, that any who can give a clear statement of evangelical doctrine may pass in without much difficulty. Then, as most of the denominations now regard fundamental error with complacency and permit it to be taught in their pulpits, it may be necessary to inquire whether the applicant is personally sound in the faith, otherwise he may bring in such error as will corrupt and mislead others. And as there must be some cause why he is leaving the denomination of his choice, it is only reasonable he should be asked what this is, otherwise you may give refuge to one who is a troubler, or has had a quarrel, or cannot get his way, or may be fleeing from such discipline as exists in the place where he has been.

Whatever time may be necessary to make the welcome of one seeking to "join himself to" (Acts ix. 26) such a company of believers united and hearty, such delay is not rejection, but rather godly exercise in seeking to carry out in a way worthy of the Lord that which He has committed unto them.

THREE ASSEMBLY FUNCTIONS.

There are three assembly acts in which all, according to the measure of their intelligence and ability, are called to share. (1) The *Reception* or welcoming of a fellow-believer into their fellowship. (2) The *Expulsion* of one who through continuance in such sin as the Scripture marks out for excommunication, has in obedience to the Word of the Lord to be put away from among them, with a view to bring him to humiliation and repentance. (3) The *Restoration* of such as have become repentant, renouncing their evil ways, or being recovered from the evil doctrines in which they had become ensnared, and manifesting true restoration to God. In either case it is the whole assembly that are called to act, as the words "Ye receive" (Rom. xvi. 2), "put away from among yourselves" (1 Cor. v. 13), "Ye should forgive him" (2 Cor. ii. 7), tell. Those tending the flock and taking the oversight (1 Pet. v. 2) will, in this as in all else connected with the assembly's welfare, doubtless take the lead (Heb. xiii. 17, R.V.) always solemnly setting before the saints their responsibilities connected with them, but it is not the overseers apart

from the assembly who bring in, put away, or restore. Hence the need of such wholesome ministry as keeps the responsibilities as well as the privileges of Christian fellowship before the Lord's people, exercising them in what each is expected to be and do. For the fellowship of saints as set forth in the Word includes much more than meeting in one place and breaking bread together.

OUR RESOURCES.

But some may say, The Church as a whole has failed, and has become divided into many denominations. What are we to do? Which are we to choose?

We take it, that as a principle it will be readily admitted by all who love the Word of God, and have learned to be guided by it in all things ecclesiastical as well as personal, that if the pattern of what God's assembly was at the beginning, and is to be to the end, is given there, it is the responsibility of all who call Jesus, Lord, to acknowledge His right to say how His people are to be brought and kept together while He is absent and they are on earth. The common notion that a Christian is at liberty to choose his "church" in the same way as he may his dwelling-house, and to call and pay for his "minister" as he does for his doctor, has no authority whatever from the Word of God. The pattern of what the local assembly was and is to be, is given in the Word, and there is not a single hint that it may be altered or repealed because of

man's disobedience and sin. On the contrary, the children of God, amid the last days, are cast upon "the words spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 17) for their guidance, and, as Paul committed the elders of the local assembly at Ephesus, in view of approaching evils and divisions, to "God and the Word of His grace" (Acts xx. 32), so now amid the general failure there remains to the individual believer wherever found, and the assembly however small in numbers, the living Head and Lord at God's right hand in heaven, from whom all increase and blessing flows, the abiding Comforter as Guide and Administrator, and the Written Word as the all-sufficient standard and final appeal in everything through "all the days" till the Lord shall come.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Is it right to say that because the Church as a whole has failed in its testimony, there is no assembly testimony to be attempted now? Revelation ii. 3, shows there will be "churches" until the Lord come, and that they are instructed and encouraged as such. Man's failure can never alter God's Word, and ought not to diminish its authority, either in individual or collective testimony. How would it do to say that because Christians have failed, we should not aspire to be individually what the Word sets before us?

Worship, Ministry, and Rule in the Assembly.

THE fellowship of saints in its assembly aspect has its privileges and also its responsibilities. Some of these may be briefly enumerated.

