

# CHURCH THEORIES:

OR,

## EDIFICATION.

BY

J. H. BURRIDGE,

*Author of "Christian Unity," "Liberty, Joy, and Power,"  
"The Coming of Christ," &c.*

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BRISTOL:

J. H. BURRIDGE, 1 COTHAM GROVE.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE practical unity of the Lord's people at any time is good and pleasant; it is essential to consistency with, and it is the outcome of, the high and holy relationships into which they are brought, and pleasing to God.

But never was there a time, in the history of the Church, when it was more necessary than at the present that all sound children of God should be drawn closer and closer together in a practical acknowledgment of the fact that we are all one in Christ Jesus, and to stand in unbroken ranks for all that is according to truth and holiness.

On the one hand, there is altogether too much worldliness among the children of God, by which we become entirely unfitted for effectual testimony; and when we couple with this the sectarian strife by which our ranks are divided we need not wonder at the feeble character of the Churches' testimony.

While on the other hand, nominal Christians and religious rulers, whether rationalistic or ritualistic, are directing, from their different standpoints, continual attacks upon the truth of the gospel to the perplexity of thousands of the sheep and lambs of Christ.

At the same time there are signs, obvious enough to those who are at all intelligent in the Scriptures, that the dispensation is fast closing in. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh. The judgment of the world, the awful fate of corrupt Christendom, and the glory of the true Church, are all rapidly approaching.

All this calls loudly to the people of God to rally around their Lord and Master for united confession, prayer, and devotion; and to band themselves together under the direction of His Word for united testimony to the truth of Revelation.

The earnest and prayerful desire to help, in some little measure, toward such a state of things has led to the publication of the following pages. The writer is conscious of much imperfection, and welcomes criticism, in a right spirit, being open to correction on any point that can be shewn to militate against the teaching of Scripture. This latter is what all concerned desire. There is true blessing in nothing else.

The writer has sought to emphasize the great absolute truth, and bring it to bear upon practical and local conditions and various theories. This accounts for the repetition of certain phrases. But we think it will be found that whenever such repetition occurs the truth repeated is brought to bear upon some fresh aspect of the question under consideration, or different argument.

May the Lord deign, in the riches of His grace, to use this effort, in spite of shortcoming, in blessing to His beloved saints.

J. H. BURRIDGE.

1 COTHAM GROVE, BRISTOL.

## INTRODUCTION.

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**ECCLESIASTICISM**—as seen in its many and varied forms, in Christendom to-day, from the colossal and blasphemous proportions it presents in the Papacy, grading down through the Establishment, and sects of Nonconformity, to the more simple and petty aspects it assumes among the different parties and sects known as “Brethren”—versus true Scriptural edification. The former is destructive in its character, and works by bigotry and pretension; the latter is constructive, and works by love and humility.

Church theories and Christian practice are made to oppose each other, so that the very earnestness and devotedness, in the true spirit of Christianity, which often leads a child of God to scale the boundary wall of the Church theories that have been built around him, brings him into conflict with his brethren, who look upon those theories as the sum and substance of Christianity. Indeed, the more fully a child of God drinks into the Spirit of Christ—becomes filled with His love, and is thus enabled to enter somewhat into His thoughts concerning all His people—the more does he feel compelled by exercise of conscience before God to do things his Church theories forbid; for divine love must find expression, not in word only, “but in deed and in truth”; it instinctively and absolutely refuses to be circumscribed by sectarian boundaries.

This is true of any child of God in whom divine love is allowed its own activity, whether he be in the Church of Rome, Church of England, any Nonconformist Church, or in that “called out company” which assumes to be “Church of God” in any given place.

We may be sure that there is something radically wrong in that Church theory—however simple, and even Scriptural, its name—that militates against true individual responsibility, life, and conduct, as enjoined in the Scripture, or against the unsectarian exercise of divine love—that is prejudicial to enjoyment of true Christian and Scriptural fellowship—having a circle of fellowship peculiarly its own, outside of which it refuses to benefit by the ministry of earnest, devoted, sound, and able servants of God, or even to acknowledge such Christian excellencies.

Indeed, sad to say, some strong adherents to a certain Church theory attach such importance to it as to look upon it as so essential to Christianity that there can be no such servants of God, as named above, outside its confined limits: at least they have spoken of such cases when named to them as wholly imaginary. Their Church theory, rather than divine love, is for them the bond of perfectness, for without it nothing is perfect in their eyes. It is the all in all. All believers are looked at, and judged of, in their relation to it, rather than in their relation to the living Head in heaven, which, of course, makes all the difference possible in the attitude taken toward them.

And yet this in many instances is not really themselves, it is not in harmony with their attainment in Christ, their grace and knowledge. For they are often so excellent in Christian graces toward *those in their fellowship*, and so helpful in ministry, that it is ten thousand pities that such grace and ministry should be, by sectarian theories, limited to so few of the sheep of Christ, all of which are dear to Him, while such a different spirit (which is certainly not the Spirit of Christ), is shewn toward them who are not “with us”; indeed, even toward those who *are* “with us”; as we have pointed out, if they refuse to be bound by the theory.



It is very easy to agree with those who agree with us ; no great demand is made upon Christian grace, patience, and forbearance in such a happy state of things. It is also easy for one to pass judgment upon those who do not agree with him ; it is quite natural, indeed there is something very pleasing to oneself that one is in a position to do so.

But to take occasion of disagreement to exhibit the grace of Christ, and to bring one's own thoughts again to the test of Scripture—looking to the Lord for the guidance and teaching of His Spirit, with no confidence in one's own understanding, this is not quite so natural and self-pleasing, and yet it is made a real blessing to one. It is helpful both to oneself and to those who disagree with him ; and thus, even in disagreement, kindred hearts are brought closer together, the enemy is disappointed, and the unity of the Spirit is, so far, manifested. This is not agreeing to differ, but taking occasion of difference to shew grace and forbearance. We should be most severe in judgment upon ourselves, but most tender and considerate toward others. The Lord grant unto us more of this spirit.

We are not here dealing with our conduct toward those who hold fundamental error.

Mutual help and fellowship (in whatever degree occasion offers), among those who love the Lord and His truth, yet whose intelligence in the truth may represent almost every possible degree, who may all round have erroneous ideas of a minor character (I use the word "minor" as distinguishing from fundamental), on some subjects, and among whom minor disagreements on Church government, ministry, &c., may exist. This is our subject here, and we have an ardent desire to promote such help and fellowship, and if, as we proceed, we speak plainly on some points it will be with the desire to put what we consider to be the truth forcibly against what we believe to be unscriptural

theories that stand in the way of true Christianity and fellowship.

Our readers must judge of the truth for themselves. All we ask is that they will seek to free themselves from the influence of former prejudices, and prayerfully search the Scriptures on the subject.

After what we have said, it may be necessary to remark that we quite believe in faithfulness to the Lord, to His truth, and to each other: but we need not say that this is quite compatible with the spirit of the previous paragraphs.

We also believe in the assembling of ourselves together for united worship, mutual edification, and the enjoyment of other Christian privileges, and that under the guidance of the Scriptures; and that our collective responsibilities involve the maintenance of sound doctrine and godly practice amongst us.

We need be more concerned about the general condition of the saints of God than their various Church positions. Individual soundness in the great fundamentals of Christianity—individual growth in grace and truth—real personal attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ—devotedness in His cause—and that we may all drink more deeply into His spirit: these are the things that we should be concerned about for ourselves and all the saints. The enjoyment of collective privileges, and real collective testimony arises out of such individual condition. The nearer we are all drawn to our blessed Lord Himself, the more will there be a drawing to each other. Therefore, the great thing is to minister Christ and His truth among all His people as occasion offers. Any amount of zeal for mere ecclesiasticisms can never compensate for the lack of this; and to be occupied with churchisms to the neglect of it is to "*pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,*" and to pass over more weighty matters. It is to put the effect before the cause.

# WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF GOD?

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THE answer to the above question is of all importance to the study of our subject. All other aspects of it are based upon its essential nature, and any conclusion that does not agree therewith cannot be right, any idea that is not in accordance with it, and drawn out of it, must be wrong. We cannot decide, nor rightly understand, what the Church should be practically, until we know what it is absolutely; her practical form, conduct, and government are all ordered in view of this.

The practical is controlled and shaped by the absolute, and is dependent thereupon. The objective governs the subjective. But as we have gone somewhat into this part of our subject in another work, we do not intend doing anything more here than just to point it out as a basis to work upon.

The first intimation of the wonderful purpose of our blessed Lord concerning the Church is found in Matt. xvi.: "Upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it." Nothing could be more sovereign and absolute than this.

The word "*ekklesia*" translated Church, simply means assembly; its immense importance in the New Testament arises from the fact that God is pleased to use it to designate that vast company which, according to His eternal purpose, is being gathered out from among Jews and Gentiles during the present dispensation, and is brought into the most intimate relationship with Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ, all individuals of such company being baptised into one body by the Holy Ghost. It is *God's* assembly brought into the highest possible relationships and most holy associations.

The word "*ekklesia*" is somewhat more concrete in its meaning than "*sunagogiu*," the word for synagogue; it implies a more definite call out, a more intimate associa-

tion by an authoritative principle (at least as used in the New Testament). While the word congregation may somewhat adequately express the meaning of "*sunagogiu*" it falls short of the meaning of "*ekkllesia*."

The word is used in different senses (1) sometimes applied to the Church as a whole, as viewed in the purpose of God; (2) sometimes applied generally to the Church at any given time on earth; and (3) sometimes applied in a local sense; (4) It becomes plural when used to signify a number of local churches in a district, province, or country. In three of these instances (2, 3, 4) the word may be used in a subjective sense (*i.e.*, as applying to the saints on earth in testimony), but always on the basis of, and fully in accordance with, No. 1. A local church has its own responsibilities and obligations directly from the Lord, the Head, in heaven, under the guidance of His own Word. These are to be carried out by the church in any locality without reference to other localities; and so in each locality, for each has the same Lord, the same written instructions and the same Spirit. Hence the plural becomes necessary to convey the idea that in a certain district there is a number of these local churches. But they all go to make up the one Church that Christ is building, in accordance with the purpose of God, and become the expression of it in testimony in each place. There are not two different churches as to purpose, place, and relationship, any more than there are two different Heads, but there are many localities in each of which the one Church—one Body—indwelt by one Spirit, and having one living Head in heaven, is represented. The word "churches" is used not in contrast to this, or as operating against it in any way, but simply to convey the idea that there are many such representations in a certain province.

If we read "the Church which is in Asia," we might think that there was only one such representation of the Church of God in that province; but the inspired writer desires to convey the idea that there are several. Hence "churches."

The term "Church" is never used in a party or sectarian sense,—*i.e.*, to take in only a certain part of the many members of the Body of Christ within the limits of its application.

In the passage referred to, in Matthew xvi., we have Christ, the Son of the living God, as the foundation of the Church. If we turn to Eph. i. 22, we find Him presented to us as the Head of the Church, exalted in heaven. He is again spoken of as the Head of the Church in chap. v., ver. 23; and in ver. 25 we read that Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, in view of presenting it to Himself a glorious Church. Wondrous love! Marvellous triumph of grace! That Church, so scattered and divided here, so unfaithful here, shall soon be presented to Himself all glorious up there. Praise His blessed and adorable name!

The intimate character of the unity into which the Church is brought, as including every saint, is referred to in ver. 32.

In Col. i. 18, also, we have Christ spoken of as "the Head of the Body, the Church"; and in ver. 24 the Church is spoken of as His Body.

In Heb. xii. 23 we read of the "Church of the first-born."

These passages speak of the Church as viewed in the purpose of God, in its entirety, as embracing all true believers from Pentecost to the coming of our blessed Lord to receive her and present her to Himself a glorious Church. In the fullest harmony with this, we are told that there is one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all (Eph. iv. 4-6). This is the unity of the Spirit, and the Scripture knows no other (the unity of the faith looks on to the grand fruition of this); and the gifts that the following verses speak of are given for the edification of this Church—this Body—which is embraced by this unity. Any unity formed on a narrower basis than this—*i.e.*, which, by its own nature, would exclude many of those in the unity of the Spirit—cannot itself be the unity of the Spirit. It is a sect, and any gifts devoted exclusively to the building up of such a sect fall short of the object for which they were given, though they may be blessed of God.

All other uses of the term "Church" are governed by and in harmony with this, its cardinal and primary use.

Let us, then, keep this absolute, great, grand, and glorious

aspect of the Church before us. We shall thus have a more grand conception of the purpose of God, such as will enable us more fully to appreciate His sovereign grace in all its riches and magnitude, while humiliating us in deep contrition and real confession before God, on account of the sad failure of the Church in testimony, which we measure by the divine relationship into which she is absolutely brought. It will also fill our hearts with the deepest gratitude, our lips with unfeigned praise, and our souls with holy longing. It will lift us above all the petty ecclesiasticisms that are the cause of the most bitter strife, that fill us with pride, prejudice, and everything that is ignoble in speech and conduct; and, instead thereof, will fill us with divine love and holy desire towards all or any of the Lord's dear redeemed people, imparting to us a catholicity of spirit such as enables us to embrace in our affection and prayer all God's people, and which shuts none out from our sympathy and concern. It enables us to look at believers in their relation to Christ, the Head, and not in their relation to our party ecclesiastical position.

