

THE SCHISMATIC TENDENCY OF SECTIONAL MEMBERSHIP.

MY DEAR BRETHREN AND SISTERS,

It is known to a few individuals around me, that there are some things maintained at * * * * * which are not commended to my regard as authorised by the Word of God, and that, consequently, I can no longer take a part in their furtherance. Whilst I feel it my bounden duty thus to make my altered convictions the rule of my own conduct, I do also feel that there is a duty I owe to you as my brethren, and that is, to declare, in faithful love, what these grounds of difference are, that we may mutually bring all our sentiments and thoughts to the unerring standard of God's truth, and pray that the Holy Spirit would guide us into the mind of Christ.

It is a cause of devout thanksgiving with me, that in your midst "none other foundation is owned than that is laid, which is Jesus." Yet I would say, particularly for my own observance just now, "Let every man take heed *how* he buildeth thereupon," knowing that "if any man's

work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward ;” but that “if any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss.” In proceeding to bring before you more fully what I wish to communicate, I would state that there are three things concerning which my convictions have undergone a total change.

1st.—As to my owning or sustaining SECTIONAL membership.

2nd.—As to my standing connected with any Christians where room is not afforded for the exercise of all gifts of the Spirit.

3rd.—As to my right to possess, in the Church of God, any power for rule, simply on the ground of membership.

The one radical question to these three points appears, to my own mind, to be this : What is the relation which the Holy Spirit sustains towards the Church ? In reply to this, I would say, there are many passages, and some *chapters*, in Scripture, which fully and definitely describe the office of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Church. I shall only, for the present, select the 1st Cor. chap. xii., and content myself by asking, if our position at **** * corresponds with what is there written ? I would, however, pass by the consideration of the general question now, and go into a more particular and minute inquiry in the way already expressed. 1st.—As to my owning and sustaining SECTIONAL membership. I read in 1 Cor. chap. xii. “By one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body.” Here, then, is my membership—membership of the body of Christ—the *only* membership which the

Scripture knows. I cannot give it, nor refuse it, for it is constituted already of God; it has already been given by him. Now, where my fellowship is, there my membership must be also; any thing short of this is not *full* brotherhood. "*All ye are brethren.*" Surely the Great Head of the Church knew best what channel to open for my sympathies and love to flow through; and He prayed thus: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that *the world may believe* that thou hast sent me." Now this unity for which our Saviour prayed, was not only to be in the Spirit, but also to be in the *body*—it was to be a *manifested oneness*; something that the *world* could see, and by which the *world* should believe that Jesus was the "sent of God." And, again, another Scripture says, "By this shall *all men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." In conformity with these words of our Lord, I find St. Paul writing to the Corinthians—"The body is *one*, and hath many members; and *all the members* of that body being many, are *one body.*" Now shall I say, "It is impossible for me to love *all* the brethren in this town, and therefore, I will come into a nearer relation to a *few* of them; this will be more for the edification of the one family." Was it not to counteract this very thing, that we find it written in this same epistle, "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the *same care one for another.*" Is it not the most effectual way to counteract the meaning of these passages for me to say, I can sustain *special*

relation to A SECTION, although Christ does say, His body, the Church. How can I own membership to any *part* without dividing the "one body of Christ?" It does appear to me, that for any one to say, "I will regard *this believer* as a fellow-member with myself, but I cannot receive *that other*," would be to act in direct opposition to the prayer of Christ, and to the epistles and practice of His apostles just quoted. It would be just as presumptuous as if I were to say, "It is true, indeed, that God has made such an one, by natural relationship, my brother or my sister, but I shall not own them *equally* as members of our family; I shall manifest my love to some in a more special way than to the rest of them." Again, I have powers and sympathies which, though the feeblest of all the members, I am capable of exercising towards the *whole body*, and which I am commanded so to exercise. Who, then, can say, "You shall not *contribute* nor *receive* your *full* measure, unless you consent to give yourself to us, and to regard us in a very different light from that in which you regard *the rest* of the ONE family." My brotherhood, I would again remind you, is put by Christ in the *body*, and I cannot alter it; I dare not come into *another* relationship—SECTIONAL membership; if I attempt to do so, I should, in the very measure in which I succeed, be coming out of the *body* into a *limb*, and owning the *part* in the very way in which I am commanded to own only the *whole*. What would the apostle have thought of such a principle at Colosse, or Ephesus, or Corinth? and why should this town be different? Surely, dear brethren, it must be manifest to you, that you and I and every belie-