1. Their united WORSHIP of God, as a holy priesthood (1 Pet. ii. 5), fitted and guided by the Spirit (Phil. iii. 3, R.V.) and the Word. As individual believers, we may bless the Lord "at all times" (Psa. xxxiv. 1) and offer the sacrifice of praise to God "continually" (Heb. xiii. 15). But when the whole Church comes together into one place (1 Cor. xiv. 23), it is to unitedly express the worship that is due unto God, whom we know as Father, and "the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (John iv. 23). It is when thus assembled, that the Divine principles of 1 Cor. xiv. are to be acknowledged and practised. Such an assembling is essentially different in character from a meeting for ministry of the Word, in which a number of the Lord's people come together to hear one or more whom the Lord has gifted as teachers, and equally so from a meeting where the unconverted are invited to hear the Gospel preached by an evangelist. The LORD calls together His people when they assemble for worship, and He Himself is "in the

midst" as Lord, to whom all honour is to be paid. Those who come together do not arrange what is to be said or done beforehand, but count on the present guidance of the Spirit of God, who dwells in the Church, as the Source of all power for spiritual worship and edifying ministry. Those brought into the assembly, whether as young believers newly brought out from the world by conversion to God, or those older in the faith brought out from worldly religion with its human arrangements and cut-and-dry forms, need to be taught the truth of God regarding these things, so that they may intelligently and with true exercise of heart take their part in that which God has called them unto, and which it is for their own and their brethren's blessing that they should share. There are many complaints that so few take part in leading audibly the prayers, thanksgivings, and worship of the assembly when thus gathered. But may part of the cause not be, that many hardly know how or when to do so? When a certain few always lead the thanksgivings, give out the hymns, read the Word, and give whatever ministry there may be, it becomes a sort of "unwritten law" that they are expected to keep the chimes going, and generally they do. But each male believer who has ability to express himself intelligently and is in right condition of soul, may, and certainly often would be heard leading the worship of the assembled saints, if the truth of God were exercising his heart as it ought to do. It is not here a question of gift.

That comes under the subject of ministry. But here it is worship, in which all, in virtue of their common priesthood, may share, subject always to the Lordship of Christ, the leading of the Spirit, and the truth of the Word. When Christians sit listless, turning over the leaves of their hymn books or gazing around the room, instead of being silently occupied in meditation on the person and work of Christ, it is little wonder if they have nothing to offer and manifest little spiritual interest in the exercises of others. In order to enjoy in full measure the presence and blessing of the Lord in the midst of His assembled people, it is necessary for each one to come up in personal communion with Him. If the week is spent in worldliness, if the early hours of the Lord's Day are spent in bed, then a hurried dressing and breakfast, with little, perhaps no time, with God and over His Word, it is no great wonder if there is silence or apathy, or worse still, carnal activity filling up time, or inflicting upon others what is intended for ministry which is utterly destitute of grip or freshness. Pauses in true spiritual worship, when the heart is silent before the Lord, are truly blessed, and ought never to be disturbed—for the sake of doing something; but pauses of spiritual poverty, when nobody has anything to offer, are the result of backsliding in heart and carnality of spirit, and ought to be a cause of self-judgment to us all. Although the worship of God is the primary object of such a gathering, yet this does not exclude words of

ministry from any to whom they may be given. Very frequently a presentation of Christ, in some of His many glories, and of His work in some of its many aspects, in the grace and power of the Spirit, nourishes the spirit of worship among the saints, and brings forth a fuller and richer measure of it. But ministry on general subjects, quenching the flame of spiritual worship, is not in season at such a time. Wherever it has become the rule for a "ministering brother" to give his stated address, often out of all keeping with the character of the gathering—the spirit of true worship declines, and God's people come to *get* rather than to GIVE.