And while a true apprehension of the Church of God, in this absolute and supreme aspect, held in power in the soul, does all that we have said, it deepens our desire to maintain the truth of God, not in "our church," "our cause," or "our fellowship," but in the Church of God.

The very same view of the wonderful work of grace that God is doing, consequently upon the death and resurrection of Christ; at the same time enlarges the heart towards all who are concerned in it, and deepens the desire for a more practical response to it.

It leads us to be more occupied with the Person than the place, more with the Head than the members, yet it gives a more real and natural care for the state of the members, because of their association with the Head, and not merely because of their being "in our fellowship" or in the fellowship of "our Church." In a word, it enables us to recognise in any or every child of God a member of His Church equally with ourselves, and to shape our conduct towards him accordingly.

Any so-called church shaped upon any other basis, or principle, is obviously sectarian in its conception and character, and requires sectarian conditions of fellowship.

## THE TERM CHURCH USED GENERALLY.

There are a number of passages which speak of the Church in a general way, *i.e.*, in a way applicable to the whole Church on earth or to any local expression thereof. In Acts ii. 47 we are told that "the Lord added to\* the Church daily such as should be [or, are being] saved." The Holy Ghost had descended and baptised all believers into one body, thereby forming the Church, or assembly of God on earth. Having formed the Church He goes on adding to it, according to Matt. xvi. : "I will build My Church." This is a very important passage (Acts ii. 47) in connection with our subject. Here are three things to be noticed (1) the Church was formed, and (2) the Lord was adding to it daily, and those added were (3) such as were being saved.

All who are being saved are added to the Church, and from that moment (the moment of their conversion), they are members of the Church. They are then brought into all the vital relationships of Christianity. Hence there are no people saved who are not added to the Church of God. Nor is there any church known to Scripture that shuts out any who are saved, whether it be viewed in its general or local aspect. There may be much failure in the practical expression of this blessed truth.

There may, with us, be some question or doubt as to whether or not a man *is* saved, but, this point being settled, there is never any question as to whether or not he is in the Church.

The same sovereign act which saves a man makes him, at the same time, a member of the Church of God. Does any one question this? If not, where is he and what is he? Is he not one of the sheep of Christ? Is he not in the family of God? Is he not a member of Christ? Yea, is he not indwelt by the Holy Ghost? Is all this true of him and yet he not in the Assembly of God? Association in worship, service, &c., is the expression of, or the testimony to, the Church that the Lord builds him in, not another church.

\* The words "to the Assembly" are marked as doubtful in some Greek Testaments, but their absence would not alter the sense. "The Lord added" what to? the company of His people who formed the Church, being the same thing. Verse 41 bears the same meaning.

God is gathering out His Church from among the nations by the gospel, and all who believe that gospel are saved, and, by the indwelling of the Spirit, added to the Church. The Lord is building His Church with living stones; these living stones are people who have eternal life, hence when a soul is born again he becomes a living stone in that building.

Ritualists always reverse God's order. The Scripture shews that the way into the true Church is through Christ, but Ritualists say that the way to Christ is through the Church, and by thus doing they misrepresent our blessed Lord—our loving and entreating Saviour—to the sinner, and falsify the character of the Church.

The next passage speaking of the Church in this general way is found in Acts v. 11. At the instance of God's judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira we are told that "great fear came upon all the Church" and upon many others who heard these things. Also chap. viii. 3, as well as xii. 5, refers to the Church generally. In one case Paul made havoc of the Church, and in the other, prayer was made of the Church for Peter who was at that time in prison. If it be said that there was only one gathering of all the saints at Jerusalem at that time, our reply is, firstly, if so, that would not alter the fact that these terms are of general application; and, secondly, that such a conclusion is gratuitous and most unlikely. We read of 500 brethren, not to say anything of sisters, seeing the Lord at once, of three thousand being converted by Peter's preaching, and, after that, the Lord adding *daily*. It is, we say, very unlikely that even in the early chapters of the Acts that all these thousands formed but one local gathering, and it is certain that they did not by the time of chapter viii., when a gathering was formed at Samaria, and chapter ix., which shews that saints were found at Damascus. And yet the use of the term Church in chapters viii. 3 and xii. 5 would apply generally, *i.e.*, to the Church as a whole, made up of all the local gatherings, and therefore to any one of such gatherings.

The fact is, that in the early times of the first few chapters of Acts there seems to have been no such fixed Church order and government as is inculcated in the Epistles to the Corinthians. The true character of the



Church was not yet revealed, the great distinctions and contrasts between Judaism and Christianity had not been shewn by divine revelation. Believers were indeed of one mind, of one accord, and they clung together and expressed this unity in a remarkable way. But the Jewish Temple was their daily meeting place, otherwise they had many meeting places; they broke bread from house to house, Acts ii. 44-47. In chapter v. 12 we are told they were with one accord in Solomon's Porch. As to the "Apostle's doctrine," in which they continued steadfastly, it was the death and resurrection of Christ. There was nothing ecclesiastical about it. Though God was building believers into the Church, its true nature and destiny were not yet revealed. Hence, to go to Acts ii. for a model of Church principles and order shews a want of intelligence on the subject.

There are at least three passages in 1 Cor. which view the Assembly in this general way: x. 32, xii. 28, and xv. 9. In the Old Testament times there were only two classes of people on the earth, Jew and Gentile; but now there are three classes, Jew, Gentile, and the Church of God. This obviously views the Church of God as a distinct and visible people on the earth. It does not say Jew, Gentile, and *Churches* of God, though it evidently includes all those local gatherings that are sometimes called churches. The second of these passages likewise looks at the Church as made up of many local churches. Indeed this Scripture unites the absolute with the practical in such a way as to shew beyond all question that the one is simply the expression or outward form of the other; "*God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondarily Prophets,*" shews its absolute and general character, but as we proceed with the verse we find it speaks of an administration which can only be made good in all the many local churches which go to make up this one Church; thus shewing that the churches in the many localities are its expression in those places, or are this one Church as seen in those different places.

The passage in chap. xv. bears testimony to the same thing: "Because I persecuted the Church of God." He does not say "churches." It was the same Church that he persecuted in different localities.

There are also three passages in Ephesians iii. 10, 21, and v. 24. We do not limit the application of these Scriptures to the Church of God on earth at any given time; we believe that, in character with this Epistle, while they are applicable in this way, they also look on to its dispensational completion; indeed we are always working up to this, in whatever aspect we view the Church.

The Apostle again speaks of the Church as the object of his persecution in his unconverted days in Phil. iii. 6. Indeed he never forgot this; he looks upon it as the worst sin he ever committed, because of it he calls himself the chief of sinners and the least of saints. What a serious thing it must be then that even converted people should be found sometimes persecuting saints of God, or stumbling them, which is almost as bad; see Matt. xviii. 6.

In Heb. ii. 12 we read of our blessed Lord as saying, "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee"; and in the previous verse we are told that "He [the Lord Himself] that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are *all* of one," *i.e.*, all of one company. The Church is made up of sanctified men who are His brethren. All believers are sanctified, are His brethren, and hence are in the Church.

Here are, we think, all the passages which refer to the Church in this general aspect. And the thing that we desire particularly to emphasise in them is that they look at the Church in a general sense as composed of all saints on earth, and that they therefore take in any or all local expressions of it.

We do not anticipate much disagreement so far, on the part of intelligent Christians, though we believe that some who would perhaps agree in the main with what has so far been stated, at least as to the absolute character of the Church, nevertheless take a position that is inconsistent therewith, not having it as its basis. To our own mind what we have seen decides the whole question of a right and Scriptural principle, and the way to act upon it in the existing state of things.

At least the practical Church position of God's people, to be Scriptural, must be in harmony with—indeed, ordered and controlled by—the absolute truth stated in the passages of Scripture quoted and referred to.

Anything at variance with this cardinal truth cannot be of God, in so far at least as it is at variance with it.

Everything—our gathering together, our treatment of each other collectively, the remembrance of our Lord's death, wherein this wonderful unity finds the most true expression (see I Cor. x. 16, 17), the reception question, and the exercise of gift—must be ordered according to, and be regulated by, this great fundamental view of the Church. Anything that comes short of it does not take in the grand Scriptural idea.

Any sect, party, or company of professed Christians (by whatever name they may be called—"Baptists," "Independents," "a circle of fellowship," "called out company," or "Church of God"), forming a separate society in itself, with conditions of membership other than the membership of the Church of God, the Body of Christ, *i.e.*, the possession of life evidenced by soundness in doctrine (as far as the intelligence goes), and holiness in life, is, in its formation, of human origin, and comes short of the divine idea as revealed in Scripture.

Israel may be divided, and part of the tribes scattered, but the twelve stones of their altar, as well as the twelve stones in the breastplate and on the shoulder-pieces, remain. The purpose of God concerning the people—the whole nation—and not the condition of the people themselves, is the one great thing to be kept prominent, for our guidance.

Thus the relationship of all Israel was maintained, not only before God, but also in the minds and worship of His people. The two tribes, in their principles of worship and collective responsibilities, must own their relationship with the whole twelve tribes, though they were sadly divided, and, alas! even sometimes at war with each other. Yet they were one people—God's nation—and their divided state did not alter their relationship to Him, as such, though it was a standing testimony to their sin.

Perhaps the most regrettable thing in the formation of ecclesiastical sects is that it ignores the ruined state of things for which the Church as a whole is responsible. Each sect or party gets so taken up with its own supposed merits that it is rendered insensible to its share in the general failure, and hence is wanting in Daniel-like confession. And this is so whether we view sectarianism in

its grossest forms as exhibited in some Nonconformist societies, or as seen in its more enlightened form in the views of some sectarian "Brethren."

So far from seeing anything wrong in the divided state of the Church, most Nonconformist sects justify it, and ascribe it to divine ordering, so that we often find them speaking of the different sects as the many branches in the vine.

But this is not at all according to the mind of the many parties or sects of "Brethren"; they are too intelligent in the Scriptures to treat us to such an exegesis as this. They know that Scripture does not give many different orders to be followed according to the tastes of His people. They err rather on the other side. They (each party) say "there is but one Scriptural order given for the Church, and we alone follow that, and all who wish to do so too must join us." But both are sectarian, for each has a unity, a membership, peculiarly its own, which others, though joined to the Lord, have no part in, till they join it.

Though we thus speak, we would ask our Christian reader to take his Bible and compare the order followed by the several parties of "Brethren," and we think that he will find that *in the main* it is the order given in Scripture. But for this very reason their sectarianism is the more to be regretted. In the first place, the very fact here admitted is in itself the greatest reason why they (the different parties of Brethren) should recognize each other, and so abolish the sectarian walls between them. And, secondly, it is the very reason why they should altogether extend the right hand of fellowship to every godly individual, and recognize everything good in all the Lord's people in the different sects around, ever watching for an opportunity to shew the spirit and grace of Christ, and never putting the slightest hindrance in the way of their enjoyment of Christian privileges with us. We are speaking of those who love the Lord and His truth.

Let us earnestly stand up for the truth, fearlessly exposing the fundamental errors that strike at the very foundations of Christianity as set forth in the Scriptures; but let us in our attitude towards the children of God who are sound in the faith disregard all merely sectarian barriers. Such an attitude is consistent with the intimate character of our relationship to the Lord and to each other, and with the fact

that all His people alike are dear to Him, and it is the only way to follow out the instructions of Scripture as to our conduct in relation to each other as begotten of God.

### THE CHURCH LOCALLY.

From the Scriptures that have already been before us, we learn that God's purpose is, consequently upon the death and resurrection of Christ, to gather out from Jew and Gentile—from all nations—a redeemed people for the heavens; that this redeemed company as a whole, according to the purpose of God, is called the "Church of God," "the Body of Christ," and "the Temple of God"; that by the Holy Ghost they are all united to a risen Christ, and baptised into one body. This Church embraces all true believers from Pentecost till the coming of Christ to receive her to Himself—that is, all believers saved under the present dispensation; for the object of the dispensation is to call out this Church, and occupies a parenthetical place in the ways of God with His earthly people the Jews: Acts xv. 13-19.

We have seen that the term is also used in the more restricted sense of embracing all believers on the earth at any given time during the dispensation. In this aspect the Body of Christ is looked at as increasing "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."

When the Body of Christ is viewed as the dwelling-place of God we find that the same progressive aspect attaches to it: Eph. ii. 19-22.

