

Can a
**YOUNG MAN
FIND THE PATH?**



ARTHUR GOOK

NEVER was a book more appropriate to the times than this incentive to a closer walk with the Lord. It provides the eager enquiring youth with the answer to those soul-questionings that trouble the young people of all nations. How many happy accidents will bring such a specific into the hands of those who stand so much in need of it? How many others will continue to plod along, their souls unsatisfied, their Saviour still undiscovered, and life still a confusion of frustrated hopes? The answer to these questions is surely a responsibility for all of us. To get this book into the hands of the great number who need and want it is a task that duty imposes upon every one who loves the Lord his God and seeks to help his neighbour.

By the same Author

CAN A YOUNG MAN TRUST HIS BIBLE?

CAN A YOUNG MAN TRUST HIS SAVIOUR?

CAN A YOUNG MAN TRUST HIS GOD?

CAN A YOUNG MAN OVERCOME?

CAN A YOUNG MAN FIND THE PATH?

ARTHUR GOOK

F.R.S.A.

*"That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself
in the house of God, which is the Church of the Living God,
the pillar and ground of the Truth" (1 Tim. 3. 15).*



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Foreword

THE experience of early days in the literary world showed me the fatuity of working a 'series' to death. I was impressed by several glaring examples. I have resisted the temptation to issue a sheaf of "Can a Young Man?" booklets on all conceivable subjects, in spite of the unexpected popularity of those already published. For some years past, however, I have had a growing conviction that the series is incomplete without such a booklet as I now venture to place before my readers.

It is not propaganda for any party, sect, movement or established set of opinions. It is, however, a serious call to the young Christian believer to seek for a closer walk with the Lord in the path He has been at pains to specify in the New Testament.

The co-operation of Christian readers is invited in passing the booklet on to such, with the prayer that they may 'find the path.'

A.G.

AKUREYRI, ICELAND.

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I

A Pilgrimage

SOME years ago the writer, as a young man, set out on an interesting pilgrimage, which was destined to have far-reaching effects in his own and other lives. He had been a Christian for a few years, having been converted through the influence, for the most part, of a private Bible Class held in a drawing-room, the leader of which was associated with the Church of England. In the course of time this gentleman's views underwent a change, but he did not, in honour bound, make any attempt to draw the members of the class away from their ecclesiastical affiliations.

Meeting him one week-day, and having him all to myself, I took the opportunity of asking if he knew of a good bishop by whom I could be confirmed, this being, in my opinion, the next step to be taken in my Christian life. I was rather concerned because this rite had been neglected.

His answer was to this effect: "You told me that you want the will of God to guide your life, didn't you? Well, then, whatever steps you take in your life, you must first consider them in the light of the Word of God, so that you know what you are doing and why you are doing it. I would advise you, before you get confirmed, to make sure you understand all that the Word of God says on the subject." I accepted this wise advice and continued searching the Scriptures, especially the New

Testament, with the definite purpose of finding out God's path for me in this respect.

With the same object in view, I also started out in earnest to find a spiritual home, where I could join with other Christians in the worship and service of God. Every Sunday morning I sallied forth to a new place of worship, hoping to find where it might be the will of God that I should cast anchor.

My circumstances and antecedents happened to be such, that there were no influences from without nor prejudices from within to confuse the issue. Studying the Word of God during the week and praying earnestly that I might be guided by the Holy Spirit, I visited Sunday by Sunday every church within a wide radius. I started with a St. Barnabas' Church, to which I felt a slight partiality, seeing my birthday was on St. Barnabas' Day. In spite of this childish predilection, the guiding cloud did not seem to rest over this sanctuary. It did not occur to me to go anywhere but to churches of the established Anglican communion, and it came to me as quite a shock, after visiting every such church for miles around—sometimes involving long walks—to realize that I must now, as an honest enquirer, try other places of worship. With some hesitation I then visited Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist and other chapels.

I have since realized that, being perfectly free to be guided by the Word of God alone, and without any external influences to bias my judgment, my experience constituted a very fair test case, so to speak, as to how a young Christian might be expected to react to the Word of God alone. In other respects I believe I was just a normal youth of average intelligence, characterized, perhaps, by a tendency to look before I leaped.

I hope to finish the story of this pilgrimage in a later

chapter. I start off with this little bit of autobiography, as I wish to make it clear that what I have to say is not what I have accepted unquestioned from others, but what I have had to hammer out for myself on the anvil of actual experience. Moreover, more than forty years have now elapsed since those early days, and I have had the opportunity, as a missionary, of trying out the things I learnt as a young man and finding, under the acid test of long experience, that the principles to which I was then led have proved their validity in the most difficult circumstances and with the most unpromising material.

I have no axe to grind, no new plan or teaching to propagate. As far as I know my own heart, this book is an honest attempt to direct the attention of any who may be humble enough to read it, to that which I believe the Lord Himself and His apostles have laid down in the New Testament as permanent instructions for His whole Church. So far from being a new discovery, there must have been millions who have trodden the same path in the past, with a singular lack of display or advertisement, but all led by the same sure Hand. It is my conviction that the great Shepherd of the sheep knows exactly what methods are the most suitable for shepherding the souls He has created and saved. It is for us to trace those methods in the Word of God.

Every reader must in honesty decide between two alternative convictions. Either the Spirit of God has, with regard to Church fellowship, given us a series of conundrums, to which there are several equally likely answers, and it does not really matter much which answer we happen to hit upon, providing we are loyal to Christ in other respects; or He has, indeed, given us clear instructions in the New Testament, only many of us allow environment or upbringing to be the determining

factors, without being convinced by personal study that what we do is according to the will of God as there revealed.

With all my heart I believe the latter alternative to be true, and invite my reader to consider it carefully. It seems unthinkable that the Hòly Spirit, sent by the Saviour to lead His people into all truth, should have failed to provide them clear guidance into this most necessary phase of truth, one which intimately affects the life, the testimony and the service of every one of them.

II

Why Does It Matter?

WHY should it make any difference which path we take, providing we arrive at the right destination? This seems a reasonable objection. There are, nevertheless, three weighty reasons why it matters very considerably which path we take.

The first is that God has revealed to us in His Word that He has other plans with regard to His Church, besides the ultimate object of getting us to heaven. We are told in Ephes. 3. 8-10, that it is His plan to use His Church on earth as an object-lesson by which to make known His manifold wisdom to the 'principalities and powers in the heavenlies.' This not only indicates that He considers His plans for His Church to be a clear and convincing display of His manifold wisdom, but that it is essentially important for us to follow those plans as closely as possible, in order not to mar or render futile the course of instruction God is giving the unseen hosts by means of His Church.

The second reason is that it seems very clear from Scripture that our loyalty to Christ will very largely determine our position and service in His coming millennial kingdom. Throughout the Scriptures we find that God sees fit to test His chosen instruments. The several dispensations appear to be tests of His people under varying conditions. Even His Son was tested before He commenced His ministry.

Those who pass God's tests are entrusted with further and enlarged service. The servant who, by diligent

trading, turns his one pound into ten is henceforth entrusted with the government of ten cities, and others proportionately (Luke 19). Thus in the present time God is sifting out His people to find by actual test, as is His wont, those whom He can trust to discern and carry out His will in the coming kingdom.

It seems that the measure and range of our service in that kingdom depend entirely upon our fidelity to the Lord's path for His people in this present time, and that enough has been given, *and no more*, to enable sincere souls to find that path. Admittedly, there are difficulties. This seems to be the point of the apostle's remarks on church troubles in 1 Cor. 11. 18-19: 'I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it. For there must be also factions among you, that they which are *approved* may be made *manifest* among you.' Tracing the path mapped out for the Church of God in the Scriptures, and daring to follow it, apparently call for the qualities the Lord needs to find in those to whom He will entrust positions of authority in His future kingdom.

Just as the way of salvation was planned by the great Master-mind with marvellous psychological skill to ensure that all humble, sincere, repentant sinners *and no others* should find their way into the Kingdom, so we find the same unerring Mind planning all the details of His Church in such a way as to call for the exact qualities He wishes to develop in His servants to fit them for their future responsibilities, and to eliminate those qualities He will necessarily have to condemn at His Judgment Seat.

This also seems to indicate that we shall not, immediately on death or at the coming of the Lord, learn perfect obedience and acquire spiritual intelligence and under-

standing of the Lord's will by some kind of automatic process, equivalent to the waving of a wand—an idea to which we became accustomed in the fairy tales of our childhood. This is contrary to all that the Scriptures tell us of the ways of God with His people in all ages. God's schooling time for us is *now*. True, believers will be 'changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,' to be 'like Him,' but this does not in any way contradict the Scripture teaching that He will reward every man according as his work shall be.

Moses and Aaron had their own plan for bringing water out of the rock (Num. 20. 10-12), but it was not the way God had told them to do it and it met with His displeasure. In mercy He allowed the water to flow out to the thirsty multitudes, thus establishing once for all the principle that streams of blessing are no criterion as to whether or not God is pleased with the servant through whose instrumentality they have come. He punished Moses and Aaron with extreme severity and declared that for their conduct on this occasion they should not lead His people into the promised land, although Moses greatly desired to do so. This was written for our instruction (1 Cor. 10. 11). I greatly fear that some who have brought the life-giving Gospel streams out of the rock for the blessing and refreshment of multitudes, *in their own way*, may find that God is displeased with them as He was with Moses and Aaron, and that their standing in the coming kingdom of Christ will be definitely influenced by their heedlessness of the Lord's explicit commands.

The third reason is that one of the greatest blessings the Lord ever promised His people is definitely associated with their adherence to initial teachings, 'that which ye have heard from the beginning.' Our Lord made the

marvellous statement: 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.' The Apostle John recorded this (14. 23) and later on amplified it in his first epistle. Speaking of the Father and the Son, he goes on to say: 'Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard *from the beginning* shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father' (2. 24). He further explains it in his second epistle (v. 6): 'This is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard *from the beginning*, ye should walk in it.' The intimate connection here, between following closely 'that which we have heard from the beginning' and enjoying in a special measure the fellowship of the Father and the Son, is inescapable.

What a tremendous incentive this is to a true believer to get back, as far as he honestly can, to first things; to dig down through all the rubble that has accumulated during the centuries and build upon bedrock!

In this connection I should like to quote from the article on Church History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (13th Edn.), by Dr. A. C. McGiffert of Union Theological Seminary, New York. The well-known bias of this *Encyclopaedia* against evangelical truth and its obsession in favour of the more irresponsible critics makes all the more striking its testimony to the doctrines which obtained 'in the beginning.' Here is an extract:

"The most notable thing about the life of the early Christians was their vivid sense of being a people of God, called and set apart. The Christian Church in their thought was a divine, not a human, institution. It was founded and controlled by God, and even the world was created for its

sake. This conception . . . controlled all the life of the early Christians, both individual and social. They regarded themselves as separate from the rest of the world and bound together by peculiar ties. Their citizenship was in heaven, not on earth, and the principles and laws by which they strove to govern themselves were from above. The present world was but temporary, and their true life was in the future. Christ was soon to return, and the employments and labours and pleasures of this age were of small concern. . . . Not necessarily that the present world was evil, but that it was temporary and of small worth, and that a Christian's heart should be set on higher things. The belief that the Church was a supernatural institution found expression in the Jewish notion of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit . . . In the everyday life of Christians the Holy Spirit was present, and all the Christian graces were the fruits. A result of this belief was to give their lives a peculiarly enthusiastic or inspirational character. Theirs were not the everyday experiences of ordinary men, but of men lifted out of themselves and transported into a higher sphere."

This is a true and beautiful picture of the Church of God, as visualized in the New Testament. How infinitely sad it is, that history has to record a fall from these heavenly heights! The article continues:

"With the passing of time the early enthusiasm waned, the expectation of the immediate return of Christ was widely given up, the conviction of the Spirit's presence became less vivid, and the conflict with heresy in the second century led to the substitution of official control for the original freedom. . . . The Church as an institution now looked forward to a long life upon earth and adjusted itself to the new situation, taking on largely the forms and customs of the world in which it lived."

When he speaks of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit being a Jewish notion, the writer discloses, of course, his rationalistic bias, but apart from this there is no doubt that we have here, although unwittingly given, a true diagnosis of the disease which first robbed the

Church of her vitality and power. Losing sight of her Lord and quenching the Holy Spirit, she 'took on largely the forms and customs of the world in which she lived.'

We see, then, how intensely important it is for us to tread at any cost the path that God marked out for His people 'from the beginning,' before this apostacy began.

God's plans for the religious and national life of Israel were perfect and were intended for the instruction of all the nations of the earth. But what a failure they made of them, through taking up the ways of the nations round about! In like manner the Church, though planned by divine wisdom and a fit object-lesson for angelic intelligences, has outwardly become a failure because of its disastrous departure from that which was *from the beginning* and its assimilation of the forms and customs of *the world* in which it lived.

There is a religious party in England which has for its objective a return to Christianity as it was in early Britain, before the coming of the Romish Church. As far as it goes the idea is good, but it does not go far enough. Others would take us back as far as the time when the Romish hierarchy was first established. But neither does this go far enough back.

As our Lord prophesied, corruption soon began to set in; birds of the air soon came and lodged in the branches of the mustard tree (Matt. 13. 32); tares soon began to spring up among the wheat (v. 38). Therefore it is not enough to go back half-way, or three quarters of the way; we must go back to that which was from the beginning.

In addition to the above three reasons, there is another which should have weight with every child of God. It is that there is *no conceivable way* of attaining any kind of unity among the people of God unless we resolutely go back to that which was from the beginning.

III

The Path God Planned

THE first thing to do, in seeking to find out the path God has planned for His people to take in this day of grace, is to clear away a very common misapprehension—one which has wrought more confusion than any other.

In spite of the explicit and reiterated statements of the New Testament that the Church of God was an absolutely unknown thing in the days of the Old Testament, teachers and would-be exponents of the Word of God have insisted on ignoring them and going back to the Old Testament to find instructions and guidance for the conduct of Christ's Church. We are plainly told in Ephes. 3. 5-6, that God's plan for uniting both Jew and Gentile in one body to form His Church was 'in other ages *not made known* unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.' From the beginning of the world it was 'hid in God' (v. 9).