2. The observance of THE LORD'S SUPPER on the first day of the week (Acts xx. 7), as the Lord desired and as the early disciples practised. The central object of the assembly's gathering together in one place on the first day of the week, is to "show forth the Lord's death" till He come (1 Cor. xi. 26). When preaching and teaching—however gifted the preacher may be—takes the primary place, and The Lord's Supper is relegated to the last few minutes of the assembling, it has ceased to be where the Spirit and the Word of God would have it. However profitable it may be for saints to hear the Lord's servants speak of Him, the highest privilege of all is to listen to Himself and to be occupied in adoring contemplation of His Person and His Work.

3. The GIVING of their substance to the Lord (Heb. xiii. 16; 1 Cor. xvi. 1), is part of the saints'

worship, and should never be thought of as a mere paying of expenses or passing a paltry coin for missionary work. If the Word of God and its teaching regarding this matter were better known, and their responsibilities kept before God's people, there would be no lack, and no need for begging appeals to meet urgent needs. Whatever is given to the Lord out of love for Him, is acceptable, but what is extorted by continuous demands and given with a grudge, is reckoned of no value in heaven.

MINISTRY.

As worship goes up *to* God, *through* Christ, *by* the Spirit, *from* the Church, so ministry comes down *from* God, *by* Christ, *through* the Spirit, *to* the Church. And while all believers are worshippers, and as a "holy priesthood" may draw near to God (Heb. x. 22) to offer the sacrifice of praise, all are not fitted to minister in the assembly, or to publicly preach the Gospel to the world. In relation to the assembly, we read that "God hath set *some* in the Church" (1 Cor. xii. 28) with gifts for ministry—not all. And in the church at Antioch we read there were "*certain* prophets and teachers" (Acts xiii. 1), whose names are given, and who were evidently well known and recognized as gifts from the glorified Head in heaven (Eph. iv. 11, 13), set in their midst for a time at least to minister the Word to the saints for their edification. It would be their responsibility as gifted by the Lord to exercise their ministry, and that of the saints in

that assembly to receive it and see that ample opportunity was given for its exercise. There is nothing in the Word to warrant an exclusive ministry confined to one man, nor is there any authority for an every man ministry, or that condition of things where anyone who imagines he is fit, may speak when and as often as he likes. The Church has no power to choose its own ministers by ballot, nor has the State any God-given right to appoint them. True ministers are from Christ the Head in heaven, fitted and guided by the Spirit, and furnished from the Word, for their ministry, and the saints are responsible to receive and recognize all such men that the Lord gives.

The *Evangelist* goes out to the world with the Gospel, guided by the Spirit. He is the servant of no church or society, but looks directly to the Lord for his orders and support; and if he is a true man, faithful to his task, he will make full proof of his ministry in sinners being saved and brought into the assembly. The *Teacher* expounds the Word, feeding the flock and building up the body of Christ. He is a man of the Word, and if his own soul is well fed and his spiritual condition right, the saints will be blessed through his ministry and gladly recognize him as a minister of God. The *Pastor* has a heart for the sheep, and spends much time visiting and guiding them. He may not have gifts for public ministry, but his words of counsel will be valued by those in perplexity and difficulty; they will seek his aid in times of trial. Those so minis-

tering may give all or part of their time to their ministry, according to the measure of their gifts and the call of God, but no distinction is made in the Word between the official "evangelist" who does nothing but preach, and the man who makes tents or sells boots to earn his living, and preaches Christ as doors are opened to him. When God calls one from his tents and boats to go into unreached places with the Gospel, or to preach the Word among His people, He looks after his wants, and ministers to him in temporal things through the purses of His people, but it is a step none should take until they are fully convinced of the Divine call, and have the fellowship of the assembly in which they are, as we see in Acts xiii. 2, 3.

RULE.

