

2nd Edition

THE  
**FELLOWSHIP**  
TO WHICH  
ALL CHRISTIANS  
ARE CALLED



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## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction*

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**T**HERE is only one Christian fellowship outlined in the Scriptures. We read, “ God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord ” (1 Cor. 1:9).

#### THE EARLY CHURCH

For one brief moment, the formation of the Church of God upon earth on the day of Pentecost, the early church recognised and knew no other fellowship than this, and walked in the unity of the Spirit in its practical manifestation. Alas! declension, division, worldliness soon set in, ecclesiasticism without spiritual power became rampant. For centuries the professing church of God was marked by the ignorance, superstition, deadness and idolatry of the dark Middle Ages. Then came the glorious Reformation; too soon, alas! to be shorn of its spiritual force, when it looked to political power for support, and placed its confidence in princes.

## A SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT

In the first half of the nineteenth century there began a blessed movement of the Spirit of God, calling attention to and reviving long-forgotten truths, leading men and women of all ranks to renounce unscriptural ecclesiastical associations, and to meet together in Christian assembly, gathered to no other name but that of their risen glorified Lord, and knowing no other fellowship but that which the Word of God teaches.

No wonder that Satan made unceasing attacks on this most blessed and God-honouring movement. Too soon the enemy got in. Division after division has broken up and weakened this wonderful testimony.

## QUESTIONS ASKED

Amid all the ruin and confusion of the present day, many earnest Christians are disheartened, and wonder if there is any use in seeking to preserve a course, which seems to end only in disaster.

Is there then no divine path for the Christian today? Is he left to choose that fragment of the church, which is most to his liking? Or is he to be rendered so perplexed by all the claims put forward by different rival bodies of Christians, that he gives up all hope of discovering what is the divine path in a day of ruin, and in despair takes the path of least resistance?

Surely these questions carry their own answer. The Christian is not left to his own choice in this

important matter. He need not be perplexed. "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" (Psalm 25:9). "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17).

## EXCUSES FOR NOT RESPONDING TO THE TRUTH

How many excuses are put forward by Christians for remaining in what they know to be unscriptural ecclesiastical associations, which will not stand the test of the judgment seat of Christ.

One will put family connections, the natural and right dislike of bringing in disunity in his family, among those closely related, such as husband and wife, parent and child, etc. Such put family feelings before loyalty to the Lord! Should that be? Should the Lord not be first?

Another will urge difficulty as to distance as a reason for being where he is, thus putting, it may be, personal ease and convenience before fidelity to the Lord.

Yet another will give as his reason for remaining in unscriptural connections that his sphere of usefulness would be greatly limited, if he followed what he knows to be according to the Word. Here service is put before the Master—the servant's usefulness (?) before his Lord's will.

What a general turning over would take place if all Christians were true to their convictions. We would urge upon all our readers to be faithful to the Lord and His word *at all costs*, as we would aim at it for ourselves.

### BIBLE WARNINGS

What a significant warning Scripture presents in the case of King Saul. Bidden by God utterly to destroy the Amalekites, he “spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly” (1 Sam. 15:9). When Samuel asked what meant the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, Saul replied that he had spared the best of the flocks of the Amalekites *in order to sacrifice unto the Lord*.

It seemed a very praiseworthy reason. Saul did not spare the best of the flocks for his own enrichment. There was nothing selfish in his action. It might be thought that the object in view would have atoned for his departure from strict instructions.

But it was not so. The King had committed an act of unpardonable disobedience. That act cost him his kingdom. Samuel answered in words that are historic: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” How scathing was Samuel’s language! Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23). Pretty strong language

this! Pretty stiff price to pay for departing from the word of the Lord, even for the apparently laudable object of using the best of Amalek's flocks and herds for sacrifice to the Lord!

How unutterably sad Saul's end was! Amid the deepening shades of spiritism; hard pushed by the Philistines, the enemies of the Lord; bereft of his sons, who had fallen in the battle; in terrible despair, he committed suicide, falling on his own sword—his armour suspended on the walls of the temple of the heathen goddess, Ashtaroth; his body hung on the walls of Bethshan—a terrible warning indeed.

Is this not a sharp warning to Christians who plead their usefulness as a reason why they should remain in unscriptural associations? Is not their disobedience on a par with Saul's? Is not their act equivalent to sparing the best of the flock for sacrifice instead of obeying? Is the fat of rams a substitute for hearkening?

How many servants of the Lord, who have refused to follow the gleam on the plea that their usefulness would be curtailed, have found out that their spiritual power has largely, if not altogether left them, and their usefulness indeed been impaired?

For power *with God* we need to be right with God. And without spiritual power there can be no true usefulness.

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## TRUE CHRISTIANS ALARMED AND PERPLEXED

In these days of unabashed worldliness in the professing church of God, of widespread Modernism in the pulpits of the land, of Ritualism that is traitorous in the lengths to which it is being carried; true Christians are becoming increasingly alarmed, perplexed and troubled. The voice of the Lord is heard: "Come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing . . . and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6: 17, 18).

### REASONS FOR WRITING THIS PAMPHLET

In moving about the country we find Christians generally in a state of distress, indecision and perplexity, whilst among young Christians, who are often where their parents are, without quite knowing why, there is a general demand for scriptural information as to what Christian fellowship truly is. We often hear the anxious desire, "I want to know why I am where I am."

It is to meet such cases that we put pen to paper. We propose to give a rapid sketch of how Scripture presents the Church of God as designed of God, and then to seek to compare with that standard the denominations of Christendom.

Finally we will take up the question as to



whether assemblies professing to be gathered to the Lord's name in simplicity apart from man-made denominations, are part of one whole, and hence linked up one with another, or whether they are *independent* assemblies. Just as a visitor to some ruins of antiquity, finding a fragment here and a fragment there, and puzzled how to group things together, would be greatly helped if he were furnished with a plan of the building in its original completeness and splendour, so we deem it best to go over the whole ground of truth as to the Church of God, and thus we trust this pamphlet may be more generally helpful than if we took anything for granted in the way of knowledge.

Necessarily we cannot go too much into detail, and must content ourselves with a general survey of the truth, else this modest pamphlet would be swollen to the dimensions of a bulky volume.

## CHAPTER II

*The Church of God—Its Inception  
and Constitution*

God has put believers in relation one to another. “God setteth the solitary in families” (Psalm 68: 6). This has ever been His principle.

## AN OLD TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATION

This was typified by the children of Israel in the wilderness. They were nationally the people of God, and their gathering centre in the wilderness was the Tabernacle, God’s dwelling-place. The blessing of each individual Israelite lay in his keeping in touch with the Tabernacle, and in taking his appointed place among the tribe he belonged to, east, west, north, south of the tabernacle as was appointed. He was not left to follow his own choice or inclination.