We have now to look at the Church in a still more restricted sense, viz., its local aspect. And in our study of the subject it is most important that we keep before us the Church as already considered, for it is the local expression of *that* which we now enter upon, the local expression of that Church which God is gathering out from the world, and therefore governed and controlled by what is true of it. What else is the Church in any given place? All the saints of God, in every particular place, form a part of the Church of God as a whole. Hence they are the Church of God—the Body of Christ—as it appears in that place. Is this

not so? It is a matter of fact, and strikes at the root of every form of sectarianism.

Two great principles are therefore true of the Church in any place, as also in general, *i.e.*, (1) Holiness, for it is God's Assembly in an ungodly world, it is composed of the people among whom God dwells. The Lord in the midst, evil must be judged, "wicked persons" must be put out from the midst of those who thus represent the Church of God. Unconverted people have no part or lot with them; they have nothing whatever in common; they are not of the Church in this true and blessed sense; and "what part hath he that believeth with an unbeliever?" Clearly then the Church is not a society of mixed membership.

(2) While unbelievers have no place there, no true believer can, on any Scriptural principles, be shut out without, in so far, denying its true character. For the Church of God, in any place, includes all the people of God; the Church of the saints includes all the saints of God; the Body of Christ includes every born-again soul, for all such are members of it.

This is obviously the divine principle on which we should act if we desire to follow the guidance of the Word of God; the fact that there is need to insist upon this shews the natural sectarianism and carnality of the human heart.

The fact that the principle of discipline in the Assembly requires the putting away of one that is *called* a brother, if he be a "wicked person," does not militate against the above principle, but rather confirms it, for it is the "wicked person" who is put away, in accordance with the principle (No. 1) given previously. And it is *only* the wicked person, though he be *called* a brother, clearly indicating that the professed relationship is doubtful, *i.e.*, as far as we can see, his conduct denies the relationship. For the time being his true Christianity hangs in doubt to us, for we can only judge by the fruits, hence his allowed presence would only deny the true character of the Church. And the "without"—the place of unbelievers—is where God, who knows the heart, judges. But if his repentance evidences the reality of his salvation he is to be received back again, in accordance with the principle given above as No. 2.

All therefore, generally speaking, that should be looked for in order to acknowledge a person a member of the

Church of God, is just what we should look for in order to acknowledge him as a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—a saved man.

In the whole—the infinite—range of revelation, there may be room for very great difference of intelligence, of view, and of method (always taking fundamental soundness for granted), calling for grace, patience, and forbearance with each other. Indeed, our relations with each other supply us with ample opportunities for the exercise of the graces of Christ—the fruit of the Spirit. We are continually exhorted in the Scripture to grace, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, gentleness, meekness, to consider one another, to prefer one another, &c.; all of which imply circumstances adverse to one's own judgment—not in accordance with one's own mind—to call them into exercise.

If in any way, or under any pretence, we pick and choose from among the saints of God to form a church of such as agree with us concerning one or two particulars, as to boundary lines, and judgment of things around, and the attitude to be taken in regard to other Christians who do not see as we see (even though we may be nearer the truth concerning those things than they), we are acting on human ground, we are carnal; for do not even the societies, clubs, and schools of the world go on the same principle? Is it not a purely human principle?

We are far from saying that the exercise of Christian graces should stop with the saints; no, they should be like the fruitful branch that ran over the wall, nothing can stop their spreading, if only we abide in Christ. Grace, patience, forbearance, and such like virtues should form the character of a child of God, wherever he is, whether among believers or unbelievers.

True, indeed, it is that the prejudices, the misunderstandings, and the misjudgings of believers are more trying to a child or servant of God than all the derision, the scoffing, and the mocking of unbelievers. But if we are found abiding in Christ such unchristianlike ways, instead of exciting and irritating the flesh into action, will afford the opportunity of shewing the spirit and grace of Christ.

But let us examine the local aspect of the Church as treated in Scripture somewhat more closely.

## CHURCH OF GOD THEORY.

There are some earnest and sincere servants of Christ who say that the Church of God locally, or "Church of God,"\* includes only those who, to adopt their own phraseology, are "gathered to the Name of the Lord," who "own the Lordship of Christ," are the "called out company," phrases with which in themselves we have no quarrel; it is their restricted and sectarian application, as fostering a self-complacency and pretension such as are most unhealthy to the soul, and damaging to true testimony, and, above all, leading to strained interpretations, if not utter perversion, of certain parts of Scripture, that we wish to point out.

There are other exclusive theories—*i.e.*, theories that exclude saints of God without any Scriptural reason, yet with more or less truth in them—known as "the ground of the one body," "a circle of fellowship," &c. But as we believe that one answer applies to them all—though the theories differ—we will seek to investigate the one stated above, by the Word of God. We feel our own weakness and dependence; but our desire to help the Lord's dear people to more practical unity and fellowship has led us to take up this work; and, assured that the Lord knows this desire, we count upon Him for grace and help.

By this theory, a part of the saints of God—it may be only two or three out of as many thousands—in any given place are the "Church of God" in that place. Supposing, for instance, there are one thousand children of God, say in the town of S. Fifty of them are "gathered to the name of the Lord," and they therefore form the "Church of God" in that place, in such a definite way that the nine hundred and fifty are not only outside them as a company thus gathered, but outside the "Church of God" and "Body of Christ" in the place, for the fifty are "Church of God" and "Body of Christ" in the town. The centre of gathering is all right, but the boundary line is sectarian.

What then, we may ask, about the nine hundred and

\* They make a point of the absence of the article—it suits, or they think it suits, their purpose better; indeed, they partly build their theory upon it, though in reality it lends, as we shall see—the Lord helping us—no support whatever to it.



fifty? Are they not members of the Church of God, the Body of Christ, in its absolute character? Those who take the position we are examining will agree that they are. Then they must be members of that Church, that Body as represented in the town of S; they, the whole thousand, are the local representation of that Church. "In the town of S" only localises them, as "the Church of God which is at Corinth."

Yet we are told that the fifty who are "gathered to the name of the Lord" are exclusively "Church of God," and until any of the nine hundred and fifty come into "the fellowship" they are not, they cannot be, in "Church of God" or "Body of Christ."

Is not this obviously sectarian? Indeed, in most towns there are two or three parties, who are professedly gathered to the "name of the Lord," who have no fellowship with each other. The writer recently asked the most able exponent of the above theory—who is in what is called an open meeting—if he would say that those meeting in the same way, who are called "exclusive" or "needed truth," were not "Church of God" also in the place, and found that, with strange inconsistency—for the pretension is that a certain company are Church of God in the place—he demurred to say they were not, but thought they may be!

Thus, according to this view of the matter (which we think was a somewhat forced, and evidently a reluctant, admission, and no part of the theory), we may have, in one town, two or three (and, if two or three, of course any number), Churches of God, yet refusing fellowship with each other. What, we ask again, could be more sectarian? It would be impossible, under the divine principle and relationship we have had before us, without standing convinced by the Word of God. And, mark, in the present state of things the theory must either make the above admission, which demonstrates its sectarian and unscriptural character, or must make its pretension so obvious as to open the eyes of its own devotees, by saying that no other company can be "Church of God" (even though meeting as we do, and are as sound in the faith); we alone are that!

Sad state of things indeed! May our gracious Lord open our eyes to see the state of ruin that *we*, His people, His Church, are in, and lead us to Daniel-like confession,

taking in the whole Church of God in our confessions, in our prayers, in our principles, and in our ministry ; for the love of our adorable Lord is set upon all His people, every individual has a place on His heart, and His glory is concerned in the whole, for they *are one* ; hence it is “ my sin and the sin of my people,” or, what is more, with us, “ my brethren,” fellow-members of the same Body.

The more we enter into this the more will there be a real and spiritual drawing together around Himself on the part of the Lord’s people who love Him and His truth.

But alas ! such is the fascination and complacency of the theory we have stated (and we do not think at all overstated), that some of its supporters seem incapable of appreciating the spirituality, the piety, and devotedness that exist outside the precincts of their own fellowship. Indeed, one of the fascinations of the theory is that there can scarcely exist such devotedness to Christ and love of His truth outside this confined “ Church of God.” So one went so far recently as to assert that spiritually-minded and devoted children of God outside the gatherings in question existed only in the imagination of those who maintained that no sectarian barriers should be raised to hinder their participation in Christian privileges with us.

We can only understand this in the light of the fact that they never go outside their own ecclesiastical precincts to seek intercourse with dear saints of God. And, then, the theory itself is calculated to make them look upon all who do not subscribe to it as unspiritual, if not unsound, simply because they are outside of it. Is this the spirit of Christ, or the spirit of self-righteous bigotry?

Let us cleave to the Lord : Let us cleave to His Word as being sufficient for us in every set of circumstances ! but let us obey that Word and honour Him by a real love to all His people, and by owning and manifesting the unity into which all His people are brought, by encouraging fellowship (not hindering by sectarian barriers) with all “ who call on the Lord out of a pure heart,” by acknowledging all of Christ that we can in any of His people, by seeking the edification, not of a party only, but of the whole Church of God.

If we see that the Church as a whole has gone astray from the simplicity of divine order by human sects and

systems, it is indeed our privilege and our blessing to return to that order, though it may be only as a feeble remnant, but let us not make sectarian walls around those simple Scriptural principles which we profess to return to, much less to say that we are exclusively the Church.

O! that we may see this and cling to the truth with humility of mind, finding our hearts going out after the Lord's dear people, ready to own the relationship that absolutely exists, in whatever godly way opportunity may offer.

#### THE GREEK ARTICLE.

As we have intimated, the propounders of the theory here referred to attach a great deal of importance to the absence of the article in Greek. They prefer "Church of God" or "Body of Christ" to *the* Church, or, *the* Body. This is not to be wondered at when the nature of the theory is understood.

To limit the application of the term "the Church of God" in S to the fifty who are "gathered to the Lord's name," as excluding the nine hundred and fifty who are not with them (though some of them are meeting exactly in the same way, and making the same claim to be "gathered alone to the name of the Lord"), would be rather too glaring in its pretension.

The term "Church of God," or "a church of God," lends itself more readily to the theory, as it does not appear to be so absolute, at least in English.

The term is pressed into use to justify the idea of a church within a church. Every believer, it is readily admitted, is in the Church of God which is the Body of Christ, but every believer in S is not in "Church of God" in that town. "Church of God" to those who follow this theory includes only those who actually gather with them, but "the Church which is His Body" includes all believers in the town. Thus the nine hundred and fifty are in God's Church, but not in *theirs*.

Vital membership of the Body of Christ puts one in the true Church of God, but nominal membership of the party "gathered to His name" (alas! that such a Scripture should be made a party badge) puts one in "Church of God" according to this theory.

The practical state of the Church of God, generally and locally, is not our subject at this moment; it will come under consideration in due course. We are now emphasising the truth of what the Church really is as before God. What it should be, and what it is practically, or in testimony, can be better estimated when this is clearly seen.

We should not interpret the Scriptures by the practical state of things, but interpret the practical state of things by the Scriptures. But, after what we have said about the use the theory makes of the absence of the article, will not the reader be surprised to find that, though there are forty-eight instances in the New Testament in which the term "Church" (*ekklesia*) is used in a local sense, only eight times is it used without the article? It is "*the* Church which was at Jerusalem," "the church that was at Antioch," "the church which is at Corinth," "the church of the Thessalonians," &c.

The plural, "churches," occurs thirty-three times, the article being absent only four times out of this number.

This observation alone is enough to shew that the use made of the absence of the article is quite erroneous; to be any real support to the theory (even if the conclusion drawn from it were correct), its absence must be invariable—whenever the church in any particular place is in question—instead of which it is quite exceptional.

But such a use of the absence of the Greek article arises, we think, from want of a better acquaintance with the idioms of that language. Very often the article is absent in Greek when its presence in English is required to give the same sense. For instance, in 1 Tim. iii. 15 ("the Church of the living God") the article is absent both from "Church" and "living God"; but who would gather from this that it supposes, or leaves the slightest room for the idea, that there is more than one living God? We know from Scripture that there is only one living God, and so rightly add the definite article in English. In this case the sense in Greek is sufficiently definite without it. Likewise, its absence before "church" may not, in itself, imply that one out of many local churches is meant; and much less would it convey the idea that only some of the saints of God in that locality were in such church.

The article is often absent in Greek where it is needed

in English ; on the other hand it is often present in the former language where it is not needed in the latter, as "the Paul," "the Peter," &c.

There are two cases in which the authorised version leaves out the article before Churches where it occurs in Greek—1 Cor. vii. 17, xiv. 33. But such an exception does not imply that the term Churches is used in a more limited or less definite sense than in the many cases where the article is used. The sense would be governed by what the term Churches was understood to mean. If read in the light of the ritualistic idea that there is one Church in every parish, a number of churches would be taken to mean so many parishes. If understood in the light of the idea common among Nonconformists, it might be taken to mean any number of churches in any one place. But if looked at in the light of what Scripture shews the Church to be in its varied aspects, it would be understood as grouping together a number of churches found each in its own locality. It may be in a public building, it may be in a house. The absence of the article in these two passages is purely idiomatic, the sense is the same with or without it.