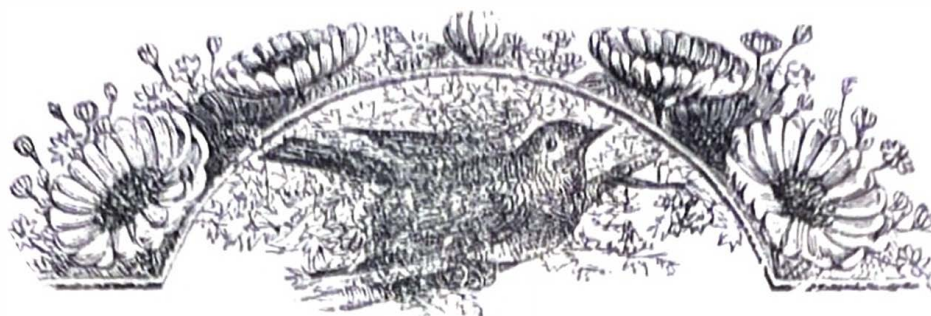
In the early assemblies, there were some whom apostles and their delegates appointed as *Elders* (see Acts xiv. 23). They were not chosen by the saints, but evidently set in the place to which the Lord had fitted them, by the apostles, possibly at a time when the Christians in the various assemblies were unable to discern the spiritual qualifications necessary for such a sphere. There are no apostles now, nor others who can so appoint, but the Lord still gives some hearts with "earnest care" (2 Cor. viii. 16) for His people, and they "desire" and exercise their spiritual gifts in shepherd work, feeding and guiding the flock (1 Pet. v. 1-3). Such men may easily be known by their

qualifications (1 Tim. iii. 1-5) and the work they do (1 Thess. v. 14), being honoured (1 Thess. v. 12, 13) and obeyed (Heb. xiii. 7) without any formal recognition, such as obtains in the world's churches, where "ordination" services and their accompaniments are "writ large." To serve the Lord here according to the pattern and example He left, will never be a path of worldly honour or recompence: it may involve rejection, poverty, and shame. But in the day of His judgment-seat, all who have served Him faithfully will receive His well done and His reward (Rev. xxii. 12; 1 Pet. v. 4). But they must wait for it, and not even count on their service being always appreciated or recognized among those to whom it is rendered here.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Is it right to speak of "receiving to The Lord's Table"? It is not a Scriptural expression, Though it is while the assembly is gathered together for worship and to show forth the Lord's death, that receiving or putting away takes place, one is received to all the privileges and responsibilities of the assembly, and not simply to break bread, or to any other isolated act.

How is the leading of the Spirit to be discerned? On the part of him who leads in praise or ministry, by the inward conviction that he has the fitting hymn or word, and by others that they are able to share it in fellowship with God and with blessing.



A Brief Sketch of Church History.

WHILE the messages to the Seven Churches, as recorded in Revelation, chapters ii. and iii., were undoubtedly addressed to seven actually existing companies of believers in the places named, and in common with all the other epistles addressed to individuals and to assemblies, as all Scripture, are to be received and used by us for our personal edification and guidance, they have a further application to the whole course of the Church in testimony through the entire dispensation, and trace its history from Pentecostal power and devotion, through the centuries, in all the salient features of its decline and failure, down to Laodicean apostasy and rejection by the Lord. The position of the Lord "in the midst" of the lampstands, the symbolic number seven, the word "mystery" used in connexion with these churches, and the comparison of the seven messages with the development of the evils named in the corresponding periods in the actual history of the Church

show, that the Lord, in His Divine Omniscience, is here giving an inspired history of that which bears His Name upon earth, from its beginning to its close. And let us remember that this is the only Church history that shows "the things which are," from the Divine standpoint. Men may boast of numbers and wealth and influence and progress, but the living Lord looks deeper, and searches the heart. He here lays bare the real condition of things, as He only sees and knows it.

THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH.

The early chapters of Acts give us a picture of "the church which was at Jerusalem" (chap. viii. 1) in its early power and beauty. Separate from the world, at unity in itself, it stood as a light-bearer for God and a witness to its absent Lord in the world. Later, in the same Book, we read of assemblies coming into existence in Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and many other places, all formed after the same pattern, owning the one Head in heaven, the one Spirit as Administrator, Power, and Guide in all worship and service, and the Word of God—so far as it had been given—as their only Standard and Rule of Faith. The effect of such a testimony in the midst of the Jewish people and far beyond among the Gentiles was marvellous. Many thousands—or, as the word is, "myriads" (Acts xxi. 20)—of the Jews believed, and great cities such as Ephesus, Athens, and even

Rome itself, were stirred and moved by the preaching of the Gospel and the presence of a people in their midst who, answering to the word *Ecclesia*, had been called out of the world, to bear witness personally in their lives and unitedly as gathered unto His Name (Matt. xviii. 20), to the living Lord in heaven. The lampstands were thus set up to give light, and the world felt and owned its power.