The pillar of cloud gave guidance. When the cloud moved the *whole* camp had to move in unison. There was no blessing for the individual save with the company, for the company gathered round the Tabernacle with its cloudy pillar—in other words, the presence of the Lord was their protection and

the pillar of cloud was Jehovah's guidance for His people.

Let us be clear, it was not the company which was the Israelite's protection and guide, but the LORD *in the midst of the company*.

We should ever be suspicious of any, who exalt the company at the expense of the Lord. It is only as the company is in touch with the Lord that there can be blessing in such associations. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15: 4).

This brings us from the type to the anti-type; from the Tabernacle in the wilderness in the Old Testament to the church of God, the Lord among His people, in the New Testament.

### THE CHURCH'S INCEPTION

The church of God was formed by the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, indwelling believers, linking them with their Lord in heaven as Head of the church, His body, and with each other as members of that one body on earth.

### THE CHURCH DOES NOT INCLUDE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

The church of God clearly does not include Old Testament saints. In Matthew 16: 18, the Lord said, "Upon this rock [the confession of His Person: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"] I WILL build My church; and the gates of hell

[*hades*] shall not prevail against it." When the Lord spoke He had not begun to build. "I *will build*," is in the future tense. Not till the redemption work was completed, not till His resurrection and ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit had taken place, could that building begin.

The Head must be *in heaven* before there could be a body upon earth.

Ephesians 1: 19-20 gives us to see how Christ was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, set at God's right hand in heavenly places, far above principality and power and might and dominion, and being exalted is given to be "Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," whilst 1 Corinthians 12: 13 says, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

Ephesians 2: 20 tells us that the church is built upon the *foundation* of the apostles and prophets. The Old Testament saints were prior to the apostles and prophets and could not therefore be on the foundation.

All this clearly shows that the Old Testament saints were not in the church of God, though blessed according to their dispensation. The inception of the church of God clearly took place on the Day of Pentecost, and not before.

## THE CHURCH COMPLETED AT THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

Nor will the believers *after* the Lord's second coming be included in the church. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5: 25-27). This presentation takes place at the second coming of Christ. There will be multitudes saved after the coming of the Lord for His church, but they will form part of the earthly company over whom Christ shall set up His millennial Kingdom and reign for a thousand years.

Unless the dispensation of the Church—between the Day of Pentecost and the second coming of the Lord for His saints—is clearly seen, there is bound to be confusion in the understanding of Scripture.

## THE CHURCH OF GOD COMPOSED OF TRUE BELIEVERS

The church of God is composed only of true believers on the Lord Jesus, of those who, having received the gospel of their salvation, are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God. (See Eph. 1: 13). It is never contemplated in Scripture, and is not possible, that mere professors should have a place in Christ's body. Christ's body is vital and real.

It is true that Scripture foretells that declension would set in, and things be lowered to such a terrible extent that mere professors would abound. But whilst such, alas! have usurped a place in the professing church of God on earth, they cannot be members of Christ's body, nor of the true church.

The first effort of the enemy as seen in the parable of Matthew 13: 24-30 is to sow the tares among the wheat, in other words to introduce mere professors among true believers. We are told whom the tares represent—"the children of the wicked one"; and who the enemy is, "the enemy that sowed them is the devil."

Scripture never teaches that believers should willingly and of knowledge act in church fellowship with unbelievers.

### UNBELIEVERS HAVE NO TITLE TO TAKE THE LORD'S SUPPER

It is perfectly foreign to Scripture that an unbeliever should partake of the Lord's supper. It is not sufficient for a man to be a decent living parishioner, and have passed through a course of confirmation. There must be conversion, there must be real faith in the Lord Jesus before a man is privileged rightly to partake of the Lord's supper.

It is said to *true* Christians, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [*judgment*] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly

among you, and many sleep ” (1 Cor. 11 : 29, 30).

If eating and drinking unworthily is so serious to a Christian walking carnally, what must it be for an unbeliever?

No enlightened Christian true to Scripture would ever consent to walk with a religious body that willingly, and of knowledge, allowed mere professors to partake of the Lord’s supper.

### THE CHURCH OF GOD HAS NEITHER GEOGRAPHICAL, NATIONAL NOR SECTARIAN BOUNDS

The church of God is composed of all true believers, wherever found, of whatever nationality, of whatever social position. So we read, “ There is neither Greek nor Jew [no national distinctions], circumcision nor uncircumcision [religious distinctions], Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free [no social distinctions], but Christ is all, and in all ” (Col. 3 : 11).

At Colosse there were in the church Philemon and his slave, Onesimus, “ a faithful and beloved brother.” Thus happily does grace triumph over distinctions that obtain in this world, and are recognised of God, but which yield to something infinitely higher, and on a different plane in the church of God.

It follows too that the church of God, being one,

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cannot be bounded by nationality. To attach any geographical name, or the name of any man, or of any particular doctrine, or a name descriptive of a special kind of church government, is all foreign to Scripture, and the enlightened Christian, obedient to the truth of God, could not associate himself with any of these.

What liberty of soul it is to be connected only with the church of God, to have no name called upon one but the name of the Lord, to have no man-made creed or ecclesiastical constitutions, to be guided alone by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit—in short to own the fellowship to which ALL Christians are called.

### THE CHURCH OF GOD IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

That is clear in Scripture. Twice over the Lord said of His disciples, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17: 14, 16). Why repeated twice? Surely it puts great emphasis on the statement. The Apostle Peter speaks of the believers as “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2: 11), whilst Paul writes, “Our conversation [literally *citizenship*] is in heaven” (Phil. 3: 20); whilst John writes, “The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not” (1 John 3: 1).

Thus union of state and church, the attempt to get political power and standing, are ideas clean



contrary to the genius of Christianity and the teaching of Scripture. It is to show ignorance of the true nature of the church of God and of her relationship to Christ and of her heavenly calling. We need to be jealous with a godly jealousy in these matters.

## CHAPTER III

*Gifts bestowed by the Ascended  
Lord on His Church*

QUOTING from Psalm 68: 18, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men . . . And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4: 8, 11).

We are told that the saints "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2: 20).

## CHRIST HAS THE SUPREME PLACE

The supreme place of Christ must be strenuously upheld. *He* gives character to the church. It was upon the confession of His Person that the Lord would build His assembly. The apostle Peter, quoting the Scripture, "Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone" (1 Peter 2: 6) goes on to say, "Unto you that believe He is precious" [*literally*, the preciousness, N. Tr.]. Once get the eye off Christ and the key to everything is lost.

If our earth got out of right relation to the sun, disaster untold would be the inevitable result. So it is with Christ and His assembly.