But the all-important point to see is that whether the locality be large or small the Church of God includes all believers in it ; and that whether there be few or many churches in the district, each church is of that character. It is the nature of the church that we need to bear in mind ; the area to which the term may be applied is of secondary importance, when it is seen that all saints in such area are included by the very nature of the case.

The use, therefore, of the term that is to be avoided, is any such one as would exclude from it those who are demonstratively members thereof in its most absolute sense.

#### THE CHURCH IN PRACTICAL TESTIMONY.

For practical purposes we need not go over the history of the Church to see how complete her failure has been. We have to act in the present state of things, therefore let us seek to look at that in the light of the Word of God, and to bring that light to bear upon our own principles and practice in their relation to God, to His truth, and to His people.

In Christianity we are called to bear testimony to what God in His sovereign grace has done. He has made me a child of God, and I am responsible to live as such; He has made us members of one body, we ought to give expression to that practically; and in so far as we have failed to do so, we (the saints who compose the Church generally), have sinned, we have been carnal and disobedient. God has brought us into a wonderful relationship through the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord, and by the descent of the Holy Ghost, which we have failed to evidence in practical testimony.

And, alas! how great is that failure. Should we not be on our faces before God about it? When we look at the state of things among the people of God in the light of the high and holy relationships and associations into which we are brought with our blessed Lord and each other, do we not rightly speak of "the ruin of the Church as to testimony"? Can we get out of that ruin by making a limited Church of our own, which we think is not a ruin? Are we not one with all the redeemed—one family, one body, one Church, yea, and one Priesthood? It is *our* sin. O, that we may feel and own it instead of thinking that we are not concerned in it.

Though, blessed be God, we are not bound to go on in that which we see to be wrong. If there are those who see the state of things from a Scriptural point of view, there is a resource for them; our blessed Lord has made provision for the smallest remnant who wish to make Him the one true centre. "Where two or three (He does not say the Church) are gathered together in My name," &c. Here, then, is a resource in times of general failure for any feeble remnant who desire the path of obedience, who desire to give our blessed Lord His place in our midst, and to acknowledge Him as the centre, not of a party, but of all His dear redeemed people. But we will look more closely at this Scripture presently.

Are, then, the few (for they are but few out of many), who thus return to Scriptural order, strictly speaking, the Church of God in any given place? Obviously not; they are only part—a remnant—and as such, if any testimony at all, it is to the general ruin, for that which is a manifestation of the truth shews up all that is inconsistent therewith. As

turning to the Scripture from human arrangements, from human divisions, from sectarianism, they should cultivate Christian love, and manifest the graces of Christ to all saints, that others by these graces may be more attracted to the same blessed Person—should seek to acknowledge in every godly way the relationship that exists. The Scripture gives a centre for the Lord's people, and is also most explicit as to order and government in the Church; and it is only around that centre and under that order that God's thoughts about His Church can find a true expression practically, though there may be much individual piety, devotedness, and fellowship, that is according to it (*i.e.*, the relationship), even in the midst of a great deal that is of men; yes, even here, much that the Lord owns and that we should own in each other (see Rev. ii., iii.). But let us not use the failure as an excuse for not following out the Word of God in all things.

Any feeble remnant, even down to "two or three," may turn to the Scripture and follow its instruction. Nor should we be any slower to do it because of the sad failure of others who have attempted it. But if we look at and treat our position as if it were peculiarly our own, to which we alone hold the key, and to which we admit only on conditions that seem right to us, but find no support in Scripture; if we look upon ourselves as being exempt from the general ruin, as being "Church of God," in which no one can be unless they join us on our own conditions, and come into our "fellowship," and begin to look upon other Christians as though they were not "of us," as though we were not all brethren, and to set them at a great discount because they are not "with us"; or if we begin to strive and divide among ourselves, and then, having divided, do what the sectarian spirit we had already shewn (by attaching unscriptural barriers to our position), made possible, namely, put in rival and sectarian claims for the position—we say, if we do these things, do we not bring great dishonour upon the name to which we profess to gather, great discredit upon the truth to which we profess to return, and make confusion worse confounded?

Is not this a solemn reflection for us at the present time? Surely we do well to face it and be humbled before our God? But blessed be God, that if we, in a simple and

humble way, without any pretension to be anything, seek to follow the Word of God, He will be with us.

May the Lord look in mercy upon our condition, and lead us to real exercise as to these things, that the many gatherings of His people about the country, of different parties, may throw down the unscriptural barriers which they have erected around themselves, and seek to act more according to the relationship into which we are brought with our blessed Lord, and with each other, under the control of His Word alone in all its blessed simplicity, divesting ourselves of all ecclesiastical prejudice, and party feeling, and the influence of old questions of strife. We must look at things in the light of His Word alone.

Albeit, we believe it in full accordance with the Word of God that each local gathering should act for itself as responsible to the Lord and His word alone, and not wait for the party, or circle of gatherings to do it, that all might move together; this would be to acknowledge *party* bonds, as would also the idea of leaving one party and joining another. True, indeed, this would make one party less, but it would make one *sectarian* party instead of two. True fellowship is brought about by mutual obedience to the Word of God, not by mutual agreement, though this is another result.

We know that this is not according to ideas that some of us have held and taught, but is it not according to the truth? It is easy to get a wrong idea, especially on this subject, and turn it into a standard church tradition, to govern us ever after in place of the truth of God. Church history abounds with such mistakes. Of course we claim the support of Scripture for it. But with a strong prejudice in its favour we bring it to Scripture, and try to make Scripture agree with it, instead of coming to the Word of God without prejudice, and in a spirit of dependence upon God, to see if it agrees with Scripture. We bring our ideas to Scripture instead of coming to Scripture for them.

Where, in Scripture, do we find that an assembly is bound to act, for any purpose, with a number, a circle, or a confederacy of assemblies? The Word of God addresses itself to each assembly to act for itself before the Lord; and if each assembly *is* thus acting, depend upon it that a more spontaneous, and hence, a more real fellowship, and



a more spiritual unity will follow than could possibly be brought about by a confederacy of assemblies, or by any divisive or conventional means that have yet been used to bind churches together.

True and absolute unity is through the Head and by the Spirit, therefore subjection to the Head, under the guidance of the written Word, in dependence upon the Spirit of God are the means by which it is made practical. Is this not so? This begins with the individual; it becomes collective by mutual subjection and obedience, and gives character to the local assembly. But it does not stop here, it becomes so enlarged by contact, by faith, with the living Head in heaven, till the only unity recognised is that which takes in every saint.

The careful and intelligent observer will, we think, have noticed that wrong ecclesiastical ideas find their origin, not in Scripture, but in disagreements and divisions among the saints on some matter of order or discipline—in party feeling, or prejudice, or in expedience of some kind; then they are perpetuated by misinterpretation of Scripture, and accompanied by the most bitter feeling and the greatest pretension. A new party being brought into existence by a division, ecclesiastical ideas must be revised by each party so as to maintain its position as against the other.

What cause there is for humiliation in all this! Surely such a state of things is too evident around us, and should be brought home to us. Are not our eyes open to it?

Brethren, let us consider our ways. We “have sown much and bring in little.” We have been building our own houses, or our party churches, instead of having before us the House—the Church of God. Surely His word is to us “Consider your ways,” and O may He stir up our spirit as He did that of the people to whom this exhortation was addressed. We also “looked for much and it came to little,” and the Lord has blown upon it; and for this cause the dew of heaven (the blessing of the Lord) is withheld.

Let us then take our place in self-judgment before our gracious God. Mere platitudes are of little use; we need to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. “Amend your ways” is the word of God to us, and true self-judgment always leads to this.

### THE COMPOSITION OF THE CHURCH LOCALLY.

Shall we now consider a little more closely the composition of the Church of God locally, for it is most important that we should be clear as to its true nature, because, as we have seen, this is where responsibility begins.

If, as we have seen, the Church generally and absolutely is composed of all true believers, then the local church is composed of all such in its own locality. "The Church of God which is at Corinth" takes in all the saints of that place, simply because they are saints; and, if this be so, the church of God at the town of S in our day takes in all the saints of God in the place—all that truly believe the Gospel, and hence are members of the Body of Christ absolutely. The one great and humiliating difference between Corinth and S is that in the former the saints were not as yet divided up into sects and parties as they are now in the latter. But it is the Church of God—those who are absolutely members of the Body of Christ—who are thus divided. This is true generally as well as locally. Nevertheless they are all one in Christ, and in absolute relationship. If they are not one practically, and in testimony, it is because they have sadly failed, and carried into practical and open manifestation such divisions (and perhaps worse) as existed in spirit and germ at Corinth in the Apostles' day; that is, the church in the modern town of S has become a complete ruin as to testimony.

Blessedly true it is, we repeat, that if any in the midst of that ruin find their hearts stirred with a desire to do the will of God, the way is open to them; they need not wait for the whole church. "Where *two* or *three* are gathered together," &c., gives the centre; and instructions for government, ministry, and relative conduct are found in the Epistles, especially 1 Cor. xii.-xiv. and Eph. iv. It is quite true that, as a remnant, they act upon the principles of the whole; but they are not the whole (*i. e.*, not, strictly speaking, the Church of God in that place); hence the application of those principles may, in effect, by the divided state of the saints, be to some extent neutralised, as, for instance, is the case with discipline. This is clearly not so effective in the present divided state of things as in the days of the Apostles,

because the disciplined person may find refuge in some other company of Christians who do not recognise Scriptural discipline, which is not the same as being outside the assembly when it, subjectively as well as objectively, included all true believers—to all appearance an unbeliever, and in the place of such.

This is one effect of the sin of the Church. Nevertheless, in practice we must follow the instructions of the Word in the matter, and leave the results with God, and still watch for repentance.

Let us now turn to 1 Cor. xii. for a few moments, which gives us most clear teaching as to what the Church is, both generally and locally. And nothing can be more certainly gathered from its instructions than the fact that the local is the expression of the general—of the absolute—and includes all believers.

“For as the Body *is one*, and hath many members, and all the members of that one Body, being many, are one Body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.” Here we have the vital membership into which we are “*all*” (all truly born-again souls) brought. One member cannot say to another, “I have no need of thee.” “If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

Now, all this is true of the saints, the Church, the Body of Christ, generally; it is also true locally, for the relative conduct enjoined applies more especially to saints in local contact with each other. Hence the Apostle says, “Now, ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular” (ver. 27). Does this leave any members out? Does it imply a relationship other than that which is the subject of the chapter? Were there any members of the Body in Corinth, or could there be in any other place, who are not included in the words, “Ye are the Body of Christ,” or “Ye are Christ’s Body”?

It is said that the absence of the Greek article in this text signifies that the term as here used only applies to those “gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus,” to “Church of God,” as including only such. According to this interpretation there are some who can say to other members of the Body, “We have no need of you.” Is not

this verse (27) simply the application, to the saints he was addressing, of the truth he has been dwelling upon all through the chapter.

Albeit, at Corinth there were no true and pronounced believers (nor is it to be supposed any merely professing ones) outside the Church, hence when one was put out, he was treated as an unbeliever outside. That God may have been working in souls outside is not questioned, but all pronounced believers would be in the Assembly, *i.e.*, in its outward aspect.

The more we study this chapter, the more clear does it become to us that it is impossible, without misinterpretation, if not utter perversion, to give it a definite local application that precludes any (much less the majority) of the saints of God. There is in it a clear reference to the Church in its dispensational character: "God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles." The Apostles have their place in the foundation, other gifts follow in the superstructure. Here we have the Church as viewed in its widest aspect, given to us in immediate connection with the statement, "Ye are the Body of Christ," *i. e.*, viewed locally, the Body of Christ as seen at Corinth. It reads as follows: "Now ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular. And God has set some in the Church, first Apostles," &c.

Evidently the great principles of gifts and governments as set in the whole Church, in an absolute sense, as stated in ver. 28, is to govern the Body of Christ viewed locally as in ver. 27. And the variety of gifts spoken of in the first part of the chapter are of a very general character, given for the edification of the whole Body as seen in ver. 11-13; but here their existence, order, exercise, and object are for the benefit of the Church locally at Corinth.

But what was subjectively or practically true at Corinth, and all localities where the Church then existed, is no longer true of local churches. The saints had not been divided and scattered; they could all benefit more easily by the variety of gifts. It is not so now. Yet what the Church, the Body of Christ, was objectively or absolutely—each saint being viewed as a member thereof, a "member in particular,"—is just as true of the Church of God in any place to-day. Absolutely, the truth remains unchanged; practically, the testimony to it is nothing but

failure. But still it is this absolute truth that we have to bear testimony to, and by it our sad failure is measured.