In Colossians also (1. 24-26) we are told that this mystery has been 'hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints.'

Again, in Rom. 16. 25-26, it is referred to as the 'mystery which was *kept secret* since the world began.' At the conclusion of the remarkable series of parables our Lord spoke concerning His Church, recorded in Matthew's Gospel, the inspired evangelist quotes the words: 'I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world' (13. 35).

Why, in the face of such unequivocal statements, continuous efforts should have been made for nineteen centuries to see in the Christian Church merely a revised edition of the old Levitical régime, and consequently to foist upon it all kinds of wholly inappropriate imitations of the externals of the Old Covenant, is one of the many enigmas whose explanation is only to be looked for in the intricacies of the fallen human heart. In the words of one of the afore-mentioned parables: 'An enemy hath done this.'

We should not study Homer to find out how to run our motor car. Why not? Because, of course, there was no such thing as a motor car in the days of Homer. Similarly there was no such thing in human experience as the Church of God in the days of the Old Testament. It was a secret hid in God.

It is quite true that, in writing about bringing our body into subjection, about idolatry, tempting the Lord, murmuring and the temptations common to man, the apostle speaks of examples in the Old Testament being written for our admonition 'upon whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor. 9. 27; 10. 11). For there are eternal truths concerning God and His ways with men, which have unchangeable authority in all dispensations. But with regard to the path God has mapped out for His people in Church matters there is need of 'rightly dividing the Word of Truth,' and praying, as did the apostle, that our love 'may abound . . . in *knowledge* and in all *discernment*, so that we may prove the things that differ' (2 Tim. 2. 15; Phil. 1. 9-10).

Timothy had known the Old Testament Scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3. 15), yet the apostle deemed it necessary to write to him a letter of instruction, in case he himself should be delayed, that he might know how

to behave himself 'in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. 3. 14-15). If Timothy could have gathered from his thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures how to conduct himself in the Church of God, there would have been no need for the apostle to write him this letter. In it he only once refers to the Old Testament, to quote: 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn' (5. 18), to illustrate the fact that the labourer is worthy of his reward. Not a word is said about the priesthood, the sanctuary, the altar or any of the Old Testament ritual observances, for the simple reason that these have nothing to do with our conduct in that hitherto unknown body—the Church of God.

The tendency to attempt the transplantation of Old Testament ritual into the church of the New Testament caused much trouble even in apostolic times. In spite of our Lord's warning, attempts were made again and again to put the new wine into old bottles. In the first place, the idea that the Church was essentially a Jewish institution was very difficult to dislodge. Even the Apostle Peter was reluctant to act on the command to make disciples of *all nations*; and needed special urging before he would fulfil his use of the 'keys of the kingdom of heaven' and open the door to the first Gentiles, as he eventually did in the house of Cornelius. Even after this he seemed hesitant (Gal. 2. 11-14). Then the question of circumcision caused endless trouble (Acts 15). This ritual observance from the Old Covenant seemed to exercise a great fascination for the more carnally minded, and spread even to distant Galatia, hence the epistle to the Galatians, dealing with it.

Since then there has been an ineradicable tendency to

copy in manifold ways the ritual of the Jews' religion, as the apostle called it. In that religion there was a priestly caste, hence, in imitation, the same has been imposed upon nominal Christianity, in flat defiance of the teaching of the New Testament as to the priesthood of *all believers*; in that religion this priestly caste had a distinctive dress, hence a distinctive dress is displayed by professional 'priests,' even to the present day; for the observance of that religion a special, consecrated building was used, hence we see the same on every hand in our time; that religion had a visible, tangible altar, before which the priestly caste, clothed in its distinctive dress, performed its office; hence we see, on account of this ineradicable tendency, exactly the same at the present moment. Not for nothing are many of these consecrated edifices erected so that the worshippers turn their faces east, toward Palestine! And yet all these things are entirely foreign to the New Testament. The Spirit of God gives detailed instructions on many other points, but makes no mention of any of these. They are, in fact, incompatible with the spirit, as well as the letter, of the New Testament.

Let our minds, therefore, be perfectly clear on this point, that God's path for His people is to be found in the inspired writings of the New Testament, and in them alone. We will therefore search diligently in that precious Book to find that path.

Mankind is divided, from a scriptural point of view, into three great bodies—'the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God' (1 Cor. 10. 32). The Jews, of course, are a specific nation chosen by God for His own purposes; the Gentiles consist of all the other nations of the earth, whether nominally Christian or nominally heathen; while the Church of God is a people called out from both

the other bodies to form a company which, as already pointed out, was an entirely new conception, formerly unknown, hid in God, kept secret, but now revealed in the New Testament.

These three great classes of mankind are mutually exclusive. No one can belong to more than one of them at the same time. Thus, if a Jew, through a new birth, enters the Church of God, he ceases to be a Jew. In the same way, if a Gentile is born again, and becomes a member of the Church of God, he ceases to be a Gentile. He is a new creation (Gal. 6. 15; 2 Cor. 5. 17). He belongs to God's holy nation (1 Pet. 2. 9). He and his fellows will exult in the future (as, indeed, they should now), in the fact that they have been redeemed to God 'out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation' (Rev. 5. 9). Though their bodies may have black, white, red or yellow skins, they are, if in the Church of God, one indivisible people, now and in the ages to come. All other loyalties take second place to this. Before this divine conception national, religious, cultural and social distinctions pale. 'There is neither Greek nor Jew (a national distinction), circumcision nor uncircumcision (a religious distinction), Barbarian, Scythian (a cultural distinction), bond nor free (a social distinction), but Christ is all and in all' (Col. 3. 11).

It therefore follows necessarily that our Church fellowship has nothing whatever to do with the nationality with which we were born. The path we seek cannot lie along the lines of a national religion.

Let us look at some of the similes God has chosen with which to instruct us concerning His Church. Of old He said: 'I have . . . used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets' (Hos. 12. 10). Our Lord Jesus also constantly used parables. In the Epistle to the Ephesians

some beautiful similitudes are given to help God's people to grasp what this new thing, the Church, really is. The first is: A New Man (chap. 2. 15). Here the emphasis is on new. It was something that had never been known before. We have already dwelt on this point, so will pass it by now. Another similitude is that this New Man is the Body of Christ (4. 12-16). Of this body Christ Himself is the Head. Just as, in a healthy human body, every nerve and muscle is controlled by the head, so every member of the Body of Christ, His Church, must be under the control of Christ Himself. The human body has no under-heads, subsidiary centres of volition; the brain directs, or should direct, the movements even of the little finger or toe. If otherwise, there is some disease at work. In the same way, Christ is the Head of His Church, not merely the ultimate source, but the direct source of control of the weakest and most insignificant member of His body. More of this anon.

Yet another similitude which God uses to reveal to us His conception of His Church is that it is a Building—God's Building (Eph. 2. 19-22; 1 Cor. 3. 9-10). Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone, and on that foundation are built living stones to form a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2. 4-7).

It is interesting to note that when vain man sought to attain unity by means of a building to reach unto heaven, he used substitutes—brick instead of stone and slime instead of mortar (Gen. 11. 1-9). God will use only genuine materials, living stones. Man's edifice was left incomplete and the whole project ended in confusion. At Babel they could not understand each other's speech, but on the birthday of the Church at Pentecost God exactly reversed the process and every man heard

the apostles speak in his own tongue. The language barrier was broken down and the foundation of true unity laid.

Perhaps the most beautiful similitude used to describe Christ's Church is that of the Bride. 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it' (Eph. 5. 25). This indicates the tender love of Christ for all His redeemed and the high position to which He will raise them, a place of nearness to Himself. The passage also expresses His keen desire in regard to His Church, that it might be 'a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish' (v. 27). If we really love Christ this will inevitably be the object of our passionate zeal, as it is His. That is why this book is being written. And that is why the believing reader will follow wholeheartedly along the path the loving Bridegroom of our souls has marked out for us.

IV

Who are in the Church of God?

THIS is the next question to be answered, and it is very important for us to have a clear, unequivocal answer. The similitudes the Holy Spirit has given us in the passages just referred to will provide us with that.

The Church was there stated to be a New Man (Ephes. 2. 15). This is true of the Church as a whole, and it is true of every individual member of it. When, on being born again, we become new men in Christ Jesus, 'old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (2 Cor. 5. 17), and we become members of the New Man, the Church of God. Thus all who are born again are in the Church of God.

The next similitude was that the Church is the Body of Christ. When we become united to Christ by faith, so that He controls our lives as the head controls the members, we become members of His Church. Thus all who are united to Christ are in the Church of God.

The third similitude was that the Church is God's Building. If we come to Christ 'as unto a living Stone,' and as living stones are built up upon that great Foundation Stone—Christ being the foundation of all our hopes for time and eternity—then we are in the Church of God. Thus all who are living stones, built on the foundation—Christ—are in the Church of God (1 Pet. 2. 4-5).

The fourth similitude was that of the Bride. The love of Christ has touched her heart and she cries, enraptured:

'The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me!' All, therefore, who love our Lord Jesus Christ because He first loved them, are members of that company symbolized by the 'Bride,' which the apostle calls 'the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood' (Acts 20. 28).

A correct description of the members of the Church of God would thus be: People who have been born again; who are united to Christ by faith; who are built up as living stones on Christ the Foundation; and who love Him as the Redeemer of their souls. These appear to be the only scriptural qualifications, but these qualifications are essential to true membership in the Church of the living God.

Let no one protest that all who are baptized are in the Church of God, for we have the express declaration of the apostle Simon Peter, that his recently baptized namesake in Samaria had 'neither part nor lot in this matter,' for his heart was 'not right in the sight of God' (Acts 8. 21). This settles the question for honest readers of the Word of God.

The greatest disaster that ever befell the Church of God was when other qualifications were substituted for those laid down in the Scriptures and unregenerate men, women and children were admitted as members of the professing Church. Consequent on that came unregenerate officials, and the door was opened wide for apostasy.

David sinned against the Lord in numbering the people of God without taking the atonement-money, the half-shekel from rich and poor alike, which each man should have given as 'a ransom for his soul' (Exod. 30. 11-16). This sin led, as had been threatened in the law (v. 12), to a terrible plague, which was only removed when the hitherto ignored atonement was recognized (2 Sam.

24. 25). The equivalent of this sin under the New Covenant is the inclusion of unregenerate people in the professing Church of God, those who have not yet accepted personally by faith the reconciliation which God has made through the death of His Son. As of old, this sin entails a spiritual plague.

Of course, this entirely excludes the conception of a Church established to include practically everybody within a certain geographical area whether personally regenerate or not. It is not to be wondered at that the plague of spiritual death rages under such conditions. From the beginning 'God divided the light from the darkness,' and throughout the ages He has manifested His will that the children of light be separate from the children of darkness. But what God has put asunder man has been very energetic in seeking to join together.

We have seen that each individual member of the universal Church of God has the characteristics of the Church as a whole, being a new man, a member of the body of Christ, a living stone built on the chief cornerstone and knowing Christ as the lover of his soul. Wherever men and women are found with these characteristics there is inevitably a miniature representation of that universal Church. In modern language this is known as a local church. The Scriptures speak of the Church of God which is at Corinth, the saints which are at Ephesus, the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, the saints and faithful brethren which are at Colosse, the church of the Thessalonians, and so on, and in the plural: the churches of Galatia.

In the New Testament there is no such thing as a national Church, nor a church distinguished from others by any particular doctrine, or named after any outstanding human personality. Indeed, the church at

Corinth was severely rebuked by the apostle Paul because there was a tendency among them to create parties around the preachers they preferred (1 Cor. 1. 12-13; 3. 3-10).

In any given place where true members of the universal Church of God are found, there is, in the eye of God, as revealed by the Scriptures, one and only one Church. Ideally they are 'all one in Christ Jesus,' and it is the bounden duty of each individual among them, if he truly loves his Lord, to seek by all means in his power to realize that ideal.

As we shall see, God has given us in the New Testament explicit instructions for the conduct of such local churches, *and He has made no provision for any other kind of church.*

One of the saddest fruits of the very general departure from the teachings of Scripture on these points is the development of sectarian temperament which is the ultimately decisive factor as to the ecclesiastical position of many professed Christians. Instead of temperament being curbed and trained by truth, the tendency of the human heart is to trim and adapt our view of truth to meet the demands of temperament. What I mean is this: that it was as natural, for instance, for a man like the famous J. H. Newman to cast anchor finally in the Roman Catholic Church as it is for men of other types to become, in politics, Conservatives, Liberals or revolutionaries. Like many others he was merely fulfilling the demands of a characteristic temperament. Similar to this is what I may perhaps term the Exclusive Brother temperament, differing from it objectively, but not very much subjectively. Then we have, nearer the other end of the register, the Methodist and the Salvation Army temperament. Similar to these, with an apparently

more progressive desire for the attainment of truth, but mixed with an almost Swedenborgian respect for supernatural signs, voices, impressions, etc., we have those who claim to have attained Pentecostal gifts and power, while sadly lacking Pentecostal self-control and spiritual discernment. There is the High Church temperament, the Low Church temperament, the Quaker temperament and the Baptist temperament. It would be difficult to state categorically what it is exactly in each case that constitutes these temperaments, but the fact remains that an experienced Christian could without much difficulty recognize their owners by a few sentences or a prayer, if he, in a strange place, should chance upon a gathering without learning from the notice-board outside which particular sectarian label they wore.

No doubt there are variations, combinations and permutations of all these types, and, thank God, in many cases spiritual growth, combined with stern sincerity, overcomes the trend of temperament. But no one with opportunities of observation and the ability to observe will deny the existence of these types of temperament, nor that they pre-determine to a great extent the ecclesiastical path which, but for the grace of God, their owners will take.

Besides temperament we must take into account the influence of heredity, education or environment, which in some cases frustrates the trend of temperament.