The figure of the church as the body of Christ emphasizes this. Of what use is the body without the head? The head is vital to the body clearly. The remedy for the assembly troubles in Colosse lay in holding the Head.

That would deliver them from “philosophy and vain deceit”—modernism—on the one hand; and occupation with ordinances—“touch not; taste not; handle not”—ritualism—on the other hand. Holding the Head is surely looking to the Lord in glory for sustainment and direction, keeping in touch with Him.

The writer once heard an old Christian say quaintly, “Brethren, if we hold the Head we shall hold each other.” Surely all denominationalism and division are only the fruits of not holding the Head.

### THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

The apostles and prophets were the foundation of the assembly. They clearly held an important and unique position. It was theirs to introduce Christianity into the world. For this a certain qualification was necessary.


In proposing the choice of an apostle to take the place rendered vacant by the death of Judas Iscariot, the Apostle Peter stressed that the choice must fall on one who had companied with the Lord since the baptism of John unto the day of His ascension, a great point being that “one be ordained to be a witness with us of the resurrection” (Acts 1: 22).

Further the apostles cast lots, so that the ordination might be the Lord's!

The Apostle Paul's ordination was peculiar to himself and on different lines. His life's work for the Lord and His ministry were special to himself and of surpassing importance. The wisdom of God is clearly seen in this.

By the light above the brightness of the sun arrested, by his vision of the Lord (Acts 9: 27) and by the Lord's own voice from heaven converted, Paul could witness to the resurrection of the Lord with power. Subsequently caught up to the third heaven he saw and heard the Lord. Were ever apostolic credentials more wonderful?

#### A DEFINITION OF GIFT

 The best definition of gift the writer has ever heard is, "The expression of an impression." What a deep impression must have been made on the apostles' minds as they journeyed with the Lord during those memorable three and a half years, as they witnessed that wonderful atoning death, and then what a deep impression must have been made when the verity of the resurrection of Christ was forced upon their unbelieving minds.

It was like the laying of a cold fire, and then on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit lit the fire; and the apostolic testimony blazed forth.

What a deep impression was made upon Saul of Tarsus on that ever-memorable journey to Damascus, when he was chosen to be a minister and witness

“ both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ” (Acts 26: 16).

Moreover there was the ability given to express what had been impressed, and also the revelation of the fulness of the gospel and the teaching as to the assembly of God in all its aspects. More was communicated to the Apostle Paul than to the others. Each was filled and furnished for his task.

The Acts of the Apostles in the main confines its narrations to the ministries of the apostles, Peter and Paul, more particularly of the latter. The Epistles bring out the doctrines. Thus the foundation was laid. The prophets are associated with the apostles in the laying of the foundation. We gather from 1 Corinthians 14 the important position they held in the Christian assemblies. A prophet is one who reveals the mind of God in a special way for the moment. A popular notion is that a prophet foretells future events, but this is only a part of his work, and may even be wanting in some cases altogether. The New Testament prophesying is marked by speaking “ unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort ” (1 Cor. 14: 3).\*

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\* In passing, we would refer to Philip's four daughters, “ which did prophesy ” (Acts 21: 9). It is clear that if the Holy Spirit energized them in this service, it would certainly not be in disobedience to the Holy Spirit's own teaching: “ But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence ” (1 Tim. 2: 12). Philip's daughters would prophesy among women in sisterly modesty, we are assured, and in no way emulating the forwardness of the present day.”

Two points must be emphasized:—

Firstly, they were divinely, not humanly, ordained. Passing through a theological college does not impart to a man a gift. Gifts must be *divinely* bestowed, “the . . . Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Cor. 12: 11).

Secondly, we believe in the early days of the church there was a mighty action of the Spirit of God, so that these gifts had power and grace in such fulness as to make operative to the full the gifts bestowed upon them. Nowadays thousands take positions in the professing church, ordained of men, who have little or no qualifications for the work they essay to do; in too many cases not even converted men.

### APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION AN EMPTY CLAIM

The Scriptures give no instructions for the carrying on of the apostolic office from generation to generation as was the case with the High Priesthood in Israel. On the contrary, the apostles and prophets are said to be the foundation. A foundation is laid once and for all. One might as sensibly speak of the foundation of a building being carried up storey by storey to the roof as to speak of apostolic succession. Neither the apostles nor the prophets had successors—they formed the foundation.

It is true that the Apostle Paul deputed Timothy and Titus to appoint elders in connection with their

spheres of service, but there was no hint of these having authority to appoint others in succession.

Those who claim apostolic succession to-day are the ecclesiastical descendants of power-seeking sacerdotalists, who would enslave men's minds and plunge the twentieth century into the mediævalism of the dark middle ages.

### THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

The only Scriptures in existence on the day of Pentecost were those of the Old Testament. Manuscript copies of these were rare and mostly confined to the synagogues, and reading was the accomplishment of the learned few.

Suppose a town with a synagogue in it, where the Jews assembled, and who were banded together in bitter rejection of Jesus of Nazareth. Outside the synagogue reigns pagan darkness. Heathen temples abound with their horrid rites. Into this city come two men. They are apostles of the Christian faith.

The preaching of the cross is to the Jew a stumbling block; to the Greeks folly; for the natural man cannot understand the things of God, they are spiritually discerned.

These apostles have got no book, embodying the Christian teaching as we have to-day in the New Testament.

The apostolic message was absolutely revolutionary. "These that have turned the world upside down

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are come hither also," was the cry of the fanatical Jews at Thessalonica. The apostolic message was alike the death blow to an anti-Christian Judaism and to dark paganism.

No wonder it needed POWER—the mighty power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit to reach, regenerate and save men, and bring them into what was very new and opposed to all the thoughts of men, viz: the Church of God.

And further the only idea the young converts could gain of how Christianity could change men's lives was to be seen in the lives of those who brought the message. So the apostle Paul could say, "I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Cor. 4: 16). Would that be modest language for a servant of Christ to employ to-day? And yet surely it was right for the apostle Paul to use it, and he used it with a deep sense of the grace of God, for the Corinthian believers were inhabitants of a city proverbial for its dissolute wickedness, whence it had passed into a proverb that if a youth was drawn into wickedness he was said to be Corinthianized. The Corinthian believers were dependent upon the apostle's life to know what practical Christianity meant. On similar lines he could say to Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life" (2 Tim. 3: 10).

From every point of view the apostles and prophets occupied a very special place, and received special grace. Their work is done. The foundation has been laid.



## EVANGELISTS

An evangelist is characteristically by his very name the bearer of God's good news, the gospel of God's grace. Very little is said about the evangelist in Scripture — Philip is the only man called an evangelist.