Now that such ruin has come in, we are not called to make something else—a church of our own, which we think outside the general ruin. No, it is what is still absolutely true that we should give heed to. “We are all baptized into one Body;” “There is one Spirit, one Lord, and one faith.” This blessed unity abides, and it is this that we are to own and express, as far as lieth in us.

If general failure has come in, then as a remnant we may own and follow the truth, but in such case our position or attitude, and our conduct, towards fellow-members of Christ must be ordered and controlled by what is absolutely true. Our absolute relationships indicate the measure and character of our obligations. Our responsibility extends to every saint of God, every member of the Body of Christ.

We see to-day, in most places, the Church divided into sects and parties. Are all the diversities of gift spoken of in this chapter centred in any one section of believers that call themselves “Church of God,” “a circle of fellowship,” or that look upon themselves as “on the ground of the one Body”? Such a claim, we believe, would not be put forth by any of these parties. There are gifts, administrations, and operations, not only in all three of the parties lastly named, though they are opposed to each other’s position, but outside them all; and yet is it not true that such gifts, administrations, and operations, are by the “same Spirit,” and the “same Lord,” and “the same God that worketh in all”? And are not all these in the Church of God, say again, at S, or any other place?

“The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” Is there, then, any such manifestation that we are not to profit by? Are we to ignore the “gifts,” the “administrations,” and the “operations,” merely because they are not with us? and, for the same reason, to say that they are not in “Church of God,” *i. e.*, not within our ecclesiastical precincts—not in “our circle of fellowship,” or “on the ground of the one Body”? All of which expressions are made to serve sectarian purposes.

God has set these gifts in the Church. It is said, “Yes, but that is in its Godward aspect.” Just so; but the gifts are to be exercised, and this brings us to the outward or

manward aspect—the practical expression of what is true before God. How, then, can we say that any such gifts, manifestations, and operations, are no concern of ours whether it be Paul, Peter, Luther, Darby, Müller, Spurgeon, or any other true servants of God? They are *ours*, “set in the Church,” the members of the same Body, and for its edification. How this blessed truth enlarges the heart to all the work of God on earth!

Does not the truth, as taught here, shew that we should be ready to recognize, help on, and profit by whatever we see of the Lord Himself, and His truth, in any of His people? Does it not also shew that, if we take a Scriptural place—if we want to own the truth—we must not only allow, but encourage, any known saints of God to come in and out among us, to share Christian privileges with us; that it is wrong to lay down as a condition that they should “join our fellowship,” &c., before they can have *any* fellowship with us?

While we may see in others certain things as to Church order that is not according to the truth, as we have learnt it, they may see much in us as to Christian practice in our conduct toward fellow-believers that is clearly against the truth. Should we not, then, bear with them (as the Lord does with them and us) while seeking to help them and be helped by them?

We ask these questions fully knowing how they cross the strong and fixed prejudices of many fellow-believers whom we love and esteem, whose censure we are sorry to incur, and whose misjudgings we shall no doubt have to bear—we hope, by the Lord’s help, graciously. But we ask them also with the firm conviction that the decided answer of the Word of God, as given to us in holy writ, is in the affirmative, which we are endeavouring to shew in this little work.

#### THE ATTITUDE OF GATHERINGS.

As to the position of the different meetings of Brethren, we believe that there is at the present time, amongst us, an impression that there is something lacking in our order—a something radically wrong in our practice—and we are thankful to say that there is great exercise in many quarters as to our partyisms; also as to our attitude toward other

Christians—fellow-believers, members of the same Body. We have made altogether too much of our virtues and of their faults, if I may so put it; *i. e.*, we have become too complaisant of our own position, and too censorious in our attitude toward other believers who are not—and because they are not—with us. We are happy to say that there are exceptions to this state of things.

Instead of adorning the graces of Christ in all their attractiveness, which cannot be without a beneficial effect upon others, we have assumed a harsh, stand-off—indeed, often a pharisaical—bearing toward them.

Let us seek the Lord for love, grace, forbearance, gentleness, meekness, and long-suffering towards His people generally. There is no law against these things.

Is not the Christian conduct here urged quite compatible—not perhaps with our ideas of things, but with faithfulness to Christ and His truth? Yea, is it not essential to faithfulness? We must maintain that the ecclesiasticisms which hinder our recognition of, and concern for, the Church of God at large; that brands as unfaithfulness to Christ such conduct towards every or any member thereof, as is constantly and persistently enjoined in Scripture, and that is consistent with, and indicated by the divine relationships into which we are brought, and according to the instincts of the divine nature that we are made partakers of; we say the ecclesiasticisms that do this cannot be of God. Are they not rather the traditions of men that make the Word of God of none effect?

Unless we drink deeply into the Spirit of Christ we are always prone to judge ways that are not our own, for no other reason. We heard the other day of one servant of Christ condemning a fellow-servant in the strongest possible terms because he smoked. The smoker (who did not ride a bicycle) retaliated in condemnatory terms upon his accuser, because he, as a servant of Christ, could ride a bicycle. Of course, he thought it wrong for no other reason than that he did not do it himself.

Some of us who do not smoke, may see a great moral difference between these two things. We may see much more to exercise the conscience in smoking than in riding a bicycle, but many Christians who smoke do not. The incident, however, serves as an illustration of what we here

say, *i. e.*, that we are all ready to condemn certain things that others do simply because we do not do them ourselves; and so strong is this tendency that the very fact that the one condemns the other in such a manner leads the other to condemn back.

How different would be the case, if the non-smoker, instead of being so taken up with his own virtue, had been a little more considerate of his brother's weakness (to put it so), and graciously borne with him, while waiting for a suitable opportunity to give his own reasons for his abstinence. This is likely to have had much more effect. But the other method produces nothing but ill-feeling and strife.

It is quite possible that some little sacrifice that one may make, for conscience' sake, may (though in itself commendable) be a means of fostering a spirit of pharisaical pride in oneself, leading one to think, if not to say, "I am not as other men," &c. With the fruit of the Spirit it is not so; this is brought forth naturally—the natural outcome of the divine life lived in the power of the Spirit of God—pride is foreign to it; this latter comes of the flesh, not of the Spirit.

The tendencies, illustrated by the above incident, are most manifest in our ecclesiastical attitude—in our dealings with each other relative to Church matters.

Is it not possible for a few of the Lord's people to gather to His Name, even though they may not be clear as to Church order, as set forth in the first Epistle to Corinthians—to which epistle we must go for such order, and not exclusively to Matt. xviii.?

Would it not be more pleasing to the Lord and be doing greater service to the Church, if those servants of Christ who occupy themselves in exposing and magnifying the wrong of the Church positions,\* in which so many of the Lord's people are found, would give themselves more to the work of exposing and meeting the false doctrines that are being taught among them? This would be to appeal to the foundations on which all stands, and be much more calculated to open the eyes of the Lord's dear ones, than making so much of the wrong of their ecclesiastical position. And

\* Even putting these on a par with the sin of Jeroboam, which was flagrant idolatry of the very worst kind, namely, likening Jehovah himself to a four-footed beast.



once convinced of the false teaching to which they are exposed, they will become exercised about their position.

Surely the fundamental truths of the Gospel are much more important than merely a sectarian church position! The one is internal, the other is external; one has to do with the vital relationship of the soul to God, the other with the responsibilities of that relationship, which are very important in their place, but apart from the relationship itself they have no place at all.

But alas! for some people Christianity is made up of a right or wrong position ecclesiastically. For such it seems to matter little whether the doctrines of believers in any sect be true or false, whether the condition be spiritual or carnal—the Church position is wrong, and that is the main thing, if not everything. If there are true, earnest children of God there crying for bread, they must cry; our reply is to the following effect:—"They are in a wrong position, we should defile ourselves if we go to them, they are scattered, and we are gathered." Such is the argument put into plain words.

Oh! how very far from the thoughts of that blessed One who looked with the deepest compassion on the scattered and hungry multitude, because they were as sheep having no shepherd. How then does He look upon the scattered multitude of His redeemed people now, longing for some sound spiritual food? Is He not filled with compassion? Is not His word to us, "Give ye them to eat?" What then shall be our reply? Shall we say, "Lord, they are not with us, they are scattered. We dare not go to them, we should build up their sects if we did. If those sheep outside our flock want better food they may come to us, but we must not go to them."

It is because they are scattered that He has compassion on them. The shepherd's work is to give most attention to the wandering ones.

Alas! how very little we partake of the thought of Christ about His people. We abandon them to the wolves of Christendom while we wrap ourselves up in our ecclesiastical garb, and congratulate ourselves that we are out of the reach of such beasts of prey. Valiant shepherds!

Instead of separating the precious from the vile, we treat the precious as the vile (for surely every blood-washed soul

is *precious* to the Lord), and use our own holiness, or separation, as an excuse for doing so. Or, in other words, we think that we ("the called-out company," "Church of God," "Circle of fellowship," or "those gathered on the ground of the one Body") only are the precious, and everything outside "us" the vile. However, this is the only logical conclusion of some reasoning that we have lately seen.

Let not any company of the Lord's people think that by drawing a rigid line of circumference around themselves—and embellishing it with an ecclesiastical halo—they shut in all that is good and shut out all that is evil. Nay more, let not any company of believers take for granted that because they have taken a position more or less according to the letter of the Word, that therefore they have the spirit and power of that Word, or that their walk or condition morally is necessarily any better for such position—looked at as in itself. Neither let them think, on the other hand, that it is impossible for believers whose ecclesiastical position may not be in strict accordance with the letter of the Word (for want of more light, and through the influence of traditional teaching for years) to be, nevertheless, in the moral condition of their souls, thoroughly in the spirit and power of the truth known to them. The edification of the Lord's people is the one great thing, exhortation to it occupies a large place in the Epistles. "Feed My sheep," "Feed My lambs," is the Lord's word to those who love Him.

At the last day, that great day of the feast of tabernacles of which we read in John vii., the Jews were gathered according to the letter of the Word; they would have given, as we say, chapter and verse for their gathering and its purpose, and yet, at the same time, they were seeking the life of our blessed Lord.

We believe in following the Word of God to the very letter, but if, while professing to do so, the spirit and power of it is wanting, we only bring discredit upon it, and dishonour upon our blessed Lord. Indeed the Word of God is so complete, turning every way, like the sword in Eden, that it is impossible to exalt one part of it to the detriment of another with impunity; obedience in taking a position which may be according to its letter becomes neutralised by the turning that position against

obedience to the many portions that shew what our conduct toward each other should be. We are often found pressing one class of passages out of their relative connection with another class, the true bearing and import of which we ignore. We profess to obey the truth in one direction, while we disregard it in another. But the Scriptures refuse to be thus treated. Obedience in that direction is required to perfect it in this. We need to walk circumspectly, *i. e.*, keep a sharp look out *all round*.

We believe also in the sufficiency of the Word of God, and would refuse the postulation of any merely human arrangements. At the same time we know that God is not the author of confusion, and if He says "Let all things be done decently and in order" we should take measures to secure such order, *i. e.*, we should make such arrangements as are necessary to carry out the truth, but not against it.

The Word of God bids the evangelist go forth into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and in pursuance of his commission he takes a hall (or others do it for him), fills it with seats, announces his meeting, and puts a Christian friend at the door to shew people to their seats, &c. All this might be called human arrangements, but he is simply taking measures to secure the order enjoined in the Word of God. So in an Assembly, to take measures to secure Scriptural order is acting upon Scripture. Certainly godly order should be maintained.

This is quite compatible with all that has been before us about the Church of God in any place as including all believers. But more about the order of the Assembly presently.

Meanwhile, it may help our readers to understand more clearly what we have said about the difference between the mere letter of the Word and its spirit and power, between merely an ecclesiastical position and the real feeding of the sheep and lambs of our blessed Lord, if we give the following incident as a simple illustration.

It is said that one day two gentlemen went into the country for a day's shooting; after a few hours of such employment they felt their need of some lunch, and so repaired to a small inn in the neighbourhood, as the only place within their reach, to get it. The place was very clean, and the old woman who kept the inn received their

orders very thankfully and shewed herself very obliging ; but while she was preparing for them on a very clean deal table, without a cloth, in quite a plain and homely manner, supplying the commonest kind of steel forks, &c., they were making fun by ironical jokes about the old woman's grand spread, at the same time remarking that everything was very clean and wholesome, and they shewed their appreciation of it by making a hearty meal.

A fortnight later these two gentlemen were in the same neighbourhood for the same purpose, and went to the same inn for their lunch. This time the old woman made as grand a spread as she could ; she got out her best cloth and her plate, which only saw the light on special occasions. While she was thus preparing the gentlemen were flattering themselves that they had done good by their jokes on the former occasion.