If we are to find the path which God has planned for us as members of His Church, we must deliberately sacrifice our temperamental leanings on the altar of truth. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can this be done. But through Him it is definitely possible. He can also overrule the bias of heredity, one-sided education or abnormal environment.

There is one bias which I confess I had not taken into consideration until it was pointed out by a friend who read the manuscript of these early chapters. It is the bias of social caste.

I have in my library an edition of the 'Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott,' in which there is a brief Life of that poet and author. The anonymous writer reports the words of Sir Walter Scott: "I took up my politics as King Charles did his religion, from an idea that the Cavalier creed was the more gentlemanlike of the two," and he adds: "We are not sure but that Scott's religious profession had a similar origin." His mind dwelt largely on the traditions of the past, and he "had an almost superstitious reverence for rank and high birth." Hence it is not surprising that the writer remarks later on: "Though he had a kind of respect for religion, it was a sentiment rather than a principle."

It seems almost incredible that anyone really born from above and committed to a new life of discipleship to Christ could allow the comparatively paltry considerations of rank and birth and social standing, let alone the possession of wealth, to take priority over the explicit teaching of the Lord Himself. Having 'surveyed the wondrous Cross on which the King of Glory died,' it seems impossible that such an one should fail to 'pour contempt on all his pride,' especially this type of pride, which is of all pride the most unreasonable and most worthy of that contempt.

And yet it appears one is forced to concede this possibility. Had Thackeray had knowledge of these things, he might possibly have added a new chapter to his 'Book of Snobs,' for surely no snobbishness could be more glaring than this. The Friend of publicans and sinners and the Companion of fishermen, Himself reputed

to be a carpenter's son, would of course not have come up to the social standard of some of our modern Pharisees. But we 'have not so learned Christ.'

The Son of the Most High God laid aside His glory and made Himself of no reputation for our sakes. What will He have to say to any of His redeemed ones who look round for a gentlemanlike religion, failing to realize that all true gentlemanly feeling and conduct originated in Him and comes from Him, and is seen best of all in His readiness to 'condescend to men of low estate'?

Within the sphere of a scriptural Church there is room for the possessors of all kinds of temperament and for the harmonious fellowship of men and women from all classes of human society, providing they are brought under the sway of the Holy Spirit, loyal to the written Word and bound with chains of love to the Person of the Son of God and to one another.

The Church's Mission on Earth

As the dark shadows gathered around our blessed Lord towards the close of His public ministry, He made an important appointment with His disciples. 'After I am risen again,' He told them on the way from the upper room to the Mount of Olives, 'I will go before you into Galilee' (Matt. 26. 37; Mark 14. 28).

When the women came to the sepulchre on the Resurrection Morning, they were commissioned by an angelic messenger to remind the disciples of this appointment: 'Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee, as He said unto you,' 'there shall ye see Him, lo, I have told you' (Mark 16. 7; Matt. 28. 7).

Of such vital import was this message that, when the Lord met the same women immediately after, He repeated the commission: 'Go, tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me' (Matt. 28. 10).

Arrived in Galilee at the mountain where Jesus had appointed them, the disciples found their Lord waiting to deliver a new and briefer 'Sermon on the Mount.'

'Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying: All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you. And lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age' (Matt. 28. 18-20; R.V., marg.).

Here we have, in a few simple, direct words, the Charter of the Church of Christ.

After giving His disciples the assurance of His divine authority in heaven and on earth, our Lord gives them His permanent instructions for the Church age, under three heads:

- (a) They are to go and make disciples of all the nations.
- (b) Having made disciples, they are to baptize them* into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- (c) They are then to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He commanded them.

I say advisedly permanent instructions for the Church age, because our Lord Himself definitely fixes their term of validity with the words: 'And lo, I am with you all the days, even *unto the consummation of the age.*'

Our Lord's first words assured His hearers that the message they were to be entrusted with was an authoritative message. On that authority they were to carry out the instructions given. While they do so, they have the encouraging assurance that the One to whom all authority is given will be personally with them, and not only with them, but with all other disciples who come after them, seeking to carry out these instructions, until the consummation of the age.

Well may this be called the Great Commission. No greater was ever given, nor one with such authority behind it. Consider now its main points:

(a) The Church of Christ must be a going concern. She was never intended to settle down and accommodate herself to the world around her. Insomuch as she has done so, it has been contrary to orders. Our Lord

* It is grammatically impossible that the word here used for 'them' could refer to 'nations.'

manifestly intended her to be a mobile unit, continually propagating her faith and making disciples.

Inertia seems to be a cardinal fault of human nature. After the creation God commanded man to 'replenish the earth and subdue it,' to 'have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth' (Gen. 1. 28). But men gradually settled down and, at Babel, took definite steps to prevent their being 'scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth' (Gen. 11. 4). God had therefore to take counter-measures to 'scatter them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth' (11. 18).

In the new creation we have almost an exact parallel to this. Christ gave the command, as we have seen, to go and make disciples of all nations. But the Church is soon found as a non-mobile organization settling down in Jerusalem and having 'all things common' (Acts 2. 44), an arrangement feasible enough in a static community but impracticable in an expanding, propagating Church. Before long God permitted a great persecution (Acts 8. 1), with the immediate result that 'they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word' (v. 4). The centre of interest shifted from the home base to the firing line, and the Great Commission started functioning again.

The principle displayed at Babel, and again at Jerusalem, is everywhere applicable, for without any doubt whatever a company of believers is always doomed to withering extinction if it neglects the main work with which our Lord charged His Church, that of making disciples of all nations.

It is doubtful whether Paul the Apostle did better work for the early Church than Saul the Pharisee unwittingly did, when he so stirred up their nest that considerably more than five thousand (Acts 4. 4; 5. 14)

went everywhere preaching the Word, while twelve remained to carry on at home (8. 1).

Some congratulate themselves that they 'come together' after the apostolic fashion. Let us rather seek to spread abroad and carry out the Will and Testament of our Master after the apostolic fashion. As has been said: 'The Church must preach or perish, teach or tarnish, evangelize or fossilize, send or end.'

(b) They are to make disciples, not merely converts. Our Lord's definition of a disciple is found in John 8. 31-32: '*If ye continue in My Word*, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.' Making disciples is thus a far greater proposition and entails vastly more labour, than persuading people to make a decision, though that, of course, is the first step.

(c) These disciples are to be made of all nations. No remote tribe is to be left unreached. All are to hear the message and have the opportunity of accepting it.

(d) The Lord's express will is that all who become disciples are to be baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Why some bodies of professing Christians omit baptism altogether, and yet imagine that they are fulfilling the Great Commission, has never yet been explained. The command was given to the evangelists, not to the disciples. The responsibility rests therefore with them.

(e) The work is not finished when some one holds up his hand or signs a card. An essential part of the Great Commission is to teach the disciples all things that Christ has commanded. Obviously, this entails our Lord's instructions concerning His Church—indeed, without Church fellowship such teaching would be impossible.

VI

The Church's Ordinances

WITH the resolute determination to listen honestly to the plain teachings of the New Testament alone, and with the earnest endeavour to disregard the prejudices and tendencies with which heredity and environment may have hedged us around, we will now examine this wonderful Church which Christ has founded. We will not try to make the New Testament fit in with our views. We will insist on our views being made to fit in with the New Testament. Admittedly it is difficult for any man to rid himself of opinions and tendencies he has been taught to revere, but for the sake of truth the effort must be made. Truth is worth while.

Practically every point that will be here touched on has been the centre of fierce storms of controversy. Passing these by, we will hug to our hearts the words of Christ and His apostles with a simplicity becoming those who have taken His yoke upon them and are learning of Him Who is meek and lowly in heart. Meekness is the essential qualification for attaining sound judgment, for it is written: 'The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way' (Psa. 25. 9). That is just what we want—to be taught God's path for His people.

In this chapter we will consider what are generally termed 'sacraments,' though the word is not found anywhere in Scripture. For want of a better word I have called them ordinances (1 Cor. 11. 2). Of these the first to be considered is baptism.

Baptism is of such importance that our Lord made explicit mention of it in His commission to His disciples (Matt. 28. 19-20), although it is, of course, included in the phrase 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you.'

Baptism, like the Lord's Supper, is specifically explained to be a sign and reminder of the death of our Lord Jesus. We are baptized, says the apostle, 'into His death' (Rom. 6. 3, and see vv. 4, 5).

As the professing Church declined more and more from its original simplicity, it began, with peculiar perversity, to show far more interest in the birth of Christ than in His death, in spite of the fact that there is no warrant whatever in the New Testament for commemorating His birth, whereas every provision is made for keeping His death in constant remembrance.

The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are the central facts of Christianity. Consequently we find in the New Testament that every disciple, at the outset of his discipleship, is subjected to an ordinance which conveys an impressive figure of burial (implying death) and resurrection. As explained in Rom. 6. 3-11, baptism shows in figure the death of the baptized one with Christ, his burial with Christ and his resurrection with Him. What Christ by His death, burial and resurrection did for all believers, is acknowledged and publicly appropriated in person by the one baptized. The teaching of this passage is that it is incumbent upon the believer to work out in his life what he publicly professed in his baptism.

It was only to be expected that the powers of evil would do everything possible to invalidate this initial rite, to wreck its significance and even make it a snare. This solemn reminder of what Christ effected for us by His death and resurrection, calculated to leave a lasting

impression on every disciple baptized, they had at all costs to suppress. Consequently, as the professing Church settled down to accommodate itself to the world around it, the significance of baptism was gradually lost sight of and in course of time a ceremony was generally substituted for it which bore not even a remote resemblance to death, burial and resurrection. At about the same time the obvious and essential requirement of faith in Christ began to be waived, in the pious hope that those baptized (e.g., young children) would eventually become believers.

Christ's own words place faith before baptism (Mark 16. 16). Philip demanded faith of the Ethiopian, before he would baptize him. 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest,' he said (Acts 8. 37). I shall be told that neither of these passages have full authority, being omitted from some ancient manuscripts. Of course, they had to be omitted! How could the new rite be justified without tampering with the original records? * The fact that this was done in some cases shows that the force of the passages quoted was recognized.

In some quarters great stress is laid on the words of our Lord: 'Suffer little children and forbid them not, to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19. 14), as if they gave some countenance to the practice of baptizing little children. As a matter of fact, this passage is a very strong proof that we cannot possibly baptize infants, if we would follow the example of our Lord and Master. We read that our Lord, by the hands of His disciples, 'made and baptized more disciples

* There are some modern examples of this. For instance, the Lutheran translators of the N.T. into Icelandic (B. & F.B.S., 1906), added three words before 'baptizing' in Matt. 28. 19, making Christ's command read: 'Go therefore and make all the nations (into) disciples, *by means of* baptizing them.' No error can be propagated by honest means, therefore resort is had to deletion or insertion, i.e., falsification.

than John' (John 4. 1-2). (Note, incidentally, that the disciples were first made, then baptized). Of John we read that 'Jerusalem and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan' went out to him and were baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins (Matt. 3. 5-6). From the other Gospels also we gather that great multitudes went out to the Baptist and received baptism at his hand. Now, if our Lord baptized *more* disciples than John, then the number He baptized must have been enormous.

It is therefore perfectly plain that, if it was the practice of our Lord to baptize little children as well as great numbers of believing adults, the disciples would have made no objection to their being brought to the Lord. In that case it would have been merely a routine occurrence. The fact that the disciples objected proves that it was *not* the custom of our Lord to baptize little children.

What, then, did he do in these circumstances? He lovingly received the little ones, blessed them, laid hands on them and departed thence. Although thousands of others were baptized with His authority, *He did not have the children baptized*. This must be conclusive to honest minds.

Innocent little ones, with no known sins to confess, could not fulfil the first requirement of baptism. Nothing was to be forced upon them. They were to be suffered to *come to Him* themselves, neither forced nor forbidden. What more subtle way could be found of hindering little ones from coming to Him than by submitting them, before they are old enough to understand or consent, to a rite which implies that they have, in some mysterious sense, *already* come to Him?

In the logical sequence of cause and effect, those who follow their Lord's example in this matter and do not

admit little children to the rite of baptism are far more active and successful in winning their young hearts to a living faith in Him, as soon as they can understand, than those who follow human tradition and seek by mass production methods to claim the children for their communion. They do not tell the children that they have already become regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church by a non-scriptural rite of which they were entirely unaware. On the contrary, they lovingly teach them their great need of Christ and encourage them to trust and love the dear Saviour Who died for them, Who yearns for the confidence of their young hearts, Who will receive them to His bosom, lay His hands on them as He did of old and make them His own. This, which is the strict truth, meets, as may be expected, with a far more ready response and is obviously infinitely more fruitful in suffering the children to come to Christ, than the hazy assurance that, when they were babes, someone promised on their behalf something they cannot understand, and that consequently they have already come to Christ. This doctrine is known by its fruits, for incontestably in the overwhelming majority of cases, the subsequent lives of the children thus deceived proves clearly that they are *not* regenerate.

Shortly before our Lord received the children and blessed them, without having them baptized, He made it very clear that such need to be saved, by His words recorded in Matt. 18. 10-14. There He spoke of the 'little ones,' whose 'angels always behold the face of My Father in heaven,' being, nevertheless, 'lost,' and needing individually to be sought and found by the Good Shepherd, lest they perish. Verse 14 confirms that He is throughout referring to little ones. Passing this teaching of His on to the children has always been more

effective in leading them to a definite faith in Him, than vaguely exhorting them to cling to a rite administered without their knowledge or consent and which has no scriptural authority.

I will now anticipate what long experience has shown to be the next and last stand made by those who uphold infant baptism. At this stage the rejoinder is always forthcoming: "But we read in the New Testament of many households being baptized, and we are not told that the children were excluded. They must, therefore, have been included amongst those baptized."

No, we do not read in the New Testament of *many* households being baptized. There are exactly *three* households thus described. They are (*a*) the household of Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16. 13-15); (*b*) the household of the jailor at Philippi (Acts 16. 27-34); and (*c*) the household of Stephanas at Corinth (1 Cor. 1. 16). In each case the Holy Spirit's care to avoid giving any direct or indirect sanction to infant baptism is manifest in the details given.