HOW THE LIGHT WAS DIMMED.

A true testimony for God and His Christ can only be maintained by a right spiritual condition within, by holding fast the truth, and by continuing in the path of obedience to God and separation from the world. When these decline, the Spirit, who is the power and secret of all true testimony, is grieved and quenched, and ceases to operate freely through channels which have been clogged by sin. Under such conditions, further declension and corruption become easy. And so the light was dimmed. Even while the apostles were alive and serving among the assemblies, attempts were made to introduce an effete Judaism (Acts xv. 1, 2), pagan philosophies, and traditions of men (Col. ii. 8), False teachers of destructive heresies (2 Pet. ii. 1) sought and found their way among the assemblies of saints, leading them into many errors, and even from their own midst men, and evidently leaders, arose "speaking perverse things" (Acts xx. 30), denying the very fundamentals of the faith (2 Tim. ii. 17, 18). And before the apostles passed

away, they foretold of deeper declension and greater corruption to follow (2 Tim. iy. 3 ; 2 Pet. iii. 16, 17).

The Lord's message to the Church at EPHESUS (Rev. ii. 1) deals with the apostolic age and after it, when first love was left and clerisy began to arise.

The SMYRNA period tells of the pagan persecution which followed in the days of Aurelius (A.D. 157) and others, who sat on the Imperial throne. Christians in these times were hunted to death in tens of thousands, and Christianity was by edict to be extirpated from the Roman earth, God graciously overruling and using this means to stay the spread of corruption and bring His own people back unto Himself.

HOW SEPARATION WAS LOST.

PERGAMOS tells of the union of the Church with the world, which took place in the time of the Emperor Constantine, at the beginning of the fourth century, when persecution ceased and the emperor became, in A.D. 312, nominally a Christian, uniting paganism and Christianity, proclaiming the union of Christ and State, and ordaining himself head of the Church, while retaining his office of *Pontifex Maximus*, high priest of the heathen, and blending the festivals of their idols with the ordinances of the Church. Thus it was that separation to God was abandoned by the churches throughout the Roman earth. The once-persecuted bishops and preachers were raised to the place of lordly prelates decked in gold and scarlet, and became

servants of the throne. The Church had fallen from her first estate and was dwelling "where Satan's seat is." May the lesson not be lost, nor the warning unheeded, by the children of God upon whom the ends of the age have come. The enemy is ever bent on the same device, for well he knows that when saints and sinners, light and darkness, the Church and the world become united, making common cause, all power for true testimony ceases.

THE CHURCH RULING THE WORLD.

THYATIRA represents Papal Rome dating from the pontificate of Gregory, surnamed The Great, A.D. 590. About the middle of the eighth century the Pope became a temporal sovereign, and ruled the world in the name of the Church. Then followed the "dark ages," in which all true corporate testimony for God was extinguished, although faithful individuals, whose names are held in honour by heaven, lived and died for the true faith. And here, it is necessary to remember, that while the first four periods supersede each other, the one ceasing when the next came into power, it is not so with Thyatira—that is, with Romanism as a system. This continues alongside of the others that follow it, to the end, developing into "Babylon the Great" (Rev. xviii.), the apostate Church, embracing within it every form of false religion, idolatry, and blasphemy, but all opposed to God, His Christ, and His Truth.

THE REFORMATION AND AFTER.