An evangelist cannot be copied. There is a gift bestowed upon him by the ascended Lord that puts him into touch with men generally in the gospel. He cares for men's souls. He lays himself out to reach them by the gospel. He is a man of energy and initiative and prayerfulness and zeal. He is moved by a divine compassion in seeking the lost.

The world is the sphere of the evangelist. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), indicates alike the sphere of his operations and the constancy of his occupation. Men of that stamp have crossed the seas, and amid heathen and cannibal races have preached the subduing gospel of the grace of God.

It is significant that the evangelist is not mentioned first in the list of the gifts, but next in order after the apostles and prophets. The apostles and prophets were the means by which, once the initial formation of the church took place on the Day of Pentecost, it stretched out from Jerusalem, and assemblies were formed in various countries, as we have recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Why then is the evangelist not put first on the list? One might have contended that his parish was

the world. Surely converts are the first necessity.

Yes, that is so, and the Lord Himself gathered the first converts during His ministry on earth, who formed the early church on the Day of Pentecost. On that day itself it was an apostle whose one sermon was used to about 3,000 souls.

Why then does the evangelist come third on the list? There is surely a reason.

Let an illustration help. If a person wishes to keep bees, what would his first step be? Would he procure a swarm of bees, or purchase a beehive?

If he procured a swarm of bees and had no beehive, where would he put his bees? Surely his first concern would be to procure a beehive, and then when he got the bees he would have a suitable place for them.

### AN EVANGELIST TRUE TO THE ASSEMBLY

In a similar way God acts. The apostles and prophets, to carry out the illustration, make the beehive, in other words are used to the formation of the church of God upon earth. There is a spot where the converts can be brought to, cared for and nourished.

The writer once saw two little thrushes more dead than alive in a park in the far north of Scotland, whilst most unseasonable frost and snow were making havoc of the fruit blossoms in the very

last days of April. Having wandered from the nest they were like to perish in the cold.

So in the same way how helpless is a young convert. How happy for the evangelist to have the assembly to which to introduce his converts, where they can be nurtured in the things of the Lord.

It has been said that the evangelist should be like a pair of compasses. A compass consists of a fixed and a free leg—the fixed leg remaining stationary in the centre of the circle to be made—the free leg stretching out as far as it can and taking in as wide a sweep as its length will permit.

So every evangelist should be loyal to the assembly, give assembly truth and principles their true place, and being true to that place go out into the world, and as led of the Lord to exercise his gift, and finding converts, bring them to the centre from which he works.

## THE EVANGELIST RESPONSIBLE TO THE LORD

It is not that the evangelist is under the control or guidance of the assembly, but is under the guidance and control of the Lord, and he should not count in vain on the fellowship of his brethren.

If, however, the evangelist contravenes the truth of God in carrying on his work, his brethren should seek to recover him from wrong methods or ways. If these are persisted in, and sufficiently serious, it would be the duty of the assembly to refuse its fellow-

ship with him in his work. What room there is for love and forbearance—"with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). If the spirit of that verse characterized Christians they would not go far wrong.

### PASTORS AND TEACHERS

The very words chosen to express the character of these gifts go far to explain them. Pastor is the same word, which is translated in other connections in the Scriptures as shepherd. Teacher suggests the thought of a schoolmaster, an instructor.

The Pastor or Shepherd cares for the sheep, will protect them from their enemies, will seek out proper pasture for them, will look after them when sick or feeble. Does not the character of the Good Shepherd in John 10 stand for a beautiful model in many ways of the Pastor? Of course the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep, and His death was an atoning death. This stands by itself—His death alone was an atoning death.

But in other ways the Lord stands as a model of the pastor or shepherd. Indeed the apostle Peter speaks of the Lord as the chief Shepherd, showing his thought that the Pastors are under-shepherds.

The teacher on the other hand is taken up with instruction. It is his delightful work to open out the Word of God to God's people. How necessary is his work. How much we need to have a true knowledge of the word—of the gospel, of the church, of the

history of the Israelites, of the dispensations, of the Lord's coming again, of prophecy, besides all the moral bearing of the Word on our life and ways, and also the revelation of God as Father, and of the Lord Himself, besides all the truth that subjectively is connected with the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### GIFTS ARE FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH

A gift is a gift wherever he finds himself.

A gift is not localized, but wherever the pastor or teacher finds himself he can exercise his gift. An evangelist is an evangelist wherever he is, and free surely to use his gift wherever led of the Lord.

Gifts cannot be manufactured by official ordination. The only ordination that counts is "the ordination of the pierced hands."

## CHAPTER IV

*Bishops and Deacons*

THE early church was found gathered in a circle of meetings at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Colosse, Thessalonica and many other places. The sum total of Christians upon the earth at any given time constituted the church. They formed the one body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit of God, the House of God, the Church of God.

But though one body they were necessarily separated by distance, and met in assemblies in different places. Connected with these assemblies were the offices of Bishop and Deacon.

We read of these offices particularly in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1: 4-9. An office differs from a gift in one marked respect. The gift is for the whole church of God—an office was local and connected with a particular assembly. An apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher were such wherever they went, and equally so in every place. A bishop or deacon was such in the assembly to which he was appointed and nowhere else.

## THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP

The meaning of the word *bishop* is—one who looks on; one who oversees, one who exercises a practical care for the spiritual welfare of the saints. The Greek word for bishop is *episkopos* (*epi* on; *skopos*, look on or consider). It occurs five times in the Scriptures, once referring to our Lord (1 Peter 2:25), three times translated *bishop* (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7), and once translated *overseer* (Acts 20:28).

Now Christendom has fastened on the word, *bishop*, and reared up a sacerdotal system called episcopacy, the word coined from the Greek word, *episkopos*. This is as far removed as possible from the simple unritualistic idea of Scripture.

Indeed, an authoritative writer of the Church of England has stated that the office of a bishop in the Bible is one thing, that of the present-day bishop quite another.

We have often wondered what the apostle Paul would have thought could he have seen the photos of the Bishop of London in his full regalia—mitre, episcopal ring and bejewelled crozier, etc.

The apostles ordained the bishops or overseers. Their office was confined to only one assembly, one or more being appointed in each place.

The bishop's qualifications are enumerated in 1 Timothy 3. He had to be the husband of one wife. Converted out of paganism, where plurality of wives

was allowed, some saints might have had more than one wife, but the bishop must have only one.

He must be sober, given to hospitality, apt to teach, one who ruled his own house well. The qualities, that would result in successful home life, such as self-restraint, wisdom, tact, ability wisely to rule, were just the same qualities that would shine in the assembly. He had not to be a novice lest he should be puffed up, and he must have a good report of those that were without.

It appears from the instructions given to Timothy and Titus that the apostle Paul empowered them as apostolic delegates to ordain elders—in the case of Titus in a particular district—Crete—where he laboured.