In Lydia's case there is not only no hint that she was married and had children, but strong evidence to the contrary. For a married woman in the East to say to visiting travellers: 'Come into my house and abide' is entirely unthinkable; she would at least have said 'our house' if she had had a husband. Again, she is described, not as the wife or widow of a 'seller of purple,' but as a saleswoman in her own right, trading, moreover, about 200 miles away from her native city—a most unlikely contingency had she been a married woman with young children. No, an extraordinary effort of imagination is called for if we are to find any children in Lydia's household!

The jailor at Philippi may have had some children—

there is no evidence to the contrary—but if so, they were old enough to be included in those who ‘rejoiced, believing in God,’ for this is the scriptural description of all the jailor’s ‘house’ (v. 34). Being happy believers, they were of course fit subjects for Christian baptism.

There is certainly no argument for infant baptism to be found anywhere in Philippi. Let us now try Corinth.

In 1 Cor. 1. 16 the bald statement is made by the apostle that he baptized the household of Stephanas. Even if no more had been said about this household, we have no grounds for assuming that it contained young children. But here again the Holy Spirit manifestly seeks to guard us from misapprehension. He leads the apostle to add, before he lays down his pen at the close of this long epistle: ‘Ye know the household of Stephanas, that it is *the firstfruits of Achaia*, and that they have *addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints*,’ and the Corinthians are exhorted to ‘submit themselves unto such.’

Now the firstfruits of Achaia are described in Acts 18. 8. They first heard, then believed, and then were baptized. So that, whether old or young, Stephanas’ household was composed of *believers* who had heard and received the Gospel. Moreover, the members of this household, baptized by the apostle certainly not more than five years before he wrote his epistle, were at the time of writing sufficiently adolescent to have already taken up Christian work. Still further, we cannot seriously suppose that the apostle exhorted the Corinthians to ‘submit themselves’ to infants!

It is the usual thing for advocates of infant sprinkling to call these mythical infants-in-arms, created by their wishful thinking in Lydia’s, the jailor’s and Stephanas’ households, as witnesses for the defence. This only

shows to what lengths the supporters of this unscriptural practice are driven. How much it is to be preferred that we should shake the dust of such disingenuousness from off our feet, and take the side of revealed truth!

As I am writing for intelligent people, I need no more than mention the foolish objection sometimes heard, that we are not *forbidden* to baptize infants! In any sphere whatever, the mind which deems all things permissible which are not expressly forbidden is quite hopeless. It is true that we can find no text of Scripture which states in so many words: 'Thou shalt not baptize infants!' but there are innumerable other things not definitely prohibited, which no one in his senses would dream of doing. We are, however, forbidden to add to the Word of God (Prov. 30. 6). Christ also severely denounced those who made the Word of God of none effect through their tradition (Mark 7. 13), and certainly nothing has more definitely 'made of none effect' the plain teaching of Scripture about the baptism of believers than has the tradition of infant baptism. He declared, moreover, that worship was in vain in so far as the commandments of men were taught as authoritative (v. 7).

For the sake of those who feel that it indicates neglect of the best interests of children to do nothing at all to associate them with the Lord or His people at the outset of their career, let it be stated here that a great number of Christians, who cling to scriptural teaching and therefore reject infant baptism, follow the example given by the mothers who brought their children to the Lord Jesus, not that He should baptize them, but that He should put His hands on them and pray. Our Lord Himself was brought as a child to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (Luke 2. 22). This was, of course,

under the Old Covenant, but is not in any way disagreeable to the spirit or letter of the New Covenant. In many places believing parents gather with Christian friends to give thanks for the gift of life and the preservation of life and to ask wisdom from above for those to whose care this precious gift is committed, that they may be helped in suffering the little ones to come to Him.

Having found that believers, and believers only, are fit subjects for Christian baptism, we must now consider in what manner this command of the Lord is to be carried out. Here again we are confronted with a serious departure from scriptural precedent. We read that, when our Lord was baptized, He came up out of the water (Matt. 3. 16; Mark 1. 10), indicating that He had gone down into the water to be baptized. This would have been quite superfluous if His baptism had been by affusion, as so grotesquely represented by painters of the Middle Ages. Scripture tells us that the baptized are buried (Rom. 6. 4; Col. 2. 12). But a dead body is not buried by pouring over it a few handfuls of earth; it has to be lowered into the grave and covered up. It is futile to speak of any other kind of burial. The argument that the manner of baptism is immaterial cannot be considered for a moment. Since baptism is a figure signifying 'burial with Christ,' it is essential that its manner convey the idea of burial. After His crucifixion our Lord was buried in a grave, from which He afterwards arose. If a man believe that Christ died and rose again for him, he is to signify this faith by being himself buried in figure and rising again. This cannot be done in a literal grave of earth. Our Lord, therefore, chose water as the element in which baptism was to take place.

Scripture does not differentiate between the mode of

John's baptism and that of Christ and His apostles; when, therefore, we see that John chose a certain place for baptism 'because there was much water there,' (John 3. 23), we cannot suppose that his baptism was carried out by means of affusion, for in that case a small flask of water would have been ample. It is amusing to read the attempted explanation of a learned theologian (an advocate of infant sprinkling) that the 'much water' was needed for the people to drink!

It is striking to note that the Apostle Paul, in proving that the dead must rise again, says to the Corinthians: 'Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?' (1 Cor. 15. 29). No logical explanation of this passage has been forthcoming, except that it seems to have been recognized by the Corinthian church that, if a man turned to Christ on a bed of sickness from which he did not recover, a friend might be baptized on his behalf. Without justifying or condemning the practice, the apostle argues that this would be an entirely meaningless action on their part, if there be no resurrection of the dead. But, incidentally, his words provide a very strong argument against baptism by affusion, for if this had been permissible there would have been no need whatever to delay baptism in the hope of a possible recovery, or failing this to appoint a substitute. If the apostle or the Corinthians had contemplated for a moment the permissibility of baptism by affusion only a few drops of water would have been needed with which to baptize the dying man. But granting that baptism is immersion, we see at once that if a sick man was to be baptized at all, it must be by proxy, if he did not recover sufficiently to be immersed.

If we could go to the Holy Land and find, without any

possibility of mistake, the grave where our Lord Jesus was buried, with what solemn awe we should descend to the place where His body had lain after He had suffered for our sins and completed His atonement! Here the power of God raised that dead body again and broke asunder the bonds of death! Should we not ascend from that grave with hearts which burned within us, with the earnest and lasting resolve to consider ourselves as dead with Him and risen again in His glorious power?

But it is not possible for us all to visit the sepulchre in Palestine, even if anyone knew for certain where it was. Our Lord has chosen a far better method of binding our hearts to Himself and impressing on us what He did for us by His death, burial and resurrection. He has given us baptism, whereby in figure at the commencement of our life of faith we go down into His grave (buried with Him in baptism) and rise up again to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6. 4). Whoever neglects this command of our Lord or relies on some humanly contrived substitute for it, surely does so to his own irretrievable loss.

Although we have discussed the baptism of infants, it is very clear from Scripture that affusion is no baptism at all, so that if any one trusts that he was thereby baptized as an infant, he is deceiving himself, for in reality—even if children were scriptural subjects for baptism, which they have been proved not to be—he has not thereby been buried with Christ at all.

It is the plain teaching of Scripture that there is only one baptism, not two. We read in Ephes. 4. 5-6: 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.' The fact that there is only one baptism is here associated with the fact that we have only one Lord and only one God and Father. This seems to indicate that to acknowledge two baptisms would be equally erroneous with

acknowledging two Gods or two Lords. It is therefore futile to try to effect a compromise between truth and error by acknowledging as permissible baptism both the immersion of believers and the sprinkling of innocent babes. One of these is a deadly error, and logically they are mutually exclusive.

‘Why call ye Me: Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?’ cries our Lord (Luke 6. 46).

Our Lord’s instructions to the eleven apostles were that, after baptizing those who had been made disciples, they were to ‘teach them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them.’ This they sought to carry out. The Apostle Paul, too, as seen in his letters, sought faithfully to obey this command. He wrote to the Thessalonians: ‘Brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle’ (2 Thess. 2. 15). He thanked God that the Roman believers of that day had ‘obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which they were delivered.’ (Rom. 6. 17, R.v.).

In writing to the church in Corinth he said: ‘Be ye followers also of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you brethren, that ye remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you’ (1 Cor. 11. 2). In obeying the instructions of the apostle they were following Christ, and he commended them for it. Nevertheless, there were matters calling for adjustment. Some of them he said he would set in order when he came (v. 34)—they might wait—but there was one subject so important that it called for immediate attention, the observance of the Lord’s Supper. On this point he had to make an exception to his general praise. ‘In this I declare I praise you not’ (v. 17). When the church in Corinth came together into one place, that is,

as a church, they omitted to 'eat the Lord's supper.' 'Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not' (v. 22).

This is the second of the two ordinances given by our Lord to keep His atoning death before us. Whereas baptism is a personal matter for each individual, the Lord's Supper is something necessarily shared with others. It is the communal confession of a body of believers in Christ, that they trust His atoning death as the sole basis of their salvation. The breaking of the bread proclaims that He gave His body for their sakes, the pouring out of the wine that He shed His blood for them. As each one partakes of the broken bread and the poured-out wine, he expresses his faith in what Christ has done and his gratitude for His great love. In doing this, believers look forward to their Lord's personal return, as it is written: 'As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come' (1 Cor. 11. 26).

There is not the slightest doubt that our Lord desires all His redeemed people to keep this memorial feast until He returns and we see Him face to face. His express command: 'Do this in remembrance of Me,' ought to be enough for all who honestly acknowledge Him as Lord, even if they fail to discern the loving-kindness and divine wisdom lying behind the command.

But we do not rely only on the records in the Gospels. The Apostle Paul received a special charge from his Master to teach the disciples to observe the Lord's Supper. He wrote: '*I have received of the Lord* that which also I delivered unto you: That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks He brake it and said: Take, eat, this is My body, which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of Me' (1 Cor. 11. 23-24). Paul could, of course,

have learnt the necessary details from the other apostles, and the fact that our Lord gave him a special charge concerning this matter, shows what great importance He attaches to it.

It is therefore an astonishing and distressing thing that many professed disciples of our Lord, some of them apparently showing much devotion to His cause, should lightly brush aside this feast of remembrance, although He took such pains to ensure its continual observance by His people.

This memorial feast, being so precious to our Lord, has naturally been the object of the evil one's bitter attacks. No stone has been left unturned in the endeavour to pervert it and nullify the object for which our Lord established it. Instead of a *table of remembrance*, an *altar for sacrifice* has been widely substituted. All kinds of monstrous theories have been taught in connection with it, and bitter wars have been waged to enforce them. The result has been that the onlooking world has become disgusted with the whole subject and has said, like Israel of old: 'The table of the Lord is contemptible!' (cf. Mal. 1. 7).

Our Lord foresaw that tares would be sown by His enemy among His wheat, and that even when the wheat became meal it would be leavened (cf. Matt. 13. 25 and 33). With divine foresight He therefore took great pains to warn those who truly love Him of the errors which later would vex His church. One example of this is His sharp retort to the woman who invoked a blessing on His mother; here He obviously provided the prophylactic for mariolatry (Luke 11. 27-28).

When He fed the five thousand and afterwards taught that He was the Bread of Life, He took great care to make it very clear that there was no question of any

literal partaking of His flesh and blood. Some of His disciples, misunderstanding His words that His flesh was meat indeed and His blood drink indeed, said: 'This is a hard saying; who can hear it?' Whereupon He immediately said: 'Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?' As if to say: 'How can you literally eat My flesh, seeing that you will yourselves see this very body ascend up into heaven?' To make the matter still clearer He went on: 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the *flesh* profiteth nothing. *The words* that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life' (John 6. 60-63).

The idea of a literal partaking of the body and blood of our Lord is therefore in direct conflict with His own words. At the first observance of the Lord's Supper, He placed the matter still further beyond doubt by His explicit statement that the contents of the cup He had already blessed and of which He had just said: 'This is My blood of the new testament,' were nevertheless still '*this fruit of the vine*' (Matt. 26. 29). Those who dare to say that the wine is changed into blood in the communion cup thus flatly contradict our Lord's own carefully chosen words. Incidentally, they would make Him and His disciples guilty of a heinous offence against the Law of Moses, which expressly forbade the consumption of blood. The apostles led by the Holy Spirit instructed Gentile Christians to abstain from blood (Acts 15. 28-29), making it impossible for any believer to partake of shed blood.

Along with Jack's wonderful beanstalk, leading him to a country in the skies, and with Aladdin's wonderful lamp, producing for him all that he needed, and other equally mythical stories, children innumerable are taught a little about heaven and God's provision for our needs.

Small wonder, then, that their minds retain a penchant for the magical and that they are apt to interpret divine things to some extent in terms of the Beanstalk and the Lamp, for it is not easy for everyone to follow the example of the apostle and, on reaching maturity, entirely to put away childish things—at any rate from their subconscious mind.

There are thousands of people who find great difficulty in accepting some of the things which God has indeed promised us, while they nail their faith—or should we say credulity, which is not the same thing—to fetishes worthy of an African medicine man. Their minds, floating in this semi-magical haze, are actually regimented to accept the fantasy that, when our Lord instituted His memorial feast for His disciples, the bread on the platten and the wine in the cup actually became the flesh and blood, bone and sinew, nerve and muscle, of our Lord's body, while that body was still living a few inches away, unmarred and unwounded, thus being in two places at once!