SARDIS is the symbol of Protestantism, which as a system began in the sixteenth century, and quickly spread over a large part of the Continent of Europe. This period is generally known as the Reformation. That there was a time of great spiritual power and blessing, with the revival and preaching of the great Gospel truth of Justification by Faith alone, we do not doubt. Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Farel, Calvin, and others, whose names are held in honour, were true men of God and channels of blessing to thousands. They gave the Book of God and the Gospel of Christ back to the nations, from which both had been stolen and hid by the Papal Church. But the Reformation was a political as well as a spiritual work, and the Reformers as a rule held positions as ministers in the State Churches. There was no attempt made by them to sever the Church from the world, or to go back to the Word of God, where they had found the great truths of the Gospel, which they received and proclaimed so faithfully, to seek the mind of the Lord regarding the path of His people as "not of the world." The result was, that each country had its own particular form of Church constitution and government: some were governed by the State, others by the suffrages of the people. Protestantism as a system soon became what the message to the church in Sardis describes it, "having a name to live," while

dead. Whole communities became Christian, and are still so named by subscribing to a creed and submitting to the rite of infant baptism, by which they are said to become "children of God and inhabitants of the kingdom of heaven." The State "Church of England" is so constituted, and so virtually is "The Church of Scotland," while most of the dissenting bodies which have come into existence at various periods, have their own particular "constitution" and standards, all claiming to have "Scripture" for their existence, but not regarding the Word of God in its solitary dignity and supreme authority, apart from the traditions and doctrines of men, as their only Rule of Faith.

DECLENSION AND REVIVAL.

The Lord's message to Sardis is to "strengthen the things which remain," to remember how they had "received and heard" the Gospel and the Word of God, which they are commanded to "hold fast." But the Protestant churches have not held fast the truths which the Reformation restored, but are continually giving them up. Sacerdotalism and Ritualism have rendered the Gospel void in many of the State churches, and a steady advance toward Romish idolatry is their sad record. Rationalism, with a general surrender of the foundation truths of the Faith, is rampant in the "dissenting" denominations, or—as they now love to be designated—the "Free Churches." But a freedom to deny the Divinity of Christ, the need and value of the

Atonement, man's Ruin and need of Regeneration, and the conscious punishment of the ungodly, with a liberty to dissect the Bible and reject whatever of it does not commend itself to Reason, is not a godly but a lawless liberty, which is leading on to infidelity and the abandonment of Revelation, preparing to receive the coming "Lie" of Antichrist. Yet, in mercy, the Lord has kept a lamp burning for Himself even in the midst of such conditions, and has sent times of revival and refreshing to His own, with awakening and salvation to the world; notably in the eighteenth century in the days of Wesley, Whitefield, and others, and later in the Revivals of 1840 and 1859, in which thousands were saved. And even now, while everything is advancing to deeper declension, in spite of increasing worldliness, corruption of doctrine, departure from the faith, and indifference to eternal things, that abound in all the denominations throughout Christendom, the Lord has a godly remnant who love His Word and seek, as far as the systems by which they are held in spiritual bondage will allow them, to spread His Gospel and walk in His fear, while individually serving Him.

A FRESH WORK AND A NEW TESTIMONY.

The message to PHILADELPHIA—the last save one of the seven—describes a revived and restored condition, although evidently of a small remnant, who only have "a little strength," and who use it to "keep His Word" and "not deny His Name."

The *Name* of the Lord and His *Word* have special prominence in this message, and there is encouragement and promise to those who seek to "hold fast" that which they have, with the blessed hope of the Lord's speedy coming and the saints' reward. Has there been anything corresponding to this, since Romanism and Protestantism took their places in the Divinely-given history of this wonderful panorama of "the things which are" of the present dispensation? Undoubtedly there has, although it is not of such a character as to attract the crowd, or receive recognition in the great systems of Christendom, but rather to have their contempt and scorn. Since the world church systems became so corrupt in doctrine and so carnal in practice, many true children of God have been drawn closer to the Person of Christ and to the written Word, to find that which their souls seek after, and the result of this has been, that those so drawn have found themselves *together*. It was with no desire to form a new denomination, or to reconstruct a Pentecostal and perfect church, that such were at first brought together, but simply and only to seek the Lord and His face, while leaders of thought in the churches were advancing towards Ritualism on the one hand and Rationalism on the other.