But the spread being completed, and everything set out in as grand a style as all the old woman's best would allow, everything that they could wish for being before them but the food, she left them with the spread and went about her work. After waiting patiently a little while for the food they asked her if she had forgotten them. "No, no," was her prompt reply, "I think I have thought of you pretty much ; what more do you want ?" "You have given us no food." "No," was the answer, "I gave you the food last time and you were not satisfied with that, you wanted the spread. Now I have given you the spread and you are not satisfied with that." Feeling that the joke had been effectively turned upon themselves, they informed the old dame that if they could not have both, they would rather have the food without the spread than the spread without the food.

This is a simple illustration, but it helps to make clear the fact that real spiritual food—the ministry of Christ in all His grace, attractiveness, and beauty such as goes to the inmost springs of the divine life within us, helping on its health, growth, and vigour, establishing in the faith and fortifying against error—is the great thing, as shewn everywhere in the New Testament, and that mere churchism, mere external position, though it may be somewhat in accordance with the letter of Scripture, *without this*, is only dishonouring to the Lord and withering to our own

souls. If Christ is the centre of gathering for His people, let us minister of His grace in all its attractiveness, that souls may be drawn nearer to Him. It is possible for them to take a place in "our fellowship," in "our circle," without this, but it is this—being drawn nearer to our adorable Lord—that will lead them to real exercise of heart and conscience as to all unscriptural practices around them. Food is absolutely necessary to life, we cannot live upon the spread; we will have both if possible, but if only one is attainable, let it be the food. Souls cannot thrive upon churchisms.

#### THE GATHERING TOGETHER OF THE SAINTS.

Very few passages of Holy Scripture have received more attention from the saints of God than Matt. xviii. 20: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." The promised presence is claimed at all kinds of meetings—meetings for prayer, for exhortation, for the remembrance of our Lord's death, and for the ministry of the Word.

It has been very precious, and made a real blessing to many of the saints at different times, and under different circumstances. It has been acted upon and counted upon by large conventions, and the blessed promise of it—the Lord's presence—realized. These different uses of it have been the subject of much criticism. Some have sought by all possible means to make it applicable only on conditions other than those given in the text; for this purpose it has, perhaps more than any other passage, been put on the rack and strained in certain directions, altogether out of its natural proportions, to suit party ecclesiastical ideas.

The ecclesiastical halo that has been cast about this text has greatly mystified it in the eyes of many simple saints. It has been so distorted, misinterpreted, and surrounded by conditions and meanings, obviously foreign to itself, that its native simplicity is well nigh lost to hundreds of dear saints. As is usual in straining or perverting the meaning of a passage to make it support an unscriptural theory, the Greek plays a great part. The support of all unscriptural theories requires Greek scholars. The translated text as it stands gives no support to the theory that seeks it; hence the original must do service. The great

advantage of this to the expositor is obvious; the great majority of his readers are not able to investigate for themselves. They are told, in this instance, that it is difficult to translate the idea into English, and they must therefore set at nought all translations of the passage—which give a different idea altogether—and take the word of the expositor that his idea is there, wrapped up in the obscurity of the Greek until he brings it to light for us.

Now, that it will help in the study of the New Testament greatly to be able to read the Greek of it, and that some translations are capable of revision, is not denied, but whenever you find an expositor going to the Greek to build up his peculiar theory, you may safely distrust it.

It is a mistake to take a passage out of its setting for interpretation; it must be looked at in the light of its surroundings, its context. This is as important in Greek as in English; if we go to Greek, we must still consider the whole passage. In Matt. xviii. we have a number of most precious truths, all of which go together—or are intimately connected with each other. One must not be wrenched from its relative connection with the others.

The whole tenor of the chapter, and the lesson of every paragraph, is dead set against the extreme ecclesiastical meaning that is often put upon ver. 2c.

The subject of the chapter, generally speaking, is the individual responsibilities of the Lord's people in their relations and dealings with each other, the wonderful grace of our blessed Lord being given as our example. We learn from it that while the most severe judgment should be exercised upon ourselves, the most tender consideration to, and greatest concern for, others should be shewn. The grace that has been shewn to us, when we were involved in sin and guilt, is the grace that should characterise us in our dealings with each other, with our fellow servants.

The chapter begins by shewing the absolute necessity for conversion—the humble and dependent place that conversion puts one in—in order to enter the kingdom of heaven; we must be converted and become as little children. Then the Lord shews how precious such a little one is to Him; if received in His name he takes it as receiving Himself, at the same time shews what a

terrible thing it is to offend one such little one, *i. e.*, a truly converted soul.

Now, here we find what every—and therefore any—converted soul is to the Lord, and how such should be treated by us, or should treat each other. To receive such an one is to receive Christ Himself; to stumble is an awfully solemn thing. The next paragraph, after shewing the unsparing way in which we should judge ourselves, warns us against despising “one of these little ones,” whom the Son of Man came to save. Our blessed Lord then goes on to emphasize His gracious solicitude for even one soul.

How blessed and yet how solemn is all this! Blessed, for each one of us, to know how dear we are to Him; solemn that we should think so little of despising, wounding, and even stumbling each other, or one who believes in Him. Yea, even to find ourselves using the very context of these passages in a way that militates against the conduct so forcibly enjoined by them. For if these passages teach one thing more clearly than another, it is that our solemn and relative responsibilities extend to every converted soul; that each one should be the object of our solicitude and of our shepherd care, not because he is in “our fellowship,” in “our circle,” or “gathered out,” but because he is one of Christ’s little ones.

And so the next paragraph continues the same subject in its application to our dealings with each other. If our blessed Lord would leave the ninety and nine and go out after the wandering one, we should follow His example. “Moreover, if thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Note, the point is, not the satisfaction of the brother trespassed against, but the *gaining the trespasser*. If not successful, one or two more are to be taken; if this fails, then come the words, “tell it to the Church.” Now, evidently the Church is brought in here as the source of appeal after all individual efforts have failed; after which the Lord goes on with the subject, shewing the importance of prayer, surely, in connection with the subject under consideration. “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for

them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Now, is it not clear that the "one or two more" of ver. 16, the two of ver. 19, and the "two or three" of ver. 20 all have to do with the same subject? Would not the one or two more going to see the offending brother pray about such a matter? Would not the Lord's words, "Again I say unto you, that if two of you," &c., encourage them so to do? And do not Peter's words, immediately following upon ver. 20, shew that he understood the gaining of the offending brother was still the subject? "Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin [same word as is rendered 'trespass' in ver. 15] against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." The same subject is continued to the end of the chapter.

Now, the fact that ver. 19 should have been wrenched from its context and entirely severed from the subject of our Lord's discourse, and made to mean something that has no bearing upon it, shews the exigency of the theory that requires such an exegesis.

It is said that the verse is a parenthesis, and may mean two brothers agreeing to pray about something, though they themselves may be one on one side and the other on the opposite side of the earth. Now, that two such brothers might thus agree to pray is blessedly true; that they might get encouragement from, and even lay hold of the promise of this text is also conceivable. But to take the text right out of its setting and make it of no bearing upon the subject of the discourse of which it forms a part, seems to us a most unaccountable proceeding.

No doubt the Lord here states a blessed truth that is of very general application, and may be laid hold of by faith in other circumstances, but its application here is evidently to the circumstances of the case in hand, and cannot, without obvious perversion, be disconnected from the twentieth verse.

Why should it be thought that the Lord will not be in the midst of two or three of His people gathered for prayer concerning His interests on the earth? We think it a



great pity that the native simplicity of this blessed passage should have been so greatly destroyed, and its manifest meaning so obscured by the ecclesiastical interpretation in which it has been wrapped up.

No doubt the Lord is the rallying centre for His gathered saints ; and His presence is the one great thing for them. But this is not peculiar to any particular party or sect in the Church of God ; it is the one common centre for all who will avail themselves of it. And while He is the gathering centre for the Church in any place, He is also the centre for any two or three of His saints who gather to His name *anywhere* for *any godly purpose*, and delights to manifest Himself as in the midst, wherever saints are thus gathered looking to Him in simplicity, sincerity, and truth.

This is a wonderful provision for the saints of God in days of ruin, when the Church, which should have no other centre, has many rallying names and centres of its own choosing ; thus forming sects and systems with principles of government and control other than those of the Church of God, as set forth in the Scripture. Our blessed Lord fore-saw that the Church would be thus divided, and so in His rich grace He says, "For where two or three are gathered to My name, there am I in the midst of them." He does not say "where the *Church* is gathered."

The Church has grievously failed in her corporate testimony ; indeed, in this aspect she is an utter ruin. But still, in the midst of the ruin and confusion (and blessed is the contrite acknowledgment of this state), the way of obedience is open for those who desire to follow in that way ; the name of the Lord is a strong tower, a sanctuary for the two or three or any number who wish to turn to Him. He is the one great High Priest of His people generally ; He bears all upon His heart ; He is the Urim and Thummim for the Church, for two or three, or for an individual ; no party can monopolise our blessed Lord in any of these offices. Blessed, indeed, it is to find here and there a few who are seeking to bear some feeble collective testimony to this.

But let them not think that they occupy that place to the same effect, and with the same power as the Church would do if the failure had not come in. True, they act upon the same principles, and should be guided by the same directions ; but they do this, acknowledging that general

failure has come in, and that the Church of God is scattered and divided, and hence they occupy the place only as a remnant. The "outside" or the "without" is not for them, practically, exactly what it was in the early days of the Church, *i. e.*, outside their own little company is not the same as was the outside of the Church when all were together, in principle, forming but one company. Then there were none but unbelievers outside; now there are many dear saints of God and servants of Christ outside their little gathering. The truth objectively remains the same, but the condition of the Church is very different. The unalterable truth should guide us, but this links us in the most intimate relationship with all believers, and so involves us in the general ruin; but also shews the way of God through it.

Let, therefore, none think that they can claim the monopoly of the name of our Lord as a gathering centre; they act upon it, as the one gathering centre for the Church, but this is a general rallying point for the Lord's people, for whatever godly purpose, and is therefore open to all who have faith to lay hold of it in whatever measure.

It is therefore to be much regretted that this Scripture should be used as a party badge, and that, by opposing parties. But, sad to say, such is the case; it is used as a nomination of several different parties, who are distinguished as "those gathered to the name of the Lord." Now, Scripture *never* speaks of the Church in this way. The term is *never* used in the Word of God except as conveying the idea that the saints were *actually* gathered together.

We would gladly avoid all reference to the original, believing that our splendid translations will not lead us astray in such a case as this, nor, indeed, as to any other doctrine of Scripture. There may be details and minor points on which reference to the original is helpful. But the English reader may rest assured that he has, on the whole, in our versions, some very correct translations of the Word of God, and is, hence, able to follow the example of the early Christians, who "searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

This is easily done in the case before us, for the meaning is as clear as possible on the very surface. Yet we are

compelled to refer to the original by those who have taken us there to establish an idea which we believe to be entirely foreign to the plain teaching of this Scripture. In the first place we would remark that wherever the word used here for "gathered together" (*sunago*) is found in connection with the Lord's people, it is used to describe them as actually gathered together (just what this implies to us), and never as a nomination of their ecclesiastical position. But if the theory that claims this text as a nomination of its Church position can find no support in the particular word itself, it will have recourse to the case in which it appears, without due regard to the context, and on this flimsy foundation it reposes itself. Nay, more, the theory is reduced to even greater straits than this; the true grammatical construction of the text gives no support whatever to it, but, determined to get a footing somewhere, it bases itself on the most strained interpretation or explanation of the case.

Its argument is that the Greek perfect passive is used, "not merely to express that the persons referred to were assembled together, but that they were present together, as having been, and continuing to be, gathered by divine power." We do not attempt to analyze this remarkable and somewhat obscure statement; enough to know that what the writer means is that the perfect passive is used, not only to express the idea of the saints being actually gathered together, but as implying an ecclesiastical denomination. Great stress is laid upon the explanation of the case as given in the "Englishman's Bible," they "having been and being gathered together." Now, if the compiler of that useful Bible meant anything particularly by the above rather out-of-the-way translation, he must have meant to make clear that those who had been gathered together were still together when what is predicated of them, as thus gathered, took place; but this is sufficiently clear in the text itself, at least in this one, by the present verb "to be" — "*are* gathered . . . there *am* I."

It is not on his own authority that the present writer calls the above a "rather out-of-the-way translation." It is some time now since he began an inquiry on this matter, which has resulted in the conviction that most authorities would repudiate it, and that the words "Where two or three are,"

or "Where are two or three gathered together to My name," correctly convey the sense. It is just what we understand by the perfect passive, and nothing less or more. Most that is said about the difficulty of translating the true sense of the passage only appears when the above idea is imported into it, which is indeed difficult to translate, because it is not there.

As to the other three passages in which the same case occurs, and which therefore have been called to the support of the same theory, we are sincerely at a loss to imagine how any intelligent reader of Scripture could attribute such a meaning to the word as used in them.