Even the great reformer, Martin Luther, could not relinquish this error, which he had imbibed in his youth from his Popish surroundings. In his celebrated debate with the more enlightened Swiss reformer, Zwinglius, he wrote with chalk on the table-cover in front of him: *Hoc est corpus Meus* (This is My body) and declared he would never budge from this. In vain Zwinglius pointed out that our Lord had equally emphatically stated that He was a door, a vine and a shepherd, none of which Luther understood literally. Luther roared again and again: '*Hoc est corpus Meus*,' and there was an end of the matter. He refused even to shake hands with Zwinglius, and the cleavage then made inevitable set back the march of evangelical truth with sad results. Instead of being

a rallying-point for God's people the memorial feast was thus made the subject of bitter strife and division.

Nevertheless it is clear that our Lord intended this feast of remembrance to be the central gathering of His people in every locality where His disciples are found.

The question now arises: How often is the Lord's Supper to be held and on which particular day?

Our Lord has not failed to give us clear guidance about this matter so near to His heart. The Apostle Paul obtained mercy that he might be 'a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him' (1 Tim. 1. 16). Looking at this pattern, we find that on his visit to Troas (Acts 20. 6-11), he gathered the Christians together to break bread on *the first day of the week*. His journey was so urgent that, at the conclusion of the service, he had no time for sleep but departed immediately. This shows that it would have been a great convenience to him if he could have assembled the believers on the Sabbath, thus saving a whole day. But no, believers must be taught to gather together to remember the Lord's death on the first day of the week; therefore he waited. This is recorded for our emulation, and disposes completely of the contention sometimes met with, that Christians should gather for worship on the Jewish sabbath, the last day of the week. The pattern apostle deliberately waited all through the Sabbath, at great inconvenience to himself, and did not partake of the Lord's Supper until the first day of the week was come.

VII

The Church's Ministry

IN dealing with this subject it is necessary to remind ourselves that the Church of God was a 'mystery hid in God' and 'not made known unto the sons of men' in pre-Christian days, as pointed out in Chapter III. We cannot, therefore, expect to find in the Old Testament any direct guidance as to the conduct of the Church of God. All instructions as to behaviour in the Church must necessarily be found in the New Testament. As already pointed out, Timothy had been well instructed in the Old Testament Scriptures from his childhood (2 Tim. 3. 15), and yet Paul found it necessary to write to him, so that he might know how he ought to behave himself 'in the house of God, which is the church of the living God' (1 Tim. 3. 14-15). Timothy could not learn this from the Old Testament Scriptures. Neither can we.

One of the saddest things in the history of the Church of God is the way in which professed disciples have gone past the plain teachings of the New Testament, back to the shadows of the Old Testament, and sought to impress the Church into the mould of the Old Covenant. This was the greatest difficulty the Apostle Paul had to contend with, as we see from the Acts and his epistles. Everywhere he went his work was dogged by enthusiasts for the Old Testament, who wanted the disciples to be circumcised and taught to keep the Law. This tendency has persisted with great determination up to the present day.

Under the Old Covenant the very earth of the Holy

Land was considered holy, so that Naaman the Syrian, after his conversion to Jehovah, took back with him two mules' burden of earth, doubtless on which to erect an altar (2 Kings 5. 17). Jerusalem was the Holy City and the faithful, wherever they were, turned towards that city when offering up prayer. To Jerusalem they repaired to celebrate their Feasts. There was the presence of the living God, in His Holy Temple. There was the exclusive caste of priests, into whose office not even a king might intrude (1 Chron. 26. 16-20). They alone were the intermediaries between God and man. They wore a distinctive dress, without which they might not perform their service.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came with the message that no longer in Jerusalem or any other special place should true worship be offered, but that the time was imminent, when true worshippers should 'worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him' (John 4. 20-24).

When He cried out on the Cross: 'It is finished!' the time for this crucial change had come; the era of the old covenant was brought to a close. In the Temple not far off an event of extraordinary significance immediately took place. The great veil which hung between the Holy Place and the Holiest of all was rent in twain from top to bottom, not from bottom to top as by human agency, but by the hand of God. This not only signified that the way into the presence of God was now opened through the atonement made by Christ, but also that the old Levitical order was done away with. Before long the Romans came and burnt up the whole edifice. Its work was done, its significance all fulfilled in Christ.

We who believe in that atonement should not be slow to recognize that the rent veil—though doubtless patched

up again by the priests of Jerusalem—indicates God's complete annulment of the Levitical order, with all its implications.

It is therefore futile to look upon any building as now representing the dwelling place of God, as once did the temple in Jerusalem, long since discarded and destroyed, or to erect such a building so that worshippers may turn their faces towards Jerusalem. It is equally futile to term any part of such a building an altar; to have a special order of priests to officiate therein; or to clothe them in distinctive priestly garments. To do so necessarily implies a return to the old covenant—even though we find new names for all these things—and a subtle denial of the exclusive sufficiency of the new covenant, that new covenant in His blood which our Lord announced a few hours before the temple veil was rent asunder and the Levitical order once and for ever discarded (Luke 22. 20; 1 Cor. 11. 25).

Throughout recorded history professional religionists have appeared in a bad light. In the days of the Old Testament they made a poor show, although their office then had the divine sanction. In the days of Christ they incurred His bitterest denunciations. In the Middle Ages they had a very unsavoury reputation, and took a leading part in the persecutions that then made a dark smudge on the page of history. I fear it cannot be said that they have in later times redeemed their reputation, in spite of some happy exceptions.

In the Acts we read: 'A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith' (6. 7). These were, of course, priests of the Levitical order. Yet, of this great company, *not one of them* is again mentioned as a priest. Nowhere in the New Testament does one of these former priests appear again in that capacity—a most extra-

ordinary fact, if an exclusive company of priests is henceforth, as in the past, to be the channel of divine instruction or service. The apostles send greetings and messages to or from bishops, deacons, a host, a city chamberlain, a lawyer and a doctor; mention is made of a tent-maker, a coppersmith, a tanner, a jailor, a soldier and a treasurer; but *never* of an individual Christian priest. Such an office is entirely foreign to the New Testament.

On two occasions the Apostle Paul gives detailed lists of the officers of the church—in 1 Cor. 12. 28 and Ephes. 4. 11. Evangelists, pastors, teachers and others are mentioned, but no hint is made of the presence in God's Church of any officiating priests! Can we possibly imagine that the Holy Spirit, speaking by the apostle, omitted them by mistake, if there indeed be room for a caste of priests in the economy of the Church of God?

But while the New Testament gives no hint whatever of an exclusive priesthood in the Church of God, it is clearly taught that every member of that Church belongs to the 'chosen generation, *the royal priesthood*, the holy nation, the peculiar people,' which has been called out of darkness into God's marvellous light (1 Pet. 2. 9). Those who are washed from their sins in the blood of Christ are made a 'kingdom of priests' (Rev. 1. 5-6). This common standing of every believer, independent of sex, length of service, or any moral or spiritual attainment, is the only true priesthood of the New Testament, and *to acknowledge any other priesthood inevitably implies the denial of the essential priesthood of all believers.*

Of our Lord we read: 'If He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all' (Heb. 8. 4, R.V.). If *He* would not be a priest, in the exclusive sense obviously meant, who amongst us, His followers, dares to take such an office on himself?

If there is to be no separate caste of priests in the Christian Church, then there is naturally no question of priestly garments being used to distinguish them from others.

It may be objected that there is a symbolic value in the garments used in some professed Christian communions. But we have no indication in New Testament Scriptures that any kind of uniform or distinctive dress is permissible in the Christian Church, either to distinguish one Christian from another or to convey a symbolic meaning.

The well-known J. H. Newman caught a distant glimpse of divine truth when he admitted that 'freedom from symbols and articles is abstractedly the highest state of Christian communion,' but then he went on to say that this freedom was 'the peculiar privilege of the primitive Church.' Having turned his back on this highest state of Christian communion he quite logically drifted into the mental and spiritual bondage of the Roman hierarchy. Millions of others hover with more or less uncertainty, and far less logically, at various stages of compromise between these extremes.

J. H. Newman was the man who wrote: 'In a religion that embraces large and separate classes of adherents there always is of necessity to a certain extent an exoteric* and an esoteric* doctrine.' This is morally equivalent to a merchant saying: 'In a business which has customers of varying degrees of intelligence there always is of necessity to a certain extent a shop-window standard of quality and a stock-shelf standard.' The shopkeeper who runs his business on these lines is unhesitatingly

* Exoteric—pertaining to the uninitiated public. Esoteric—pertaining to doctrines taught privately and meant only for the initiated (*Dictionary*).

dubbed a swindler. A smoother word is usually chosen for ecclesiastics of the same moral calibre.

There was no exoteric and esoteric distinction in our Lord's teachings, whether spoken in parables to the public or—the same teaching—in plain words to His disciples. At His trial He was able to say without fear of challenge: '*In secret I have said nothing*' (John 18. 20). His disciples need have no hesitation in tracing the origin of the cardinal's dictum to the Father of Lies.

Insincerity of character always craves outward forms and symbols to bolster up its lack of reality and power. The true servant of God needs no distinctive dress to mark him as such. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' not by the dress they wear.

There is, however, a pronounced streak of effeminacy in some men, which leads them to glory in some kind of showy or distinctive dress. This tendency is very marked in some of the more backward races of Africa, especially in men who are recognized as religious leaders amongst them. The chasuble and alb of the ritualist and various imitations of military and other uniforms seen in some religious circles are all from the same root—the carnal heart of man, who delights in calling attention to his person.

We do not gather from the New Testament that God has any use for ecclesiastical millinery in His Church. The divinely chosen symbol of the Holy Spirit was a dove, not a peacock.

The young woman who has a cradle with a living child in it does not hanker after the dolls which charmed her a decade ago. The man who has a motor-car in his garage does not amuse himself by pulling around a wooden model of a car on a piece of string. If the poor ritualist had an experimental knowledge of the real thing,

he would not play around with his baubles, either on his person or as appurtenances of his professed service.

If it is now clear that priestly service is the privilege and duty of every member of the Church of God and not in any sense the monopoly of a distinctive caste within that Church, we will go on to consider briefly what this service involves.

A priest is essentially one who (*a*) has access to God on behalf of others, and (*b*) offers sacrifices. While a prophet comes on God's behalf with a message to His people, a priest goes on the people's behalf with a message to God. In other words, he prays for them. Again and again we are exhorted to carry out this priestly work of intercession. An examination of the New Testament epistles shows how great a part this priestly work should take in the normal life of a believer. We neglect our high calling as priests of God if we are slack in this service.

The sacrifices it is our duty and privilege to offer as God's priests are mentioned on three occasions. First, in Rom. 12. 1 we are exhorted to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service. This is the first sacrifice we must make as God's priests. If made, it will bring the whole of our life into line with the 'good and acceptable and perfect will of God.'

Our living and holy sacrifice is acceptable to Him, and His good and perfect will is acceptable to us. Thus intimate communion is established between Him and His priests.

The second and third sacrifices are mentioned in Heb. 13. 15-16, towards the conclusion of this priestly epistle. Having gone 'outside the camp, bearing His reproach,' we are through Christ to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving

thanks to His name. Thus praise to God as well as intercession for men is to occupy the life of the Christian priest.

Lastly, we are exhorted not to forget to 'do good and communicate,' for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. The word 'communicate' doubtless refers here primarily to giving help to those in need, but it carries the sense of fellowship, participation, rather than of charity in the modern sense of that word.

I now wish to refer again to the Pilgrimage which gave its name to my first chapter, and which was there only briefly mentioned. Sunday by Sunday I conscientiously visited every place of worship I knew of within walking distance of my home in South-West London, with a view to finding a spiritual home where the Word of God was honoured. In the meantime I was studying the New Testament and praying for guidance. On Sunday evenings I usually attended any place where the Gospel was preached, and greatly appreciated the messages I heard. At one place I occasionally visited there seemed less attractive outward show than at some of the others, but I was impressed by the faithfulness and power with which the various preachers gave their message, the heartiness of the singing and the manifest enjoyment of the Word on the part of most of the hearers.

I was glad to see there a former school friend of mine, a little older than myself. One evening I said to him: "What do they do here on Sunday mornings? Have they any service then?" "Yes, there is a meeting then for Christians," he replied. "May I come?" He thought I might, though he did not seem emphatic about it.

Next Sunday morning I stole into a back seat and took a look round. To my astonishment I saw that in the centre of the hall a table had been spread, with a loaf of

bread and a decanter of wine, and the seats were arranged so that the congregation sat round it. "Ah," I whispered to myself, "they are going to celebrate the communion!" But the minister did not appear to have arrived, for I could see no one in ministerial robes. When the time came to begin, a man rose and announced a hymn to be sung. "Ah, he must be the minister," I thought, and weighed him up carefully. The hymn was sung heartily, and after a slight pause someone else stood up and said: "Let us pray!" I saw he had no book to pray from, but judged that he knew the words so well that he did not need it, and that he, not the other man, must be the minister. Nevertheless his prayer did not sound as if read from a book or learnt by rote, it seemed somehow to come from the heart.

Soon after the prayer was finished, still a third man rose and said: "Let us read from the Word of God!" He read a portion of Scripture and made a few remarks on it.

I was amazed as several members of the congregation rose one after another and gave thanks or announced a hymn or read from the Scriptures, for now it began to dawn on me that I was witnessing something similar to what the Apostle Paul described in his first letter to the Corinthians: 'When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying' (14. 26). What astonished me most was that all that was said, sung or prayed, was in perfect accord, as if all who took part had most carefully arranged it beforehand. Somehow or other, this solution seemed to be ruled out. I realized with awe that I was witnessing an attempt by ordinary, simple Christian folk to put into practice what the New Testament taught

about Christian worship. It became clear to me that the One Who had guided these people in their worship was none other than the Spirit of the Living God. I had come in as one unlearned, and although I did not fall down on my face, yet I worshipped God and reported that God was in them of a truth (v. 25). I knew that my pilgrimage was at an end. I had found my spiritual home. The vision caught at that simple gathering over forty years ago has never left me, and there has been no disillusionment.

The only thing which caused me regret was that when the bread and the wine were passed round, they were not, of course, offered to me, an unknown stranger who had apparently dropped in as a casual onlooker. I realized the propriety of this, but felt sorry I had not previously asked to take part, for I had in spirit been worshipping with them as they offered their praises to God for the gift of His beloved Son.