### THE OFFICE OF BISHOP NOT PERPETUATED

But now we come to a very important point. There is no provision in Scripture for the continuance of the office of a bishop. Paul appointed Timothy and Titus to ordain elders, but there is no instruction for this authority to be handed on. Surely, if God intended the office to be perpetuated, instructions would be clearly given, as they were in the case of the High Priest of Israel in Old Testament times.

Why then, if the office is not continued, are the



qualifications so carefully enumerated? The reason for this is clear.

(1) The office was not to be perpetuated in an *official* way. Doubtless it was wise that it should be official at the beginning, and further the Holy Spirit was acting in such power that the moral condition of the men appointed was adequate to the office they were ordained to.

(2) Whilst there are no longer *official* overseers or elders to-day there are certainly elder, godly brethren, raised up of the Lord, who have a care for the assemblies to which they belong, and who carry out the spiritual work of the bishop or overseer.

Why should the qualifications be enumerated for all time except for some purpose? And surely it is just for this purpose, that Christians should recognize by their moral qualifications those who are so raised up, and fitted of the Lord to care for the saints.

The reason why this should be so, viz: the carrying out the work of an overseer by those morally fitted for it, and no instructions given for the continuance of an overseership, is, we believe, that God foresaw all the declension and confusion that would ensue in Christendom, and refrained from making provision for the continuance of that which speedily became mere *officialism*, and hence a curse instead of a blessing.

If provision had been made for this, every section of Christendom would claim the succession! What

confusion there would be! What arrogance! What fratricidal strife!

Then there is the word, elder, in the Bible, meaning a man of years. The Greek word for elder is *presbuteros*, from which the word, presbyterian, is coined. *Presbuteros* simply means an aged person. On the perversion of such simple words great religious systems are built. The bishops or overseers were chosen from among the elders.

### THE OFFICE OF A DEACON

The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos*, and this is the ordinary word for servant. The word of itself was in general use designating a servant. Evidently godly men were appointed to attend to the secular affairs of the assembly, such as ministering to the poor, attending to the funds, attending to tables and the like, and were called deacons or servants.

And seeing the deacons attended to secular affairs in connection with the assembly they had need of circumspection, they had not to be double-tongued, one thing to a person's face, another thing behind his back.

One can understand, too, why fuller instructions are given as to the character of the deacon's wife than of the bishop's. The deacon's wife might have to assist her husband in many practical ways in connection with this secular service.

The qualifications which had to mark the deacons

were very similar to those of the bishop or overseer.

They were appointed by the apostles or their delegates. More than business aptitude is needed for the deacon's work. We read of the appointment of "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3).

Nor were there any instructions given for the continuance of the office, but the qualifications of the deacons are given, showing, we believe, as in the case of the bishops, that whilst the *official* would cease, the work itself would be carried on by faithful men, such as are described in 1 Timothy 3.

## CHAPTER V

*The Priesthood of all Believers*

IN the Old Testament a special class of Israelites was set aside for the priesthood, viz: Aaron and his sons. In the New Testament ALL *believers* are priests. The apostle Peter wrote, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, *an holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Again the apostle John wrote, "Unto Him that loved us [*literally*; loves, N. Tr.] and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests [*literally*; a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, N. Tr.] unto God and His Father" (Rev. 1:5, 6).

## PRIESTHOOD FOR ALL BELIEVERS

The gift, which is special to the few, involves a ministry *to MEN*; the priest ministers *to GOD*, and this is the privilege of every Christian.

It is the privilege of each saint to minister to God, which ministry finds expression in praise, thanksgiving, adoration and worship. The Lord said, "The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers

shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4: 23).

How high and holy then is this privilege of approaching God the Father in worship! What manner of life becomes such but holy separation from the world and holiness in walk and ways.

It is true that enlightened Christians acknowledge that all true believers are priests. But it is just here that great confusion has come in. Nearly everywhere in Christendom we have the spectacle of a certain class being set aside for the priestly office.

There are degrees of assumption, the ritualists going to great lengths, calling a special class priests, clothing them in peculiar robes of which the New Testament knows nothing, giving them a place railed off where the laity must not enter.

There is a simpler class among the free churches, styled ministers or pastors, dressing in an attire peculiar to themselves, styling themselves *Reverend*, an adjective only once used in Scripture and applied only to God: "Holy and reverend is His name" (Psalm III: 9).

What is the use of paying lip homage to the truth that all believers are priests, if by the creation of a certain class, who monopolise the spiritual activities that belong to the people of God generally, believers are thus practically deprived of their priesthood?

No clergyman or minister is consistent in admitting the priesthood of all believers, and yet con-

tinuing in a position that robs them of it, and assuming the position for himself and his class exclusively.

### A SERIOUS WARNING

We would speak seriously in this matter, for we believe it is just this condition of things that is so largely responsible for the confusion of Christendom, and the weakness of Christians generally.

Believers go to a so-called place of worship where this class system obtains. They are not expected to take audible part in the spiritual exercises. They go to receive what the clergyman or minister has to give them. They go without priestly exercise, for their priesthood is denied them practically. No wonder such believers do not grow in the things of God.

We freely admit that earnest, sincere and gifted men are found in the ministerial ranks, and that they are there often with a good, but an unenlightened conscience, and that the Lord uses them greatly in the salvation of the unsaved, and the help of His people.

But these cases nowadays are, alas! becoming the rare exception. They are nevertheless part of a system that is dragging things downwards, however much they may seek to stem the tide and mourn over the state of things, and however much God may use them in their own service.

## THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The Lord's parables of the Kingdom of Heaven as given in Matthew 13 are most helpful, as being prophetic of the course of things since the inception of Christianity.

First there is the parable of the tares among the wheat. This sets forth the great device of the enemy in introducing unsaved professors where God only would have true possessors, vital believers. This is Satan's master stroke, leading to very obvious consequences.

### THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

The next parable, that of the mustard seed, sets forth the further device of the enemy, viz: to persuade the Christian professors to seek world-recognition, political power, for a place of greatness in this world.

Is this not the aim of some of the great religious bodies in the world to-day, notably of one in particular? Is it any wonder that unconverted professors of Christianity, knowing nothing vitally of a rejected Christ, knowing nothing of the true meaning of the twice-repeated words of our Saviour, "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world" (John 17:17), knowing nothing of the genius and power of Christianity, should introduce worldly methods, and seek to be great in this world?

So we have gorgeous buildings, ornate ritualism, imposing ceremonialism, high sounding titles, the seeking after political power and earthly aggrandisement—in short, a worldly religion in which the real is only kept alive, and in spite of this state of things, by the Spirit of God.