In the first of these (John xx. 19) "the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews." Here we find that the word is used to express the fact that they were actually gathered together, and it was more especially the eleven—not exclusively, for Luke adds "and them that were with them." But still, both in Mark, Luke, and John, it is the eleven that are especially brought before us, and it was the "fear of the Jews" that brought them together. Indeed, is there anything ecclesiastical about the passage? Much blessed spiritual teaching there is.

Likewise, in the two remaining passages, the word is employed to convey the idea of believers being actually gathered together (Acts iv. 31, and xx. 8). In the former we have, indeed, a prayer-meeting, and the very *place* where they were thus gathered was shaken. The last passage is more ecclesiastical, and, for this very reason, more fatal to the idea we are examining. Here was the Church of God at Troas, yet the term is not used as a designation of their ecclesiastical position as a local assembly, but to describe them as actually gathered together for a certain purpose. And thus this verb is always used; it can as a verb mean nothing else. At least it could not, without confusion, be used to nominate their ecclesiastical position, and at the same time to describe their being actually assembled together. Its noun form is never applied to the saints of the present dispensation (It occurs in James ii. 2; that Epistle is addressed to the twelve tribes); the words translated "Church," "Body," "Temple," "House," and "Habitation," are the nouns applied to the saints of this dispensation.

It may be said that the formula: "To those gathered to the name of the Lord," may simply mean those in the habit of gathering to that name, as distinguished from other names and systems. Such a use may be admissible were it not that it reduces the text to a party badge. It is said of Paul and Barnabas that they assembled themselves with the Church at Antioch a whole year, and taught much people, which obviously does not mean that they were actually gathered together for that time, any more than that they were incessantly teaching the whole of the time. Nor does it mean that they were assembled when they were not assembled. It means that they were in the habit of assembling with them. This form of expression is so common in human language that were it not that the theory under review had made use of this very text in support of itself, it would be superfluous to refer to it for such a purpose.

#### RECEIVE YE ONE ANOTHER.

A great deal of ecclesiasticism has also been cast about the word "receive" that finds no support whatever in Scripture. It is never said that the saints receive *into* the Church. There is one passage which says of Paul and Barnabas "They were received of the Church," which is clearly not exactly the same as being received into it. It is simply welcomed by the Church; indeed, "welcomed" is the word given by some translations.

We would emphasize the fact that there is no such thing as receiving into the Church in its absolute, nor, indeed, in any aspect, in the sense of *becoming members* by the act of reception, as would be the case in a club, or any particular human society. The only way in which the Church can be spoken of as receiving at all is in a subjective sense, *i. e.*, the owning subjectively what is already true objectively; in other words, giving practical effect to what is already absolutely true. The reception, by the Church, of any believer does not make him a member; it is the acknowledgment of membership already in existence. Hence the only Scriptural condition upon which such reception is based is the proof of such relationship, *i. e.*, practical proof that the person received is truly saved, and hence, *is* a member of the Church of God—of the

Body of Christ. Sound doctrine, as well as a godly life, is requisite to such proof.

When Paul and Barnabas were received of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 4), such reception did not make them members of that Church, any more than the reception by the Apostles—which was distinct from that of the Church—made them members of the apostolic company; it simply meant that they were acknowledged as members of the Church of God. Of course they were, for the time being, members of that Church as seen *at Jerusalem*; they became this by their entrance into that city; their welcome by the Church was, we repeat, the acknowledgment of it.

Evidently the word “receive” (not always the same in the original) as used in Scripture, in the exhortations to the saints in connection with interchange of fellowship, is used in the sense of welcoming to our practical fellowship and sympathy, and for mutual help, and enjoyment of Christian privileges. Individuals are exhorted to receive—“And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me;” “Receive ye one another;” &c.

Saints may receive those who are really and locally in the same assembly. The last text quoted evidently gives such an idea as mutual reception for Christian intercourse, hospitality, &c. Epaphroditus was locally in the Church at Philippi; yet the Apostle exhorts the saints there to “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation.” It could not mean receive him into their assembly, for he was already a member of that local church, and on their service; but they were to receive him back into their midst with gladness.

Paul was received by the brethren gladly on his third visit to Jerusalem. He was received by the Galatian saints as an angel of God; moreover, this could not be into the fellowship of any particular local church, for he is addressing several churches in this Epistle. The Apostle John, speaking of those who went forth for “His name’s sake . . . taking nothing of the Gentiles,” says, “We, therefore, ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers of the truth.” Here the reception is an expression of fellowship with desire to help the servant of Christ on in his work.

Is it not evident from all these passages that reception of a brother, or a servant of Christ, does not mean his reception into a church, or a relationship in which he had no part or lot before, but rather the practical expression of relationship that already existed, and the acknowledgment of the fact that he was already a member of God's Assembly? The reception was the acknowledgment of relationships, not the introduction to them. In the fullest harmony with this, assemblies were to take care that those received were already in such relationships; hence, the need of letters of commendation. Therefore, the only thing that made the disciples of Jerusalem hesitate when Paul essayed to join himself to them, was their doubt that he was a disciple; this point being settled, "He was with them coming and going." And evidently the term disciple (here, at least) is used as a synonym for believer, as is shewn by the proofs brought forth by Barnabas to shew that he had been really converted to God.

If such means of establishing the reality of professed faith in Christ was necessary in those days, how much more so in these days of doctrinal error and religious corruption? When we receive a newly converted soul, our reception of him implies that we believe him to be truly converted, and therefore one with us in Christ Jesus.

#### A DEFINITE POSITION.

It may be objected that all this is too indefinite. "If we followed the principles propagated in the preceding pages, what would our position be? We should neither know where we were, nor what to do; there seems to be nothing definite about it." "We must draw the line somewhere," as a servant of Christ said to the writer the other day.

Now, this is just what we should not do. If we attempt to draw an ecclesiastical line, depend upon it that we shall draw it in the wrong place. We shall shut in much that is evil, and shut out much that is good; some will desire the line drawn in a little, and others will want the circumference extended. It is a question of moral and divine principles, and of spiritual exercises, not of rigid rules and regulations.

Definitely enough indeed are these principles set forth in the Scriptures, as we have seen; and definite enough will our position become if we are guided by these. But if we

attempt to define our position by any other means, so that it may be maintained by following some rules and regulations, without spiritual exercise and real waiting upon God, we shall certainly become sectarian.

True, indeed, it is that the present divided state of the Church and the increasing doctrinal errors greatly augment difficulties, but still God and the Word of His grace is sufficient. The moral condition of the saints is the great thing; no position can be really and acceptably occupied for God if this is wrong.

The position of the Lord's people who wish to act upon divine principles, as set forth in the Word of God, will be that of a redeemed company rallying around the Lord Himself for the mutual enjoyment of Christian privileges, controlled and governed by the principles of relationship, of unity, of edification, of truth and holiness, and welcoming all who love the Lord and His truth as being members of the same Body, and brought into the same divine relationship, with desire to help forward the Gospel testimony in every godly way; having fellowship with, and seeking the edification of, all the Lord's people in every right way that is open to us. In whatever there is about the Lord's people (up and down among the scattered churches), in their character, conduct, or service, that is according to the truth, we should shew fellowship with them. In thus far the relationship is owned, the unity is expressed, the testimony is furthered; and is not the Lord glorified?

One's individual responsibilities towards all the Lord's people, his brethren, are not curtailed, or impaired, in the slightest degree by his Church position. But if he goes doctrinally or morally wrong, he is amenable to the discipline of the Church, though it be only at the hands of a remnant. Everything should be done in an orderly manner, but the order followed should be controlled by, and in view of carrying out, divine principles. As we have previously intimated, arrangements to *this* end cannot justly be called *merely* human. Of course, everything we do is human in a certain sense, for God is working through man. But what we do may be *merely* of man, or it may be of God through man—redeemed man, of course.

It should never be forgotten that such a company, seeking to follow Scriptural order in days of general failure (and



who will say that there is not general failure? Certainly Scriptural order is not general in the Church of God at large) are but a remnant, for many of their brethren, fellow-members of the Body of Christ, are scattered around them; and their position does not affect their responsibility to these, save, indeed, to give them a keener sense of it.

As to appellations, it is as well to be as correct as possible; but the great thing to be clear on is principle. It is principles that guide and control our actions more than names. Such a company of the Lord's people as we are supposing may correctly be called a gathering, a meeting or even perhaps a church, so long as the idea of their being the Church of God in the place is not attached to it; but for this reason, it may be better to avoid it, unless used in the most limited sense, as qualified not by the town, but by the street in which they meet. We see nothing inconsistent with the great Scriptural idea of the Church in speaking of a meeting as the Church of God in H—— Street or in the G—— Hall, as this simply means the Church of God as seen meeting in that street or that hall. But as we have said, the maintenance of the principle is the great thing. Anything that militates against the true idea of what the Church of God really is should be discarded even in name.

But we think that "Those gathered to the name of the Lord" is a term that should be avoided, for reasons given on previous pages.

#### OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

The real, vital, and absolute relationships into which we are brought with the Lord and with each other should be evidenced in our practical lives and conduct toward the Lord and toward each other. Our obligations and responsibilities arise out of these relationships. We think that no intelligent Bible student will deny this. But does not this settle the whole question?

Here we find relationships that embrace all saints, hence the mutual and collective obligations and responsibilities extend to all saints. Now, can it be that the formation of a more limited church, in any place, than the Church of God, which is the Body of Christ in that place, limits also the obligations and responsibilities of those who form that

church to themselves? Does such a position exonerate those who take it from their responsibilities toward those of their brethren around them who are in the same absolute relationship both to Christ the Head, and themselves the members of the Body?

Again, we think no intelligent Bible student would say "yes." While the relationship remains intact, so does its obligations and responsibilities. Thus, then, we see that even though a local church be formed on narrower lines than the Church of God in the place (that is, in principle), their responsibility toward those who are not with them is just as great as toward those who are; in real relationship there is no difference, nor is there in the obligations thereof. There may be more practical fellowship with the one than with the other; hearts may be drawn closer together in some cases than in others, on account of circumstances, intelligence, &c.; but this is the case even with some of those who are in the same outward position; what is maintained is that the obligations and responsibilities remain.

Thus, then, we see that we are all brought into one unity, one Church, which is the Body of Christ, and which has one Head; one family, one flock, with one Shepherd; and these absolute relationships carry with them their obligations and responsibilities, and that our conduct, individually or collectively, is indicated, governed, and controlled by these. What, then, becomes of the merely ecclesiastical walls and sectarian barriers which sects and parties describe around themselves?

This great principle of absolute relationship cuts at the root alike of sectarian and unorthodox churches, for false doctrine is as foreign to the Church of God as are unbelievers; in the nature of things, neither has any place there. Nothing is more essential to the manifestation of the wonderful unity into which we are brought than the maintaining of sound doctrine.

## PART II.

## "THE CHURCHES OF THE SAINTS."

After what has been before us, and our references to a theory which applies the term "Church of God" exclusively to a few out of the many saints in any given place, it may be helpful to briefly review a pamphlet (bearing the title given at the head of this page), which sets forth the arguments by which such theory is supported. This, we think, will be both honest to the author of the pamphlet and fair to our readers.

But, before doing so, we would express our sincere hope that the author of the arguments will not impute to us the slightest ill-feeling or ill-disposition, or want of Christian love and esteem towards himself. Esteem for the author had kept us from taking up his arguments a year ago, to submit them to the test of Scripture; but, after much consideration of, and prayer over, the subject, we think it helpful to the saints of God to do so.

Our impression is that he will not blame us for searching the Scriptures concerning his views, "to see if these things are so." We need not fear that we or the truth will suffer from friendly and reverent criticism, where there is the mutual desire to understand the truth of God, and the mutual recognition that to hold anything else is to our loss, and, we may add, the mutual recognition that either the one or the other, or both, may be wrong. The great thing is to patiently and carefully investigate in a right spirit and lowly mind. Plainness of speech, vigour, and force of expression, are quite compatible with such a spirit.

Such criticism of the paper we are now preparing will be welcomed. For we desire to benefit by the study of others.

The writer of the pamphlet, we doubt not, is sincere enough, and desirous of carrying out the truth of God concerning the collective responsibilities of His people, and sees that this is not done by the human systems among which the saints are dispersed, but, as we think, misguided in his views as to such collective responsibility.

While we desire to extend the greatest consideration to himself personally as a devoted servant of Christ, knowing that the Lord will not forget his labour of love, at the same time we do not intend to spare the Church theory which he propounds, as we believe it is not only wrong, but would be positively mischievous if allowed to develop.

He labours in vain, as it appears to us, to prove from the Scripture that God's Church locally only includes, or may only include, part of the saints of God in any given place; that the Body of Christ locally may not include some, indeed the majority, of those whom "God has set in the Body, Christ has built into the Church," in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, who are in "a unity that none can break."