This was soon remedied. After more searching of the Scriptures and enjoying these meetings a few more times from the back seat, I plucked up my courage and asked permission to remember the Lord's death with them. I found the former Bible Class Leader who had led me to Christ was now a regular attender, and he spoke for me as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, so that I was forthwith welcomed as a fellow-worshipper.

I joined no church. Their enquiries satisfied them that I was already a member of the Church of God, being a believer in Christ, and as such they recognized me.

Looking back, I am deeply grateful to our loving Father for His guidance in my search for the path He would have His people tread. I had very much yet to learn from the Word of God. I knew no Greek, hardly anything of Church history, and still less of theology.

But one advantage I had, on the negative side. I had no illusions about God having one special will for me in Church matters, and another for the next man. I did not care for, neither did I seek, anything suitable to my temperament or environment or experience. I wanted then, as I want now, to walk as far as possible in the path God had planned for all His people to tread, not as a conglomeration of individuals, but as one body, the Church of the Living God.

It is possible that some of my readers may quite conscientiously be shocked at the idea of untrained men taking upon themselves the responsibility of guiding a congregation of Christian people and ministering the Word of God to them. The fact must be faced, however, that God has deliberately chosen to use such instruments. This is fully borne out by Scripture and just as emphatically by experience. It is an unalterable principle of the Word of God that 'God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise' (1 Cor. 1. 27). Indeed, Christ Himself found special joy in contemplating this principle and thanked His Father that He had so ordained (see Luke 10. 21). It was pre-eminently to the church of the Corinthians, where there were 'not many wise men after the flesh' that the revelation of God's plans for Church order was given (1. 26).

In the British Museum there is a caricature published in 1647 by some friend of ecclesiasticism with the mocking title under the pictures: 'These Tradesmen are preachers in the City of London, 1647.' There is a confectioner, a blacksmith, a shoemaker, a tailor, a saddler, a porter, a cabinetmaker, a soapboiler, a glover, a flour-seller, a poulterer and a button-maker.

Men of all these professions were known as preachers of the Gospel, to the intense disgust of the state-subsi-

dized ecclesiastics. Singularly enough, the list does not include a carpenter nor a tent-maker. Doubtless it did not occur to the publisher of this caricature that in the very centre of his city stood a magnificent building bearing the name of a member of the latter "trade," where considerable time is spent in sounding the praises of One Who was brought up in the humble home of a carpenter.

There is not the slightest doubt that at all times and in all countries by far the most effectual work in winning lost souls for Christ has been done by those who have not been professional religionists, but who, after the example specifically given by the Apostle Paul (Acts 20. 34-35), have laboured with their own hands to support themselves and help others. Note particularly that it was not to the rank and file but to the presbyters of the church in Ephesus (v. 17), called bishops (episkopous) in v. 28, that the apostle held up this example to be followed, adding the beautiful precept from our Lord's own lips, not recorded elsewhere; 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (v. 35).

The ceremonial apron worn even to this day by clerics bearing the title of bishop, is a silent testimony to the truth now, alas, lost sight of, that the wearer was expected to have a trade whereby to labour with his hands like his colleagues in the church at Ephesus.

It is important to notice that the apostle follows up his instructions with regard to the open character of the worship and ministry of a Christian church by saying: 'The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord,' and he demands that spiritually-minded men acknowledge this. No further admonition is necessary where there is a sincere desire to please the Lord.

A limb bound up for a long period becomes more and

more useless, and after being freed takes some time to resume its normal functions. In the same way if no use is made of the gifts given by the Head of the Church to the various members, they will be lost sight of, and it will appear to be impossible for them to function. But this is not the case. Our Lord's provision for His Church is absolutely perfect and it is a serious reflection on Him to suggest otherwise. If we only dare to obey His Word, we shall be surprised at the blessing that results.

It may be true that there is some element of risk in opening the ministry and service of an assembly of God's people to a number of men. But it is equally true that far greater risks are run when the ministry is concentrated in one man, who may turn out to be good, bad or indifferent. The sad history of the Christian Church for many centuries bears witness to the appalling risks incurred by the unscriptural practice of one-man ministry.

Of course, what has been said must not be taken to imply that every member of a Christian church ought to preach. All should commend the Gospel by their life and conversation, and they should influence for Christ as many as they possibly can, but it is a great mistake to think that the only sphere of Christian service is a platform. In Ephes. 4. 16 we are told that every part of the "Body" has its work to do, and in Rom. 12. 3-8 we are told not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, for all members have not the same office (v. 4). Gifts differ (v. 6) and all should exercise their particular gift in brotherly love 'in honour preferring one another' (v. 10).

It appears from the New Testament that the assembling of Christ's people together to remember His death constitutes the chief gathering of a local church. The apostle finds fault with the Corinthian church because

they come together 'not to eat the Lord's supper.' 'Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not,' he says, 'for I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me' (1 Cor. 11. 22-26). Nothing whatever is said about any particular member being appointed to 'administer the sacrament.' In the simplest possible way, just as He Himself did it, the bread is taken and handed from one to another, and likewise the cup.

Our Lord uses similitudes whereby to teach His people (Hos. 12. 10). At the Lord's Table He has given us three similitudes by which to keep ever before us three truths He deems it necessary for us to have in constant remembrance. The first is the broken bread, which signifies His body given for us. The second is the wine, which speaks of His blood shed for us. The third is the subjection of the sisters on this occasion, which tells of the subjection of the Church to Christ as His Bride (1 Cor. 14. 34; Ephes. 5. 23-24). This third similitude follows the other two in logical sequence. Because our Lord has given Himself for us, His Church should, out of gratitude, be subject to Him in everything. It is a beautiful figure and may not be lightly ignored. It has already been pointed out that the apostle claims that the directions he gives the Corinthian church are the commandments of the Lord. This claim comes immediately after his injunction as to the silence of the women (1 Cor. 14. 37).

In some quarters there is an inclination to disregard these commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ, on one pretext or another, but a grave principle is here involved. If it is permissible to disregard them, then either (a) the

Apostle Paul did not speak with full authority from Christ, or (b) the original injunctions only applied to the times then prevailing, and we are no longer bound by what applied then. In the case of (a) we lose a great part of the New Testament as a revelation from God. In the case of (b) we vitiate the New Testament and are left floundering about without a reliable guide. Everything that may call for self-denial or self-surrender will be deemed obsolete by those who choose to do so.

Some who chafe under these commands or restrictions have developed a complex against those of us who seek to observe them. But their quarrel is not with us; it is with our common Lord and Master. For our part, we acknowledge that He has the unlimited right to tell us what to do, how to do it, how not to do it and what not to do, even though we may sometimes be tempted to think, in our presumption, that we can find more practical ways of carrying on His work than He has given us in His Word.

We learn from the record in 1 Samuel, 15th chapter, that God rejected Saul from being king over His people because he failed to yield Him implicit obedience. Saul thought that sacrifice could well come in place of obedience. Samuel's answer stands as a beacon throughout the ages: 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, *to obey is better than sacrifice*' (v. 22).

We shall undoubtedly find that we also are unfitted to reign—with Christ in His kingdom—if we have not learnt to obey the voice of the Lord, no matter what extraordinary show of sacrifice we may point to.

It is said that a French general watched the famous charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War (later immortalized by Tennyson, the Poet Laureate), and

turning away, he exclaimed: 'It is magnificent, *but it is not war!*' There are many magnificent sacrifices made by those who have 'a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge' (Rom. 10. 2). Yet truth compels us to say: "It is magnificent, but it is not the good fight of faith!" In the past, 'someone has blundered,' left the path of obedience, and thousands follow on with a zeal which intrinsically might well put us to shame, but, for all the sacrifice involved, cannot be pleasing to God, Who, in all dispensations, from the Garden of Eden to the scene in Rev. 17. 14, insists on obedience as the essential qualification for acceptable service. True, it is written: 'If we suffer, we shall reign with Him,' but this is qualified in the same chapter by the words: 'Yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully' (2 Tim. 2. 5 and 12).

If non-scriptural methods of serving God should be acknowledged in 'that Day,' many thousands of servants of Christ would be forced to say: 'Lord, we knew all about these methods. We could have used them ourselves. The only reason why we did not use them, although we ran the risk of less apparent success, was Thine own definite Word. If we have not been as fruitful as others, if our service has been limited, it has been on account of Thine own words, Lord.'

But things are not just as they seem. An enormous amount of the seeming success of unscriptural methods of service is only chaff—wood, hay and stubble—while the Lord undoubtedly does a vast amount of work unheralded and unadvertised, through those who seek to obey Him out of a sincere heart.

We often wonder why our Lord seems to delay His coming. It may be that we, His people, are primarily responsible for that delay. He has revealed that now, in the time of His rejection, He is calling around Himself

His future rulers in the Kingdom He is coming back to establish, as did David during the time of his rejection. The prime requisite for leadership in that Kingdom will obviously be a proved and tested determination to carry out the Lord's will, and that alone, in accordance with instructions given, in spite of all opposition and all temptations to half-measures. The number needed to control the uncouthed millions of mankind in the Millennium must be enormous, while the number of Christ's disciples who have no other criterion than His revealed Word and will is, as far as can be seen, appallingly small. It may be that Christ has to delay His coming because as yet there are not enough rulers to go round. If so, then every revival of interest in the Word of God and His purposes therein revealed is of paramount importance.

VIII

The Discipline of the Church

OUR previous chapter showed that the New Testament excludes the idea of a separate caste of men in the Church of God. We must not, however, suppose that no provision is made in the New Testament for discipline in the Church of God. On the contrary, very definite rules are laid down, and these, if faithfully observed, provide for the proper rule of every church, whether large or small. The neglect of the New Testament provision for rule in the church, or the substitution of human rules and regulations, has always been the cause of untold trouble.

According to the New Testament, rule is necessary in every church, and that rule is definitely committed into the hands of men who are named elders or overseers. These words are interchangeable, as is seen from Paul's address to the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20. 17-35). He sent for the elders of the church (presbyters), and in his address to them he says: 'The Holy Spirit has made you overseers (bishops) to feed (shepherd) the church of God.' The first word describes the men themselves, and indicates that they are older men of ripe experience and judgment. The other word, translated literally 'overseers,' is that from which our English word 'bishop' is derived and describes the work they do (oversee or look after).

For the sake of clarity I will use the word 'overseer' as being an accurate rendering of the original and less

likely to convey an unscriptural idea, whereas the other word 'bishop,' though equally correct, has long been associated with an office unknown to the New Testament. 'Overseer' is given in the margin of the Revised Version.

It is clear that in the local church at Ephesus there were several elders or bishops. We find the same in the church at Philippi (Phil. 1. 1). Scripture knows no such thing as one bishop officiating in charge of a local church, still less of a whole district or country.

It is necessary to keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus: 'Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master; and all ye are brethren. . . . Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant' (Matt. 23. 8-11). The spirit that longs for the mastery over others is the direct opposite of the Spirit of Christ and should be rigidly excluded from the Church of God. The strands of history are strewn with wreckage resulting from neglect of our Lord's prescient warning.

During the second and third centuries the churches, alas, gradually veered from the Ephesian standard of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance (Ephes. 4. 2-3; 5. 21), to the Diotrephesian standard of high-handed and exclusive clericalism (3 John 9-10).

It cannot therefore be too strongly emphasized that it is absolutely essential to the wellbeing of a local church that the scriptural instructions regarding overseers be carefully and faithfully observed. In the course of a long experience in many parts, the writer cannot recall ever having heard of church troubles or difficulties which were not caused mainly through neglect of the highly important instructions laid down clearly in the New Testament with regard to overseers.

So important are they that they are given twice over,

once in 1 Tim. chap. 3, and again in Titus, chap. 1. This repeated specification of a Christian overseer is so explicit and goes into such detail that there should be no difficulty in ascertaining whether a man be a true overseer or not. Those who come up to the scriptural standard here given by the Holy Spirit through the apostle qualify as overseers and must be acknowledged as such. Those who do not come up to this standard do not qualify and must not in any circumstances be acknowledged as overseers.

Stress is laid on definite acknowledgment of those who are true overseers. 'We beseech you, brethren, to know (acknowledge) them which labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake' (1 Thess. 5. 12-13). From Christ, the Head of the Church, come the gift and calling, but it is the responsibility of His people to acknowledge those whom He has called to be overseers.

Here, then, are the specifications by which an overseer may be known, as given in 1 Tim. 3 (R.V.). He must be:

Blameless (irreproachable).	Gentle.
The husband of one wife.	Not contentious.
Temperate.	Not covetous.
Of a sound mind.	One that rules his own house
Orderly.	well, having his children in
Given to hospitality.	subjection.
Able to teach.	Not a novice.
Not given to wine.	With a good testimony from
No striker.	the outside world.

The list in Titus amplifies this, emphasizing:

That an overseer's children must not be insubordinate or even accused of dissoluteness.

That the overseer must not be a self-willed man, nor quick-tempered.

That besides being capable of teaching, he must 'hold

to the faithful Word,' and thus be able by sound doctrine to encourage his brethren and to convince gainsayers.

If the Church of God had only obeyed these explicit apostolic instructions conscientiously, what a different story Church History would have told!

It must be apparent to every thoughtful reader that if such men, and no others, are acknowledged as overseers in any given church, there will be room for the Spirit of God to work mightily in blessing, both to believers and the outside world.

God's specifications are perfect, and He Who gave it is willing to help us carry it out, providing we refuse to be content with inferior substitutes for the right kind of overseers and look to the Head of the Church, from Whom all gifts come, to raise them up.

A thoughtful study of the divine qualifications for overseership will show how marvellously suited they are to ensure the right type of man in the responsible position of overseer in an assembly of God's people.

Note the wisdom, for instance, of stipulating that he must be hospitable. If his brethren have frequent access to his home, they will not have to take his word for it that he rules well his own house and that his children are 'in subjection with all gravity.'