### THE PARABLE OF THE WOMAN AND THE LEAVEN

This prepares us for the next parable, that of the woman hiding the leaven in the three measures of meal till the whole was leavened, fit symbol of Satan using these unconverted professors and worldly Christians for the gradual leavening of the pure Bible doctrines with evil teaching. We see it in the Judaising teachers, who imperilled the very foundations of Christianity; in the assertion that the resurrection was past already in the Apostle Paul's day; in the Gnostic heresies and the presence of many anti-christs in the Apostle John's day. We see it to-day alarmingly developed in Higher Criticism and Modernism, in the crank religions of the day, mostly of American origin.

We live in a day when the inspiration of the Bible is being openly derided, when men believe in a bestial origin of man as taught by evolution, and refuse the opening chapters of Genesis as a narration of facts, denying the fall, the virgin birth of Christ, the need of redemption. Even the resurrection of Christ is called in question.



## LIVING IN A FOOL'S PARADISE

Along with this, religious leaders get intellectually intoxicated, and dream ethical dreams of men's progress towards a golden millennium, whilst all the while Christendom is hurrying on towards the abyss of the apostasy, foretold by Scripture as the only possible result of drifting from the Bible.

It only needs the coming of the Lord to call away all the true believers to glory, leaving only the shell of an empty profession on earth, for the consummation of the apostasy to be an accomplished fact.

With the withdrawal of the true believers from the earth, the drag will be off the wheel of Christendom, the restraining influence of the Spirit of God will be withdrawn, and all that is shaping to-day will come to its terrible and frightful fruition.

Thoughtful Christians cannot but trace, in the setting aside of a special class for the exercise of priesthood, results a good deal similar to what we have been tracing in the parables of the kingdom of heaven. The assumption of the ministerial office is great. It sets aside the ordering of the Holy Spirit of God in the assembly. 1 Corinthians 12: 11 speaks of "dividing to every man severally as He will," but man's ordering sets this aside ruthlessly. It is to confine the activity of the Holy Spirit practically to one person.

How hampered must the divine activities be! Ministers, ordained of men and not ordained of God, and when ordained of God hampered by the ordin-

ance of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, recognizing in a practical way the truth of the one body, profiting by the gifts ordained of the Lord, the strong caring for the weak, each one concerned as to the exercise of his or her priesthood—each member of the body of Christ seeking to contribute his or her part to the welfare and happiness of the whole—the body making increase “unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

Someone may exclaim, What an ideal conception! It is the conception of Scripture. It is a glorious idea to think of the one church of God upon earth, true to her rejected Lord, acting in the practical maintenance of the truth of God as set forth in the Scriptures.

But alas! man has failed. We all know that scarcely was the apostolic age over before serious declension set in. Dealing with things with which we are particularly associated, we have to-day great and pretentious denominations all around us, and even those who seek to answer to the Lord's truth in simplicity divided and sub-divided till their testimony to the unity of the body of Christ has become a byword, a reproach and a stumbling block.

Is there then no path for the Christian amid all the confusion? Surely there is, or else God is defeated, and the Head of the Church is not sufficient for His people. If only two are found answering to the Lord's name they can count on His presence, for He said, “Where two or three are

gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them ” (Matt. 18:20).

### A VERY VITAL CONSIDERATION

We now come to a very vital consideration. We are familiar with assemblies professing to be gathered to the Lord’s name, who *outwardly* have very much in common, but who on enquiry differ in a very fundamental way.

### ASSEMBLIES WHICH ACKNOWLEDGE PRACTICALLY THE TRUTH OF THE ONE BODY

Some who gather to the Lord in simplicity believe in a circle of meetings, as there was at the beginning—the acts and discipline of such meetings affecting and being recognized by the rest. They see the truth of the one body of Christ, and how at the first there was a circle of assemblies, each a part of and having responsible relation to the whole, thus giving expression to the one body of Christ. Of course the circle of assemblies should normally include every believer on the face of the earth.

But if saints depart from this unity, should that rob believers of the privilege of acting according to the truth of Scripture?

Of course no circle of meetings to-day can claim to be the church of God. That scarcely needs saying. But it is open to saints to practically give expression to the fellowship to which all Christians are called.

## ASSEMBLIES WHICH TAKE INDEPENDENT GROUND

There are other meetings, which take the ground that each assembly is *independent* or *self-contained*, that its acts and discipline are not necessarily binding on other *independent* meetings. No doubt such a position is an easy one to take, but it has grave disadvantages as we shall see.

Moreover, it is not a question of what we like or choose, or deem expedient. We have truly no choice in the matter, if we are subject to Scripture.

### THE TRUTH OF THE ONE BODY HAS A PRACTICAL BEARING

We have heard it urged by one, who holds that assemblies are *independent* assemblies, that the truth of the one body has little or nothing to say *practically* to the constitution of the local assembly. Scripture, however, plainly gives the negative to such an assertion.

It was given to the apostle Paul "to make all men see what is the fellowship [administration N. Tr.] of the mystery [*that is*, the truth of Christ the Head in heaven and believers as members upon earth constituting the one body of Christ], which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that NOW unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places *might be known* BY THE CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9, 10). Here it is plainly stated that the administration of the

mystery is to be seen NOW *in the assembly*. The idea of *independent* assemblies is the denial of this scripture. Christ is not the Head to each independent assembly, but is the Head to the whole body—the church of God upon the earth.

Another scripture bears out the same thought. “Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular” (1 Cor. 12:27). Evidently the Corinthian saints were not the whole body of Christ, but locally they bore that character, for they were members of that body in particular. Could they be said to be “body of Christ” if they were viewed as an independent assembly? Surely not!

It greatly helps if we look upon all believers on earth at a given time, abstracting them in our minds from *all* their denominations and associations, and thus behold them as one body of Christ, the one assembly where God dwells upon the earth.

But they cannot all meet together. Numbers and distance preclude this. So we find many assemblies in many places and in many countries.

### A BROKEN STATE OF THINGS

Of course in the present broken state of affairs, and indeed from the first time the true saints of God fell into division, no circle of meetings can arrogate to itself the place of being *the* body of Christ.

But it is surely still open for Christians to take the ground, which is in *character* that of the church of God, and which is open scripturally to all Christians,

and thus to give expression to the only fellowship to which Christians are called, and to do this without presumption of any kind.

### THE CHARTER OF INDEPENDENT ASSEMBLIES

Those who believe in *independent* assemblies clearly assert their views. As one reads them one is struck how the true idea of the church is lost sight of, and expediency governs their thoughts. Here are one or two samples.