GATHERING UNTO THE LORD'S NAME.

About the time that Pusey, Manning, and others were issuing from Oxford their famous "Tracts," in which the leaven of Romanism and Ritualism,

which has since spread throughout the Church of England and elsewhere, was introduced, a few godly men were drawn together here and there to read and study the Scriptures, to seek blessing from the Lord and light upon their path. They did not at first even know that others similarly exercised were meeting for the same purpose in other places. It was manifestly a fresh operation of the Spirit of God among those who were sighing and crying for spiritual reviving, and mourning over the dearth and desolation around them. Step by step, as they got further light from the Word, and with great reluctance, they were led out from the various denominations with which they had been connected, to gather simply and only in the Name of the Lord Jesus according to Matthew xviii. 20, without adopting any distinctive name other than those given to all true children of God in the Word. They observed The Lord's Supper like the early disciples, on the first day of the week (Acts xx. 7). They worshipped God unitedly as guided by the Spirit, and used whatever gifts the living Head of the Church had given them for mutual edification (1 Cor. xii.—xiv.) The Gospel was preached in much simplicity and with great power, and many were converted (Acts xi. 21). In the city of Dublin, and in parts of Devonshire, as well as in more obscure places, companies of believers came into existence and increased in numbers on these simple lines. When some asked what they called themselves, they answered—

“Christians, brethren in Christ, disciples of the Lord.” One group of earnest preachers who were in the habit of going out from the town of Plymouth to preach in the surrounding villages, were asked what they were and where they came from. Their simple answer was—“We are brethren from Plymouth.” This was the origin of the meaningless appellation “Plymouth Brethren” which was then given, and has ever since been used by the religious world to describe those Christians in every place the world over, who refuse to take any other name than those which God in His Word gives to all His own, but to none who are unregenerate.

It is not our purpose here to trace the history of this movement, or to record its growth, or describe its failings. Suffice it to say, that while the eye of the Lord was upon it for good, and His hand opened liberally towards it in rich spiritual blessing, the same Great Adversary who entered the fair scene in Eden and marred the first bright handiwork of God in Creation, and who sought and found his way into the Pentecostal Church in Jerusalem, first as persecutor and then as corruptor, and thus sought to spoil the testimony thus raised to God in Redemption, had his eye on this fair work of Restoration and his hand stretched forth against it. Would it be any great wonder if he partly succeeded? Nothing that God ever did for the honour of His Name, the glory of His Christ, and the blessing of His people, has escaped the notice of the Great Adversary. He hates God and

all that is of Him with a perfect hatred. He is ever against Christ, in nothing more than in opposing His rightful claim to that supreme authority and place of dominion to which God has appointed Him. It was this that he opposed at the beginning of the present age, when the apostles proclaimed Him "Lord of all," and saints and assemblies owned Him Head and Ruler. Need we wonder that when a few feeble folk here and there, who had no brilliant leaders, no worldly attractions, no resources of wisdom, who sought in weakness to raise the fallen standard, upon which the Name of the Lord alone was inscribed as the Centre of gathering and the Source of supply to His assembled people, and in their confessed feebleness clung to Him, confessing Him as their Life, their Lord, their All, should this arouse the jealousy and draw forth the hatred of the Great Adversary? If he succeeded in raising an envious spirit among rival leaders, in introducing differences on points of prophecy, and latterly in leading some into erroneous views on the Person of the Divine Lord, it is only what he had done before, and will do again, if a spirit of self-sufficiency and pride gain the ascendancy. But such failure and sin, however humbling, is no more evidence that this work and way of assembling is not according to God, or without His authority and approval, than the Fall in Eden and the corruption of the Pentecostal Church are proofs of the failure of God's work in Creation and Redemption. Satan does

not oppose a religion that is of the world, or according to man—he rather patronizes and flatters it—but whatever is of the Spirit of God and for the glory of Christ, he seeks to overthrow or to corrupt and destroy. But notwithstanding manifest weakness and failure, which has greatly hindered the work of the Lord and stumbled many who were seeking after His ways, there have been, since the second decade of the last century, when this work of Restoration came into view, children of God, who, acting on light they had received from the Word, have sought back to the simple way of the early churches, and have found it a path of blessing.