Paul told the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (Acts 20. 28); and we see that Paul and Barnabas chose elders in every assembly on one of their journeys (Acts 14. 23). It is thus clear that the Spirit of God, through human instrumentality, appoints overseers. The passages in 1 Tim. and Titus show us exactly what the apostles looked for in the overseers they appointed. When such overseers are found it is the duty of the believers to acknowledge them as such (1 Thess. 5. 12-13), to obey them (Heb. 13. 17; 1 Pet. 5. 5), to

esteem them very highly for their work's sake, and to provide them with a suitable reward (1 Tim. 5. 17, where 'honour' is more correctly translated 'reward'). This last point will be dealt with in our next chapter.

Because a believer is a clever and diligent business man and has consequently amassed some wealth, he is not thereby constituted an overseer. The qualifications for success in the business world and in the Church of God are by no means identical.

The work of the overseer is to feed the Church of God (Acts 20. 28; 1 Pet. 5. 2); to guide the Church (Heb. 13. 7) and watch over the souls of the flock, for which they will be called to give account (Heb. 13. 7 and 17).

The wording of 1 Tim. 3. 5 is worthy of careful notice: 'If a man know not how to *rule* his own house, how shall he *take care of* the church of God?' Note the contrast between the 'rule' of his own house and the 'taking care of' the church. Here the same word is used as we find in Luke 10. 35, where the Good Samaritan enjoins the innkeeper to 'take care of' his wounded *protégé*. The kindly heart of the Good Samaritan must characterize a godly overseer.

Besides the overseers, the New Testament provides for deacons. This word is taken direct from the Greek and means servant, though it is generally translated minister in the A.V. An explicit specification is given of the kind of men who may be appointed deacons (servants) in the Church of God in 1 Tim. 3. 8-13. The qualifications called for in their case are similar to those of overseers. Deacons must be tried first and show themselves blameless, before actually being entrusted with any permanent service. Faithful service on their part leads to a good standing in the church and much boldness in the faith (v. 13).

The vital importance of these specifications of the

Church's overseers and servants is apparent when we read the words which follow them: 'These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but, if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. 3. 14-15). The apostle hoped soon to see Timothy, but these things were so important that he was impelled to put them in writing and send them to him immediately.

It has been shown that Scripture stresses the *recognition* of those whom God has appointed to be overseers in the local church. Perhaps the chief reason for this is that a godly overseer of humble mind is not likely to feel free to take his proper part in the discipline of an assembly, unless it is clearly understood by all concerned that he is acting on behalf of the assembly.

It is his duty, where necessary, to 'reprove, rebuke, exhort' (2 Tim. 4. 2). In some cases he will have to 'rebuke sharply' (Titus 1. 13) and 'with all authority' (Titus 2. 15).

Further, his reproof, rebuke or exhortation will certainly have more weight in the eyes of an offender when there is no question of the right of an overseer to administer correction on behalf of the assembly. Where any such doubt exists, discipline inevitably becomes lax.

We have seen in Chapter IV who are members of God's Church—those who have been born again; are united to Christ by faith; are built up as living stones on Christ the Foundation; and love Him as the Redeemer of their souls. All such should be received as members of the local church.

It is noteworthy that the apostle, after exhorting the Corinthians in the name of the Lord not to be 'unequally yoked together with unbelievers,' nor to have fellowship

with the unrighteous, to 'come out from among them and be separate,' immediately adds: 'Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man' (2 Cor. 6. 14 to 7. 2). These words indicate surely that the only possible drawbacks to the reception of a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, are that he has wronged some one; he has corrupted some one; or he has defrauded some one. These things, if known, and when known, give ground for the rejection of an applicant for fellowship.

The expulsion of a professed believer, who has fallen into sin, from the fellowship of God's people is a very serious matter and must be done, when necessary, by the entire church. The New Testament provides for this painful eventuality. We are told in 1 Cor. 5. 1-13, how an offender is to be dealt with. The 'old leaven' is to be purged, the 'wicked person' is to be 'put away' from the assembly. Such an action is described as 'delivering such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.'

The Corinthian believers in the case referred to reacted with commendable zeal to the apostle's exhortation, and expelled the erring one from their fellowship.

The happy result was that he was brought to true repentance and indeed sorrowed so bitterly that the apostle expressed concern lest he should be 'swallowed up with overmuch sorrow,' and besought the Corinthians to 'confirm their love toward him' (2 Cor. 2. 4-8).

We learn from this that, although scriptural discipline may appear at first sight to be strict, it aims at the reclamation and restoration of the offender and, if faithfully carried out, may be expected to achieve this blessed result.

Another example of church discipline is given in Rom. 16. 17, where the apostle says: 'Now I beseech you,

brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.' Again, in 2 Thess. 3. 6, 14, 15: 'We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us. . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.'

Our Lord Jesus Himself anticipated His Church's need of guidance in matters of discipline and provided that one who had suffered wrong from a fellow-believer should, if personal attempts at reconciliation fail, report the matter to the local church. If the offender should 'neglect to hear the church,' he was to be regarded as 'a heathen man and a publican' (Matt. 18. 15-17). In this connection our Lord gave an encouraging reiteration of His promise to hear and answer prayer, and to be present with His people, even with 'two or three' seeking to effect a reconciliation between brethren (vv. 16, 20), for He said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matt. 5. 9).

All who have the faith and the courage to confine themselves solely to the New Testament instructions with regard to Church order and discipline, will find that they are in practice infinitely superior to all human arrangements. After all, an orderly company of people is bound to have *some* rules of conduct whereby to live its common life. Why not the rules of conduct given by divine foresight in the New Testament, which after nineteen centuries need no revision, but are as perfect as when they were given, being backed, moreover, by the promise of our Lord's presence in their execution? (Matt. 18. 20, and 28. 20).

IX

The Church's Finances

OF all the sins to which mankind is prone, the love of money was that denounced most often by our Lord, as we see in the Gospels. He constantly warned His disciples of the danger of falling into this snare. Since He knew us men better than anyone else, we must conclude that covetousness and the unfaithful use of money are our greatest dangers.

It is therefore not surprising to find that great care has been taken by the Holy Spirit, speaking through the apostles, to give in the New Testament well-defined principles, illustrated by striking examples, to guide the Lord's people in their financial matters, both as individuals and as churches.

We will first consider what the New Testament teaches about the church's finances, and naturally turn to the Acts of the Apostles to see what was the practice of the early church.

We find that the members of the church in Jerusalem had at first 'all things common,' in much the same way as the Twelve had while their Master was with them (Acts 2. 44-45 and 4. 32-37).

We do not, however, find that this was in obedience to any instructions given by the Lord. On the contrary, He took pains while with them to prepare them for the end of their former way of living and for a change-over to a new order after His departure. We read in Luke 22. 35-37 that He asked them: 'When I sent you without

purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said: Nothing. Then said He unto them: But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one . . . for that concerning Me hath an end.'

But the disciples forgot many things their Lord had told them. Even His repeated declarations of His approaching sufferings and death, and of His resurrection, were completely lost sight of. So it is not surprising that they overlooked His warning about the closing down of the old mode of life, in which they had all things common, and the emergence of a new order of things.

The first great sorrow to overtake the infant church, so that 'great fear came upon all,' was in connection with the practice of having all things common (Acts 5. 1-10). This was followed by a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews over the working out of the communal system, and seven men were appointed to supervise distribution, so that the apostles might give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. It seems, however, that the Spirit of God made choice of Stephen, one of these seven, for the most prominent ministry of the Word, he, not the apostles, becoming the chief object of the Jews' hatred, for 'they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake' (6. 10), and he became the first Christian martyr.

After this, much persecution arose. The disciples were scattered abroad. The new order, foretold by our Lord, came into force; each had to take his own purse and scrip, and thereafter there is not the slightest hint that the disciples persisted in their idea of having 'all things common.'

On the contrary, we read in the epistles instructions concerning Christian masters and servants, and of the fair

wages the latter should receive (Col. 4. 1). Paul writes to Philemon, asking him to put on his account whatever Onesimus might owe to him, and he promises to repay. So far from all things being common in the Ephesian, Corinthian and Thessalonian churches, we read of the apostle himself working with his own hands while he was with them, to supply his needs.

The words in 1 John 3. 17: 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' could never have been written if it was the custom to have all things common. Certain lazy people in the Thessalonian church were told by the apostle to work and to 'eat their own bread' (2 Thess. 3. 11).

All this goes to prove that the idea of having 'all things common' was not part of God's plan for the permanent regulation of His people's stewardship of the possessions entrusted to them. All the Scriptures we have yet to consider on this subject will bear out this statement.

While this seems sufficiently clear, as far as outward organization is concerned, so that we are not now called upon to sell our property and lay the proceeds at the feet of Christian elders, yet it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the inner principle which moved these early disciples to such acts of complete consecration is still the divine rule for God's people. The only difference is that, instead of handing over the responsibility to a body of elders, we are required to shoulder it ourselves.

'Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6. 19-20). 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service' (Rom. 12. 1).

These passages show that we are not only required

to consecrate to God the work of our hands, but the hands themselves, not merely the product of our mental and physical toil, but the brain itself, the body itself. All must be laid at the feet of our Lord just as definitely as the early Christians laid their money at the feet of the apostles. He allows us, as a rule, to receive it back again from His hands, no longer as proprietors, but as stewards, and He has revealed that He will require us to render an account of our stewardship when He returns.

These things appear to have been understood by some of the churches referred to in the New Testament, notably the churches of Macedonia. Although undergoing 'a great trial of affliction,' and passing through a time of deep poverty, they gave most liberally to others whom they considered even more needy. The secret of their generosity is found in the apostle's words: 'They first gave their own selves to the Lord' (see 2 Cor. 8. 1-5).

Nowhere in Scripture is there any suggestion of unconverted people 'giving themselves to God'. This is the duty and privilege of those who have first received from God the gift of forgiveness and eternal life in His Son.

The experience of the early church provides us with a solemn warning in this regard. Ananias and Sapphira his wife, moved, perhaps, by the example of Joses Barnabas, sold some of their property. But when it came to surrendering the proceeds to the apostles, they decided privately to keep back part for themselves, and say nothing about it. This hypocrisy was at once revealed to the Apostle Peter, who rebuked Ananias severely. The latter fell down and expired. Three hours later the same thing happened to Sapphira, after she had been given an opportunity of telling the truth if she wished.

The mere fact that we do not see people falling down

and giving up the ghost in Christian churches nowadays is no proof that people as guilty as Ananias and Sapphira do not now exist. We see clearly in Scripture that God always punishes a sin with immediate judgment the first time it is committed. After that He often appears to take no notice.

For instance, the first time the children of Israel made to themselves a molten image to represent Jehovah, at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses was receiving the Law, God visited them with a severe judgment and 3,000 men were slain by the swords of the Levites (Exod. 32). Time and again after that the people were guilty of idolatry, but no such flaming judgment took place. Their guilt accumulated, as it were, until at last they were deported by Babylonian and Assyrian conquerors and scattered amongst the nations.

The first time 'strange fire' was offered in the service of the Lord, Nadab and Abihu, who had committed the error, possibly under the influence of strong drink, were immediately slain (Lev. 10. 1-2; 8-10). 'Strange fire,' or its modern equivalent, has been offered hundreds of times since, but apparently no divine notice has been taken.

The first time the men of Israel consorted with heathen women and bowed down to their gods, immediate judgment fell and 23,000 died of a plague in one day (Num. 25). Alas, many times in their sad history was this sin repeated, even by their monarchs, but we do not read again of such immediate judgment.

Thus it was that, when the first church member professed more consecration than the facts justified, God showed at once what He thought of it. Judgment fell, swift and terrible.

Has no one ever since acted like this guilty pair,

allowing his fellow-Christians to think him more consecrated than he really is? Has no one ever, for instance, told the Lord, so that others hear: 'All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood' and yet has not done so? It is to be feared that many have still clung to some of the vain things that charm them, and thus have gone in the way of Ananias and Sapphira, although God mercifully holds His hand—for the present.

Nevertheless, His assessment of the guilt of hypocrisy is not subject to change. He is just the same to-day. At the judgment seat of Christ all such hidden things will be brought to light and dealt with (1 Cor. 4. 5).

If the people of God are faithfully taught and keep in view the truth that we are not our own, but are bought with a price, there will be no difficulty with the church's finances.

An important principle in connection with this matter of finances is that all contributions to the work and service of the Lord are to be *freewill* offerings, as the Lord Himself may lead each one of His people. The mercantile spirit is rigidly excluded from all service done for Him.

Even under the Old Covenant both the Tabernacle in Moses' day and the temple of Solomon were erected entirely through freewill offerings. 'Every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing' brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle. So much was brought that Moses had to command the people to desist for 'more than enough' had been brought in (Exod. 35. 21 and 36. 5-7). Many years later King David rejoiced over his people because 'with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord,' so that the material was prepared for the temple to be erected by Solomon (1 Chron. 29. 6-9).

Under the New Covenant the Lord expects no less of His people. The heirs of the 'better covenant' have far more reason to 'render to Him all we have and are.'

In most churches the necessary finances may be considered under four heads: (a) Contributions for the upkeep of building, etc.; (b) the poor and needy; (c) the Lord's servants; (d) the spread of the Gospel.

(a) Little is said in the New Testament about the buildings in which the Lord's people gathered. Some churches apparently came together in private houses. Paul asked the Roman Christians to greet the church that was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16. 3-5). This church is also mentioned in 1 Cor. 16. 19. In writing to the Colossians the apostle sends a greeting to the church which is in the house of Nymphas (Col. 4. 15). In Ephesus, Paul withdrew from the synagogue and conducted his meetings in a schoolroom (Acts 19. 9).

It is interesting in this connection to note that the early disciples preached in the street (Acts 2. 14); in a porch (3. 11-12); on a chariot in the desert (8. 35); in an officer's house (10. 33); by a riverside (16. 13); outside a prison and in a jailor's house (16. 30-32); on a hill (17. 22); in a schoolroom (19. 9); in private houses (20. 20); and in a hired house (28. 30). We do not read of them erecting a 'consecrated' building for the service of God. Wherever there were people who needed to hear the Word of God, was, to them, the right place to preach. The Word they preached and the presence of their Master, according to His promise, consecrated whatever place they preached in. No other consecration was needed, nor did the Lord provide for any other.