“ It formed no part of the commission which the risen Saviour gave the apostles to execute that they should form all those of whom they made disciples into one visibly connected community . . . so soon as there were other churches planted in addition to the first church formed at Jerusalem believers ceased to form *in all respects* one community. We read afterwards accordingly not of one church or religious community but of numerous distinct communities *independent of each other.*”

Again :

“ We own no other body of any kind or description, nor is there any unity of meetings in the name of the Lord only and under the rule of the Spirit only . . . Thus if there be *no corporate relation* there can be no corporate action of the churches. Each has its distinct organizations, functions and actions. God has therefore limited the action of our judgment to

our *immediate sphere* in order that we may not be continually clashing and striving with one another.”

Note the expediency of the above extract. This idea of *independent* assemblies is to avoid “continually clashing and striving with one another.” This leaves room for all sorts of confusion, and brings in practical disunity. It produces a great lack of effective discipline. Man’s expediency in the things of God, leads to a great lowering of things, and ultimately to greater confusion than it seeks to avoid. God is wiser than men.

Again we read :

“Each church was a *self-contained* unit, responsible alone to Christ the risen and glorified Head.”

Can any Christian studying the Scriptures come to the conclusion that the church at Corinth or Antioch or Ephesus was a self-contained unit in order to avoid “continual clashing and striving with one another”? This is a very low conception of the church of God, as revealed in Scripture. Fancy the Lord being the Head of “a *self-contained* unit,” and one unit acting professedly in dependence upon the Lord, and yet other assemblies not being responsible in any way to recognize its actions.

Again we read :

“The local church is ‘the pillar and ground of the truth,’ sustaining indeed the truth common to all, but responsible in itself for the

maintenance of a witness for God, and answerable only to Christ the Head."

What right has the writer of the above extract to alter Scripture? 1 Timothy 3: 15 speaks of "the church of the living God" being "the pillar and ground of the truth." Why does the writer add the word *local*? Being obsessed by the idea of *independent* assemblies, "self-contained units," he clearly shows the bias of his mind. It is the case of making Scripture fit a human idea, rather than Scripture forming our ideas.

Again the writer speaks of each assembly being "answerable only to Christ the Head." In one sense that is true, but if it is intended to shut out any responsibility to other assemblies it is surely wrong, and refusing the practical truth of the one body as set forth, as already quoted in Ephesians 3: 9, 10.

It is true that now and again, a writer, who is connected with an *independent* assembly, will claim that the discipline of one assembly should be respected and upheld by other assemblies. In palpable matters it would clearly be so. For instance, if a drunkard is put out of fellowship at A, if B and C etc. know him to be a drunkard, they would not receive him.

But that ought to be true if a drunkard sought fellowship with any body of Christians, whether among the big denominations or anywhere else.



## THE NEED OF LETTERS OF COMMENDATION

To the writer's knowledge many of these independent assemblies receive individuals to the breaking of bread, otherwise unknown to them, on their own recommendation without a letter of commendation. Letters of commendation were evidently the custom of the early church, as seen in 2 Corinthians 3: 1, when a saint went from one locality to another, so that fellowship might be upheld.

The writer remembers calling the attention of a member of an independent assembly to this loose and unscriptural practice of receiving strangers on their own recommendation, saying, "You know that if a stranger walks into your meeting, and asks to break bread, he is allowed to do so on his own recommendation."

The brother replied, "It is enough for a stranger to walk into our meeting room. We don't even ask his name or if he is a Christian."

It says little for the unknown Christian presenting himself for fellowship that he has not taken the trouble to procure a letter of commendation.

## AN UNSCRIPTURAL CUSTOM

It would not do to assert that every independent assembly receives strangers on their own recommendation, but this unscriptural practice obtains in very many places, for the writer has the personal testimony of many Christian friends, who have been

present on a Lord's day morning at an independent meeting, and, without one question being asked, the intimation has been made that they may break bread, if they wish. What is to prevent a man of impure life, or one holding evil doctrine, from breaking bread?

And when those, who belong to independent assemblies, are challenged as to the danger of allowing unknown persons breaking bread on their own recommendation, the stereotyped reply is this, "If unworthy persons break bread with us that is their responsibility, not ours."

### CARE NEEDED IN RECEPTION

But is that so? Take an extreme case, an unworthy person—the incestuous man—was breaking bread at Corinth. Was that his responsibility and not that of the assembly? It was his responsibility, surely, but it was most emphatically the responsibility of the assembly. Solemnly they are told, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," and they are exhorted to "purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump as ye are unleavened" (1 Cor. 5:6, 7). The unworthy person had to be solemnly excommunicated, not merely put away from the privilege of breaking bread, but put away from among themselves.

### A LOW CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

That the unscriptural idea of independent assem-

blies leads to a low conception of the church of God, and the holiness that becomes God's house the following quotations show :—

“No individual in any church was held responsible for evil existing in it, either doctrinal or practical, simply because he was one of the worshippers.”


And yet John the apostle of love, could warn a Christian lady not to receive into her house one who brought not “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John, vs. 9-11), and solemnly warns her that one who does so, bidding him God speed, “is partaker of his evil deeds.” Is this not the flat contradiction of the above and following quotations?

“Firstly, believers ought not to have fellowship with the defiled; and secondly they do not become defiled by such fellowship, but only by receiving and holding or practising that which defiles. Hence it follows under no pretence of defilement are believers to be rejected who have been in contact with false teachers without imbibing their doctrine . . . It also follows *a fortiori* that meetings of believers cannot be defiled by the allowance of false teaching in them.”

Can it be believed that such crude and unspiritual teaching was part of the propaganda that brought into existence multitudes of independent assemblies? It is said that the constitution of things has changed. We fail to see that it is so. To be clear of a false start

is to publicly renounce the very grounds on which these assemblies have been built up.

For if these quotations mean anything they mean this: one may sit next an adulterer or a drunkard week after week, pass the bread and wine to him, or receive them from him, and not be defiled, so long as one's own life is clean and sober. One may sit next to a man holding evil doctrine, affecting the very fundamentals of the Christian faith, pass the bread and wine to him, or receive them from him and not be defiled, provided one does not receive the evil teaching.



Carry this principle to its legitimate end. Sinners as such may be in heaven itself, and heaven be not defiled by their unholy presence. Surely such ideas are very far removed from the truth of Scripture.

We gladly grant that there are large numbers of dear devoted Christians in these independent assemblies, who would be shocked if they knew they were in fellowship with meetings that began on such teaching as we have quoted. Such teaching is bearing evil fruit to-day, though we gladly acknowledge that some independent assemblies exercise more care than others.

One well-known writer taking independent ground, and contending earnestly for it, commenting on 2 Timothy 2: 19-21 teaches that the "vessels to dishonour" cannot mean persons, but must indicate doctrines. It therefore follows, if this be true, that a Christian is not called upon to withdraw from persons, however faulty their teaching may be, but

to withdraw or purge himself from evil doctrines.