ver in it should meet on a basis not too narrow for the whole family of God; that so, if an Apollos, or an Epaphras, or a Phœbe, should spring up among us, or come from elsewhere, I might at once be able to receive either of them in such a manner in the Lord, as neither to prevent the exercise of their sympathy and love, nor, on the other hand, to deprive the rest of the family in this town of the benefit which the Lord may intend should be derived by the *whole* body from them. The characteristic object of the gospel is "ONE BODY,"—"to gather together *in one* the children of God." We know well that our energies are, of course, *naturally* inadequate to do this; but then, as new creatures we are made partakers of the divine nature, and have the Holy Spirit, whose power is according to the extent of his work; and He says, "the *whole* body;" and however we may fall short as co-workers under Him, yet we dare not take a different model—a different plan.

This, then, is the first point in which, as I apprehend, my present position at * * * * * is entirely inconsistent with the word of God,—for membership in Christ does not give *membership* with us; thus the family is divided, and we are practically saying to other Christians, "You are indeed brethren; we do not forbid you the house, but into the most honoured and favoured apartment of this 'one family mansion' you shall not enter; we there arrange *our* family concerns; but you shall not have your part in this." Now this, my dear brethren, appears to me to be meddling with things which God has already ordered and settled for us and the rest of the family.

The next principle I find in this 1 Cor. chapter xii., is this,—“He divideth to every man severally as he will.” This, you will see, brings me into the next subject on which my convictions are changed,—namely, “As to my standing connected with any Christians, where room is not afforded for the exercise of all gifts.” In commencing the few observations I shall make on this head, I would notice that plurality of all offices naturally flows out of the above Scripture. I could not dare to say any longer, there shall be *one* pastor, *one* elder, *one* teacher; there might be *one*, or there might be *ten*; but the point to which I would draw your particular attention is this,—that the word of God binds me to refuse place to *none*. And this principle extends not only to those who are raised up in our own little locality, but applies as much to those who come from a distance. A teacher at A. B. or at C. D. is equally a teacher here; and must have room every where in the Church of God to exercise his gifts; yea, he is responsible for doing so. Does not the system on which we are acting, dear brethren, throw insurmountable obstacles in the way of this? These few thoughts are all I shall offer; not only because I believe them, when carried out, to be sufficient, but also, because my continuance or non-continuance at **** * turns not so much upon this question, as upon “SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP,” which on this account has been more fully examined.

Out of this same chapter (1 Cor. xii.) comes my last difficulty, namely, as to my right to possess any power for rule in the Church of God, simply on the ground of membership. I was

going to say, undoubtedly, *subordination* is designed to be manifested in the Church of God; the 13th of Hebrews, and other parts of Scripture, contain explicit directions as to how this duty should be observed,—“*Obey* them that have the *rule* over you, and *submit* yourselves.” Let me ask, in passing, how this is provided for in our present system? The *sheep* may rule the shepherd; his actions *may* be constrained by their ignorance, and often by their wilfulness,—involving, as I think, a practical denial of the Holy Spirit as *ruler* over the Church. It is of little consequence in what way we destroy the order of God’s house, and betray its principles, if the deed be really done. I am purposely brief here, also, for the reasons already assigned, in reference to the last considered question.

On these grounds, my dear brethren, I can neither own myself, nor be owned any longer as a member of In retiring from a connexion which has been so very productive of edification and comfort to me for upwards of seven years, I should feel my heart well nigh broken, if it were not for the conviction, that I am not separating from persons, but from things; and I do earnestly entreat you so to regard me. I have asked, and do solemnly ask myself, “Am I violating any one of those unities enumerated in Ephesians iv. by this secession?” and I do before God say—“No!” and therefore that which I now leave has nothing to do with the maintenance of “the unity of the Spirit.”

Finally, I do entreat you all to join in earnest prayer, “that our love one to another may abound yet more and more, till we all come in

the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." In conclusion, I must request you to notice, that my membership does now revert from you *especially*, into the *one* body of Christ; and I ask that—owning *that* relation *only*—we may manifest our love one to another, and to all the saints, as "dear brethren in the Lord."

Believe me, ever yours, in the bonds of the Gospel,

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