WHAT WE HAVE AND WHAT WE LACK.

At various times in the history of the present dispensation since the apostolic age, zealous and we doubt not well-meaning men have imagined they were called to reconstruct the Church as it was at the beginning. Edward Irving conceived the idea of a “Catholic Apostolic Church” with restored apostles. Others have sought after “the gifts of tongues” and “miracles,” and received the counterfeit of both from the Adversary. For when any leave the well-defined path marked out in the Word, or go beyond that which is there commanded, either in their separation or expectations, they become an easy prey to that vanity, pride, and vain-glory which may, and often do exist under a profession of devotion to the Lord. But true obedience is always measured by that

which the Lord has commanded, and expectations of His approval and blessing must be according to His promise. Nowhere in these Seven Messages does He promise to restore primitive power and unity to the Church after its fall from its first estate and union with the world. The hope of the Lord's return is set before the overcomer in the last four stages which continue to the end, and to those who have "an ear to hear" the Spirit's voice, there is the promise of the Lord's present approval and of His future reward.

A PLAIN PATH FOR THE LAST DAYS.

But while there is no commandment from the Lord to set up a Pentecostal Church, or to expect the re-appearance of apostles and signs, or to work for "the unification of Christendom," there are clear and definite instructions given in the Word for believers, individually and collectively, as to the path in which they are to walk. The general failure of God's people, their co-mixture with the world, can never abrogate the commandments of the Lord to the individual to walk with God in separation from evil, according to His will, or lower the standard of personal godliness, devotion to Christ, and diligent service to His Name. This, happily, is generally admitted in individual life, in which many seek to render hearty obedience to the Lord in their personal walk and life among men. But there is a widespread idea among true believers, that in Church association, we must bear

with things as we find them, and that no remedy of existing conditions in the various "churches" is possible. And if by this is meant, that the various denominations are beyond repair, it is true, for no measure of personal godliness on the part of a few within them can alter their unscriptural constitution or cleanse them from their corruptions, or purge out the world which has become incorporated with them. What then is the plain path in regard to such organizations? The Word of the Lord is, "Come out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Cor. vi. 17). And this is not written regarding the heathen or the non-religious, as some say, to render its message void: it is concerning fellowship of righteousness with unrighteousness, communion of light with darkness, part of believer with unbeliever, not in commerce, but in religion. And this is confirmed by 2 Tim. iii. 5, where ungodliness and worldliness of all shades is lightly covered by a "form of godliness," and the definite word of the Lord to His own is, "from THESE also TURN AWAY" (R.V.). There may be true children of God mixed up with such conditions, but the commandment of the Lord must not be set aside because of their disregard of it. If in separating from the world, fellow-believers who choose to remain in association with its religious systems are severed from their brethren, that is their responsibility, but it should never hinder full obedience to the Word of the Lord in separation. And having been led out from that which is false

in obedience to the Lord, the believer is cast upon the Word for guidance in all that concerns his association with others, who are seeking to own the Lordship of Christ and the authority of the Written Word in their assembly life. And so far as they humbly walk in dependence on the Lord and in obedience to His Word, strengthened by the Spirit, in subjection to one another, learning to bear with one another's failings and to seek the edification and blessing of all, in lowly, loving service, not boasting of attainments or claiming to be anything more than a feeble folk who have sought back to the living Lord as Centre and Source of all blessing, and to His Word as their guide, and who seek in conscious weakness to cleave unto Him, they will have His approval and blessing, and be "in the midst of many peoples as a dew from the Lord." But when compromise of His truth, in order to bring it into line with popular religion, is practised, or lofty pretensions regarding Church position indulged, their light will wax dim, and they will become withered and barren, like unto a "heath in the desert."