It is passing strange how an unscriptural idea leads good men often to twist Scripture. Here is a case in point. This writer contends that the word, *vessels*, is a metaphor and to make it indicate a person is to confuse the metaphor chosen.

But a “vessel” is that which contains something. A doctrine contains nothing, a doctrine *is* something. A man may contain something in the sense of holding or believing doctrine.

Scripture itself flatly contradicts this writer when it says, “If a man purge himself from these [*vessels to dishonour*] HE shall be A VESSEL unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). Here the man is called a vessel, hence the vessels he purges himself from are clearly men. Why did not the writer referred to not read more carefully verse 21, and so save himself from a palpable blunder?

### PRINCIPLES BEFORE PERSONS

There is an important principle to guide the believer in a day of ruin found in 2 Timothy 2: 22. We read, “Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Here principles are put before persons. We have known attractive persons who led saints away from divine principles, simply because they were attractive. It was not a question of principles at all. Such attractive persons are gifted, and pious in their walk, but have travelled into associations not consistent

with the Word of God. Principles are to be followed, and principles cannot be followed save as they are practised. Righteousness is the first thing, then faith, then love, then peace. Not peace at any price, but peace consistent with righteousness. And others will be found following these principles and will be characterized as saints calling "on the Lord out of a pure heart," and with these we can happily walk.

### INDEPENDENCE LEADS TO INDIVIDUALISM

In truth the idea of independent meetings—"self-contained units"—leads to *independent* assemblies being formed of *independent* individuals. This is the legitimate and inevitable result of the system.

The following quotation shows this to be the case:—

"One assembly cannot settle for another its course of action. One assembly has no authority to excommunicate another assembly or to pass judgment upon it *in any matter* [italics added]. Not that things are not to be seen wrong in another assembly, but because God has not invested any assembly with jurisdiction or authority to judge another. It is not a court nor has it the judicial ability or apparatus to sit in judgment over another Church of God."

Notice one assembly has no right to pass judgment

on another assembly "*in any matter.*" If this be true, what right had Martin Luther then to sever himself from the Church of Rome? What right had the author of this quotation to be separate from the great denominations all around him? Absolutely none. The above extract is the stultification of Scripture. It is the negation of 2 Timothy 2: 19-21, and would forbid a man the responsibility of purging himself from "vessels to dishonour."

Let us complete the quotation:—

“ Let us suppose

### TWO COMMON CASES

“A brother visiting a new country worships with an assembly in a certain town. He then seeks to do so with another assembly in another town. Now it happens that the assembly in the latter believes much allowed in the former to be unscriptural, and therefore some would refuse the brother because he went to it. But two questions of liberty arise. Who made the second assembly the judge of the first? And who made it a judge of the brother's liberty to go where he will before the Lord? Elders may guard their own flock from error and evil and possibly consider carefully how far the coming brother brings evil with him, but they are no court to sit in judgment upon the liberty of either the brother or the assembly.”

Here is a statement, which, whatever it lacks, lacks nothing in clearness. A meeting is no judge of

another meeting *in any matter*. A meeting is no judge of an individual wishing to break bread. The individual may go where he likes and do what he likes as before the Lord, and no meeting to which he comes has the right to judge him.

The last few lines of the quotation are really farcical. Elder brethren may consider carefully the case, may seek to guard their flock from error and evil, but have no right to sit in judgment upon the liberty of the individual or the assembly. In plain language they may talk and not act—they may deliberate and come to a judgment, but their judgment cannot be carried into effect, and is simply an empty farce. Such are the lengths to which independency carries its adherents.

### BINDING AND LOOSING

It is in the functioning of the assembly that the truth of the one body is seen in a practical way. It is in connection with discipline we get the verse, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). That is to say, if an assembly binds or looses its acts are bound or loosed on earth and bound or loosed in heaven. Surely if Corinth put out the wicked person their act to be bound on earth would take in every assembly in the world. It would be monstrous to say that Corinth's act was bound in heaven, and not binding on Ephesus and Colosse and Rome and Athens, etc. That a wicked person is put



away at Corinth and not in all assemblies where saints are gathered to the name of the Lord, is a denial of the truth: "There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4:4).

The whole trend of Scripture shows how the members of the one body are looked at as members of the one body though necessarily found in various local assemblies. "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:26, 27).

### AUTHORITY AND NOT INFALLIBILITY

But this brings us to an interesting point. The assembly is not infallible, but it has authority. This is seen in ordinary government. The judges of our law courts have authority, but they are not infallible. Without authority they could not act. But being fallible there are higher courts—courts of appeal—in which doubtful cases can be reviewed, and if necessary the decisions of the lower courts can be reversed.

The assumption of infallibility by the head of one great system in Christendom is an offence to all right-minded Christians. So any claim to infallibility on the part of the Christian assemblies would be the proclamation of crude ignorance and blasphemous assumption.

But the assembly has authority to bind or loose.

So much is clear. What then has to be done if an assembly acts clearly in an unwise way, and comes plainly to a wrong decision? Have we no precedents in Scripture to guide us?

When the Corinthian assembly was puffed up and retained in its midst a wicked person, did the apostle Paul take the ground that there was no court to sit in judgment upon the liberty of the assembly at Corinth? Did he not write them an inspired letter that brought them to a changed and chastened frame of mind, and that led them to alter their judgment to what was right and becoming to the holiness of God's house?

And to-day would it not be right for elder brethren of another meeting to approach and reason with an assembly, which, they believed, had acted wrongly in any matter? Is there not room for expostulation, patience and grace?

And better still is there not room for brethren feeling such difficulties to cry earnestly to the great Head of the Church—the blessed Lord—to come in and give searchings of heart and light in the matter. And an assembly, who finds it has done something wrong, is surely within its province in reversing a hasty and ill-advised judgment, whether of binding or loosing.

### CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that independent meetings are made up of independent individuals, and degenerate into mere gospel missions with the breaking of bread

thrown in. Individuals connected with such have acknowledged to the writer the lack of discipline, the lack of church teaching and the lack of worship found in such surroundings.

As to the gospel we prize it beyond words, but we believe the gospel gains and does not lose in power when found in a circle where the truth of the Church of God is held in a practical way.

In this pamphlet we have sought not to attack individuals, we have suppressed, as far as possible, all names, and contented ourselves with the description of movements to be tested by the Word of God.

Without bitterness, with true love, we trust, to our fellow-believers wherever found, we are at least justified in bringing to the test of the Word of God the claims to Christian fellowship put forward in one form and another, and to seek to get a clear idea of, and to practise

THE FELLOWSHIP TO WHICH ALL CHRISTIANS  
ARE CALLED