Probably those who gathered in caves and catacombs were not troubled much by problems of rent and upkeep.

The great principle of the New Testament with regard

to all business, whether of an individual or a church, is found in Rom. 13. 8: 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.'

(b) To the next item, the care of the poor and needy, great prominence is given in the New Testament. The poor were our Lord's legacy to His Church. When Paul conferred with James, Peter and John in Jerusalem, they gave him the right hand of fellowship, but pressed that he and Barnabas should 'remember the poor,' which, of course, they were ready to do (Gal. 2. 10). The apostle's teaching was: 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith' (Gal. 6. 10). The converted thief was to engage in honourable employment 'that he may have to give to him that needeth' (Ephes. 4. 28). James laid great stress on works of mercy. The two components of pure and undefiled religion were: 'To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world' (James 1. 27, and see 2. 15-16). In John's first epistle we have the same teaching (1 John 3. 17).

We read that, on hearing of an approaching famine 'throughout all the world,' the disciples at Antioch, disregarding their own possible need, determined to send relief to the brethren in Judaea (Acts 11. 27-30). The disciples in Macedonia and Achaia later did the same thing (Rom. 15. 26). The closing words of Paul's beautiful address to the elders from Ephesus emphasized the duty of labouring to support the weak, and he reminded them of words spoken by our Lord, which are not reported in the Gospels: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20. 35).

(c) The church's provision for those who give themselves to the work of the Gospel, or to the ministry of the

Word, is made the subject of very clear instructions. In this regard as in others the Apostle Paul has been by the Lord Himself made a pattern for future believers. It was for this cause he obtained mercy, as he says: 'That in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting' (1 Tim. 1. 16).

Our Lord had shown much longsuffering in dealing with His earlier servants. They misunderstood Him, sometimes even contradicted Him, forgot His explicit instructions, or entirely missed the point of them; they failed Him at the crucial time, forsook Him and fled, one of them betraying Him for silver and another denying that he knew Him. And yet 'He loved them to the end' (John 13. 1).

He also showed much longsuffering in dealing with His servant Paul. He commanded him peremptorily to leave Jerusalem, for the Jews would not receive his testimony (Acts 22. 17-21). But the apostle's national feeling proved too strong and he determined to have another try, arguing that he was known as a former persecutor of the church, and that his testimony would therefore be irresistible. Again and again he is warned not to go to Jerusalem, and is at last flatly forbidden by the Spirit of God to set foot in the city (Acts 21. 4). Nevertheless he goes, and is immediately led to take part in a Jewish sacrifice, which was, of course, a backward step for one who held and taught, as Paul did, the perfection of Christ's sacrifice once for all on the Cross. All Jewish sacrifices pointed to this until they were fulfilled in Him, after which no sacrifice could properly be repeated (Acts 21. 26; Heb. 10. 1-18; Gal. 2. 18-19).

Still our gracious Lord is longsuffering with him, as He had been with the other apostles, and although Paul

has to reap what he has sown and spend two years in a Judaeen jail, the Lord graciously helps him out of his difficulties, forgives him and blesses his service in spite of mistakes.

These facts give point to the words: 'that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering.' And the Lord's longsuffering with this servant of His is to be a pattern 'to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.' Is there any true servant of Christ who is not deeply conscious of his Lord's continual longsuffering in His dealings with him?

Even so, we are not going to take advantage of our gracious Master's loving-kindness and longsuffering in His dealings with us, His very fallible servants. On the contrary, I hope every reader will join me in the fervent purpose of carrying out His revealed wishes as closely as we can.

David's mighty Three overheard their master longing for a drink out of Bethlehem's well. They immediately risked their lives to satisfy that longing. David was a fallible master, and not to be compared with ours. His servants put us to shame if we do not at all costs carry out His will, even in small details (1 Chron. 11. 17-19).

This statement of Paul's about being a pattern prefaces the instructions he gives to Timothy about overseers, deacons, widows, etc., so that he might know how he ought to behave himself in the church of the living God (1 Tim. 1. 16 and 3. 15).

Some may object that the Lord Jesus Himself is the only pattern to be followed. That is true with regard to all things in which He gave us an example. But the Lord Jesus had returned to heaven before the Holy Spirit came to establish His church on earth. Obviously He could not in His own person give us an example of

an evangelist travelling from one country to another, or of a teacher ministering the Word to the churches. He therefore chose His apostle to give us a concrete example of the principles on which such work is to be conducted.

We find that the apostle refused to work for a salary, and laid very great stress on self-support (Acts 20. 33-35). He looked to the Lord to supply his daily needs, but was always ready to go to work when circumstances made it necessary or advisable. Thus he worked for his living for a time at Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, making tents, until Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia with a gift for him from the churches there (Acts 18. 1-5; 2 Cor. 11. 9). The unfortunate and awkward translation in v. 5, that 'Paul was pressed in the spirit' when Silas and Timothy arrived, should be, according to all the best authorities: 'Paul became engrossed with the Word,' i.e., gave himself wholly to the preaching of the Gospel, it being no longer necessary to make tents in order to live.

He reminds the Thessalonians that when with them he had laboured night and day, because he would not be chargeable to any of them (1 Thess. 2. 9).

The Lord has definitely laid the responsibility of caring for His servants on those of His stewards to whom He has entrusted means. I suppose every reader has often heard the quotation: 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' But I am afraid comparatively few of us have seriously considered in what connection this solemn statement is made. The occasion is when the apostle is giving to those who listen to the teachings of God's servants, instructions about their responsibility to provide for their temporal welfare. 'Let him who is taught the Word share all good things with him who teaches.' It is to emphasize this command that the

solemn words follow: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Gal. 6. 6-7).

This is supplemented by the words in 2 Cor. 9. 6: 'He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.'

In 1 Tim. 5. 17, where the exhortation is given that elders who rule well should be counted 'worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the Word and doctrine,' the word here translated 'honour' should probably be rendered 'reward.' In eight other passages the same word clearly conveys the sense of a pecuniary value (e.g., Acts 19. 19), and the verse which follows, especially the words: 'The labourer is worthy of his reward,' seems to bear out this interpretation.

Again, in Rom. 15. 24 the apostle gives the believers in Rome a very broad hint that they may soon have the privilege of speeding him on his proposed journey to Spain. There is no word whatever in the original for 'company,' which is supplied as a mere guess on the part of the translators, and the apostle probably refers to their help for the journey.

We have doubtless all heard the beautiful words in Phil. 4. 19 handed out as an encouragement to missionaries and ministers of the Word. But they were addressed by a missionary to a church which had loyally and faithfully discharged its obligations. The Philippians had 'once and again' supplied the apostle's need while he was in Thessalonica. He tells them therefore: '*My* God shall supply all *your* need.' The apostle's Master is not going to be in their debt.

Again, the Apostle John exhorts Gaius to assist the Lord's servants who come to him in their travels. 'Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort,

thou shalt do well. Because that for His name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth' (3 John 6-8). As the apostle says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9. 11): 'If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?'"

This all makes it clear that the Lord of the Harvest has given His own people all necessary instructions for the provision of His servants' needs as they go from place to place on His service, and that they should 'take nothing of the Gentiles.'

This last point is important. Our Lord commanded His disciples: 'Freely ye have received, freely give' (Matt. 10. 8). Paul took great pains to make the Gospel of Christ 'without charge' (1 Cor. 9. 18). It was a man whose heart was 'not right in the sight of God,' who thought that the things of the Spirit might be purchased for money (Acts 8. 20-21).

The servants of Christ, being 'bought with a price,' are not to be the 'servants of men' (1 Cor. 7. 23). Not being the recipients of a salary from a board or committee, they are directly dependent on the Lord Himself, to Whom they are responsible and to Whom they must in due course render an account of their service (2 Cor. 5. 9-10).

Even the Apostle Paul did not take upon himself the right to direct the movements of a fellow-servant. He writes, for instance: 'As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren, but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time' (1 Cor. 16. 12). 'Greatly desired' shows the length to which an older and more experienced servant of the Lord may

go in advising a fellow-servant. The final decision must be made by the latter, in dependence upon the Lord and as guided by Him.

There is in the hearts of men a fixed idea that no one can be or should be expected to do anything for others unless he receives something in return. It is, for instance, well known that this idea warps the minds of millions with regard to the question of personal salvation.

In all human religions it is a *quid pro quo*—if a man does 'x,' the Deity will give him 'y' in exchange; though 'x' and 'y' have all sorts of values in the various religions, but basically they all have this common ground.

This being so, it is easy to understand that many people look upon God's servants who try to lead them to Christ as merely doing the work for which they are paid. 'Doth Job fear God for nought?' asked the god of this world (Job 1. 9), and this question has echoed down the ages to the present day.

Hence our Lord instructed His disciples: 'Freely ye have received, freely give' (Matt. 10. 8). (The word here translated freely means gratuitously, not willingly or liberally, as our word freely sometimes conveys). There must be no possible ground for the accusation of commercialism in His service. His people must learn that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20. 35).

One of the unalterable characteristics of money is that it tends to make slaves of men (1 Tim. 6. 9-10). When the money factor enters, freedom of judgment often departs. Wise men have always discerned this fact. It was for this very reason that George Muller was led to start his great work of faith in the Lord's Name, not, be it noted, *primarily* for the sake of orphans—their happiness was a blessed by-product of the work

of faith—but first and foremost to give the world a concrete proof of the faithfulness of God in answering prayer even in the matter of bread and butter for a hungry crowd of orphans. The logic of this proof was: If God shows that He is willing and able to care for the hundreds of dependants of one man, an unendowed foreigner, simply in answer to prayer, without any appeal to human donors, then, surely He will in the same way care for other servants of His who put their trust in Him and seek to serve Him in accordance with His Word.

The great orphan houses at Bristol and their record of God's unfailing faithfulness for over a century give a complete answer to all the doubts and fears so readily marshalled by the tempter whenever a servant of God is about to venture on the path of faith, daring to follow the pattern God has given for His servants in His Word and scorning consequences.

Thousands of God's servants who have had the joy of walking this blessed pathway for a great part of their lives will agree with me that it is far superior to that worked out by the devious mind of man, even well-meaning man. Admittedly it is, in the divine hand, an unfailing instrument to weed out those who have mistaken their calling or for any other reason are not fitted for His service. That is its chief value to the church at large. It cuts at the roots of commercialism in the service of God, in which service everything is manifestly intended to be done voluntarily and without an eye on monetary reward.

The work of the local church should be on the same basis, without any camouflage. 'Gratuitously received, gratuitously given' is the unrepealed maxim.

I invite the persevering reader who has borne with me

thus far to compare the two methods of raising funds here shown:

THE WORLDLY-CHRISTIAN
METHOD

In everything by advertisement and begging-letter, with exaggeration, let your requests be made known unto MEN. And the uncertainty of finances, which passeth all endurance, shall keep your hearts and minds in continual suspense.

THE SCRIPTURAL METHOD

'In everything by PRAYER and SUPPLICATION, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto GOD. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4. 6-7).

I hope my reader will for ever avoid the headaches and the heartbreaks of the method shown on the left hand, and joyfully adopt, without looking back, the method prescribed by the Lord Himself and passed on to us by His chosen apostle.

I have never met a servant of God who has faithfully practised the scriptural method in the right-hand column and has been disappointed.

It is obvious to the reverent mind that the Lord's plan for His servants must be perfect, as is every other work of His, great or small. Faith accepts this axiom, acts on it and is not disappointed.

X

Conclusion

'LET us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.' Thus wrote the wise man of old, and the reason he gave for this conclusion was: 'For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil' (Eccles. 12. 13-14).

This appears to be the only sane conclusion for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to come to, with regard to his walk and service during the rest of his earthly course. We no longer fear with a craven dread. We are not come to a mount that burns with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest, but 'to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant' (Heb. 12. 18-24), and under that covenant our whole duty is to 'observe all things whatsoever He has commanded us' (Matt. 28. 20).

Enough has already been written about the motives that should inspire us to wholehearted obedience. Let us never lose sight of them.

Let us also keep in mind the imminence of the Judgment Seat of Christ, where all servants and all service will be made manifest. Let us never imagine for a moment that our Lord Jesus Christ will go back, then, on His own specific instructions given to His Church in the New Testament.

Let us always remember His touching words, spoken with reference to the sacrifice of His life for His friends: 'Ye are My friends, *if ye do whatsoever I command you*' (John 15. 13-14).

Unto HIM be glory in the Church
(Eph. 3. 21).

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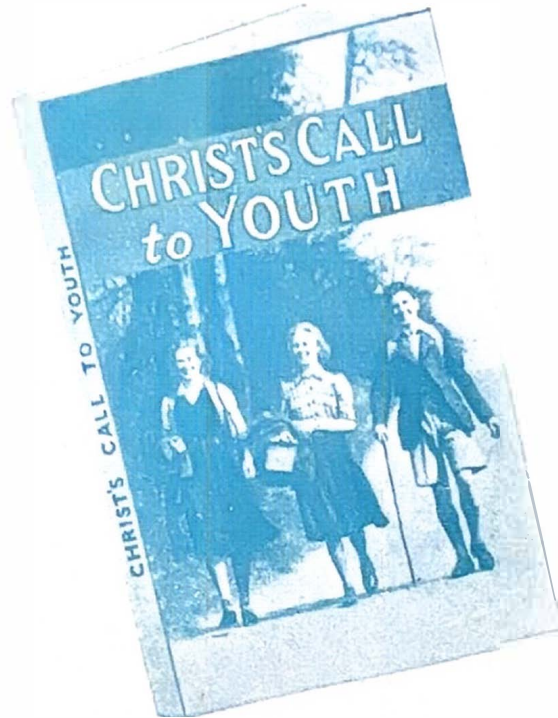
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