God's saints, members of the Church of God which is Christ's Body, in God's unity, and yet not in God's Church as represented in the town in which they live! Strange reasoning! Evidently the writer has before him a Church which is not God's Church, a unity that is not God's unity; for most who are in God's Church—God's unity—are outside his. Believers are in the Church generally or absolutely—which the writer calls "the whole Church"—yet all believers in any place are not in God's Church locally! Yet he states a truth which is fatal to the whole theory—"As we search the Scriptures, we find that all the figures which the Holy Spirit uses to illustrate the character and functions of the whole are used also in reference to the local assembly." Exactly so, because it is another, though a more limited, view of the same thing. The figure of a Body is used of the whole Church because all the saints are living members of Christ, the Head in Heaven. The same figure is used of the local assembly because all the saints in such locality are members of the same Body; hence Christ's Body as seen there, and hence also including all those in the place who are associated with Christ the Head, by the Holy Ghost. And when we come to the functions, this becomes more evident, for these flow from the vital relationships in which all believers alike are.

#### THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST.

What, then, may we ask, is this local Church? What, or whom, is it composed of? "Those whom God has set

in the Body, whom Christ has built into the Church"? No; we are informed it is composed of those who have owned the Lordship of Christ, which they are supposed to do by joining the said local Church! May we ask the writer if he is prepared to say that all who are not in "Church of God," as he has it before him, *i. e.*, according to his theory of it, do not own Jesus as Lord?

Even with his limited knowledge (on account of his cramped position and confined sympathies), of the love, intelligence, and devotedness of believers outside such narrow confines as enclose his Church, we think he would hesitate to answer this question in the affirmative.

But let us put another question, which comes more within the range of his knowledge. Will he say that all who *are* in "Church of God," according to his theory, *do* own Jesus as Lord, even to any greater extent than many do who are not in such position? Our good opinion of his high estimate of practical Christian life and walk forbids our thinking that he would answer this in the affirmative either.

It is certainly a thing to be greatly deplored that the owning of the Lordship of Christ should be reduced to a mere ecclesiastical test. Let the reader take his Bible and search through the New Testament on this point, and he will find that the owning Jesus as Lord is brought to bear more on the individual life, obedience, and service, than with our Church position, as such, treating of our direct responsibility to Him. The Scripture always looks at the Christian as under collective obligations and responsibilities, as he is in absolute relationship with all saints, but never in a party or sectarian way. Would anyone say that the words of our blessed Lord—"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet"—apply to the saints only as in a certain Church position? The passage teaches the individual interest that anyone of the Lord's people should have in the spiritual wellbeing of another or others.

It is a most serious thing to make the owning of the Lordship of Christ consist in merely the taking of a certain ecclesiastical position under any circumstances, but more especially in the present state of things.

Now, the local Church is either part of the whole, and

hence the same figures, as the pamphlet says, used to illustrate the *character* of both; or it is something different in principle altogether, to which the same figures and principles can hardly apply. Thus it is with the local Church of the theory in question. It is different in character from the whole Church, for, while the whole Church (*i. e.*, the Church in its absolute aspect), takes in all believers (as admitted by the theory), generally, and hence all in any locality, this local Church may only take in a very few of them in its locality. The membership of the Church absolutely is real and vital; the membership of this local Church is based upon mutual agreement in action (as we shall see presently); hence the Church of the theory is very different in character and constitution to the Church of God.

It cannot be that a few believers out of many in any given place are—though they may have turned to Scriptural order—exclusively God's Church in the place. What constitutes a man a member of the Church of God, which is the Body of Christ, is the new birth—or, more strictly, the possession of the Spirit of God, which all who believe the Gospel have—therefore all who are born again in the New Testament sense of the word are in the Church of God as a whole, and all who are born again in any given locality are in the Church of God in that place; for the same principles apply to the one and to the other; the same figures are used to illustrate the character of both.

It, therefore, becomes evident that the refusal to receive a child of God at the *Lord's Table*—or for the enjoyment of any other Christian privileges with us—except on conditions of our own making, such as the promise to leave entirely, and at once, the Christian denomination in which he has been converted, and learnt all that he knows of Christianity, and “join us,” or come into “our fellowship”—into “our circle” or into “our cause”—it is evident, we say, that this is to deny the Lordship of Christ, and to establish our own rule. This is done also in dictating to the Lord's servants as to where they shall, and where they shall not minister the truth.

#### THE HABITATION OF GOD.

The pamphlet proceeds to quote from the Epistles to Ephesians and 1 Corinthians in support of the theory:—

“In Ephesians ii. 21 we read, ‘in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord’; but the next verse adds, ‘in whom ye also (the assembly at Ephesus) are builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit.’”

We would first ask here if the words “ye also” do really refer exclusively to “the assembly at Ephesus” as such? The answer to the question, whatever it may be, is not required, from our point of view, to refute the theory deducted from it, and yet a negative would be fatal to the theory. We think the wrong of the idea that every local assembly is a separate and distinct habitation may be shewn without going into the above question. But it is well to be clear on the teaching of this wonderful Epistle; and to understand the true force of these pronouns “we” and “ye” will greatly aid in this. They are mostly used in this Epistle, and in chapter ii. especially, as referring “we” to Jews, and “ye” to Gentiles, and the word “together” as shewing that all distinctions between them have been abolished. See chap. i. 9-14, and the whole of chap. ii., particularly verses 11-15.

Some say that it was a circular letter for the Churches in Asia, though delivered first at Ephesus; and it will be observed that the words “in Ephesus,” in verse 1, are marked as doubtful by nearly all Greek authorities. Some omit; others call it “The Epistle to the Laodiceans,” another Church in Asia. See Col. iv. 16. However this may be, the most cursory reader will observe the general character of the Epistle.

The Church is always viewed by the Epistle in its absolute character, in accordance with the purpose of God, which the pamphlet distinguishes as “the whole Church.” Whether we look, at the first, second, third, or fifth chapter, this is so; and the fourth gives us its wonderful unity, and gives us the object of all Christian ministry, the edification of the Body—evidently the whole Body—though the process must go on locally. The word “all” is also a characteristic word in this Epistle, and three or four times we have “*all* saints.”

We would commend the careful study of this whole Epistle to our readers in connection with our subject.

How anyone could introduce such a contracted Church

theory as that of the pamphlet—independent as it is of so many saints at its very door—into this Epistle is inexplicable.

Nothing could be more clear than that the subject of chap. ii. is not the distinction between the general and local character of the Church, or the building; but the two peoples, the Jew and Gentile, who had been so separated from each other, and even at enmity with each other, are now brought together in one body, one building, into the same relationship with God and with each other. That this is the force also of the pronoun “ye” at the end of the chapter, we think, is most clear, in accordance with the whole chapter.

We will quote from verse 18:—“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, *Jesus Christ* himself being the *chief corner stone*; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Here we are told that “we both” (Jew and Gentile) have access; that “ye” are no longer strangers, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, *Jesus Christ* Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, &c.; and then “in whom ye are builded together.” It does not say “are building” yourselves, but “are builded,” or, more strictly, “being built” (as some translators render it), together, in harmony with the progressive character of the building—“*groweth* unto,” &c. Whichever rendering is taken, God is the builder—*i. e.*, it is absolute.

Is it not obvious that the same building is in question in the whole of the passage, the Apostle reaffirming for the comfort of Gentile believers their place in the building? If further proof of this were needed, it is found in the words “in whom,” *i. e.*, in the Lord. They are built together in Him, which is true of the whole building of this passage. This evidences its absolute character; for is not this true of all believers? Are there any believers who have no place in this building?

The Ephesian saints were the local expression of this wonderful building, the dwelling-place of God.



In those days, when the saints at Ephesus or Corinth were one practically (at least to appearance), as well as absolutely, they might be most correctly addressed as the Church of God, Body of Christ, or God's house or habitation in the place. But now those who are absolutely built into God's habitation are practically divided and scattered, hence the practical is no longer a true representation of the absolute. So that no one could have any idea of what the Church of God is by looking at it only from a subjective point of view; and for any section or few to pretend to be that Church in any place, exclusively of so many saints of God outside the boundary they draw around themselves, only further complicates matters.

Humbling indeed it is to us that, instead of the saints being seen as one company in any given place, they are now divided up into many and opposing companies, and so mixed up with unbelievers and professors that it is difficult to distinguish them. This is a most sad state of things, and we should all feel it.

Thank God, there is a resource for those who are exercised, in the name and Word of our blessed Lord. But if they who profess to turn to Him and His Word set themselves up to be exclusively the Church in any sense whatever, they by such a pretension shew that (1) they have at least a poor idea of the unity of the Body of Christ; (2) that they are humbled but little on account of their part in the general ruin of the Church in testimony. The Church has grievously sinned, hence any little remnant who see this, in real exercise before God, can say "*we* have sinned," for the Church is one; as it was said in Israel (whose bond of unity was not nearly so absolute and intimate as that of the Church), when only one man sinned, "*Israel* has sinned." And (3) they make even the name of Christ a party name, and really say, by the assumed position, that He is divided; for, as the pamphlet admits, all believers are in the Body of Christ, looked at absolutely, yet, at the same time, that in any locality only the few out of the many members of that Body form "Body of Christ" in the place. Thus we have "Body of Christ" composed of some members of the Body of Christ, and many members of the Body of Christ who are not in "Body of Christ"! "Is Christ divided?"

But just another word on Ephesians ii. before leaving

that chapter. Now, even supposing that "Ye also are builded together" did refer to the saints as a local assembly, is it not still absolute? Would it not include all believers? Are not all believers built into this habitation of God through the Spirit? And are they not built there, not by their own act, but by God?

As we have seen in the case of Ephesus, the answer would be simple, for all believers were practically one company; to-day they are not, and the theory under consideration makes a few of them only to be this habitation. Individual believers are spoken of as being temples of the Holy Ghost; everyone who believes the gospel is indwelt by the Spirit of God. Is not this the bond by which the saints are built together for an habitation of God *through the Spirit*? Are not those who are indwelt by the Spirit of God living stones in this building? as we read in 1 Peter ii.: "Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house," &c. The pronoun "ye" in the above passage certainly could not be handled in the same way as the pamphlet handles the same in Ephesians, for it is addressed to the saints in many districts and localities. See chap. i.

We think the answer to the above questions must be obvious to the most cursory reader of the New Testament. These figures, concerning the saints, include them all, though viewed from different standpoints, sometimes general, sometimes local. The local aspect becomes clear simply by the qualification "at Corinth," &c. It is the same Church, but the Church as seen in different places.

There is a form of speech that speaks of part as the whole, because it is the only part of the whole that is in view. "There is England," say travellers, as they near the coast, though only a very small portion of it is in view. It is England, as seen, say in Cornwall; but the whole country is in the mind. So the Church of God at Corinth is the Church as seen in that place.

The more clearly this grand truth is seen, the more does the sad failure of the Church, as our common sin, become apparent, and the more humbled shall we be. And, if we see it and turn, as a remnant to Christ and His truth, we should of all believers be the most humble, simply because we see it; while many others who, nevertheless, love the Lord and His truth do not see it. Nor shall we help them to

see it, if we ourselves become sectarian in spirit and practice, bolstering ourselves up with our ecclesiastical pretension, and setting others and all that they do at nought, simply because they are not with us. When such is the case with us, the only thing we bear testimony to is our own spiritual pride and pretension. All others see in us is a people who think ourselves more holy than they. And, indeed, there is in us a great lack of that grace, lowliness, and tender consideration for others that are never without effect upon people generally, and always attractive to the Lord's people.

#### THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Following upon what has been before us, the pamphlet on "The Churches of the Saints" adds—"Again, in 1 Cor. xii., the Church is spoken of as a body; and, in verse 12, the Apostle says, 'as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that body being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.' The Lord Jesus being the Head and His people the members, the whole forms the mystical Body. But in verse 27, the Apostle writes, 'Now ye are Body of Christ and members in particular.' He does not put the article 'the' before the word 'body.' He could not say to the Church at Corinth, 'Ye are *the* Body of Christ,' for that could only be said of all the saints from Pentecost onwards."

How, then, could he say *the* Church of God at Corinth when the Church is Christ's Body? The writer in the above passage, too, writes "*the* Church at Corinth;" why, then, could it not be *the* Body at Corinth? They are one and the same thing. It is "the Church which *is* His Body."

As we have dwelt a little upon 1 Cor. xii., as also the use of the article in another part of this paper, there is no need to go so fully into it here. Yet because of its importance we ask the indulgence of our readers while we submit the above statement to the test of this chapter.

We find that the aspect of the theory, as given above, is based entirely upon the absence of the article in one case out of thirteen mentions of the Body, and that one evidently the application of the truth taught in the previous twelve instances (all of which are *the* Body), to the saints at Corinth.

Even if such absence did imply a local sense instead of a general one (which we think it does not, for it is simply Christ's Body), it could not mean that only a few out of the many saints in that, or any other place, composed that Body exclusively of the others. It would still be the same Body viewed in a different aspect. As is clearly seen from the fact that the vital relationship ("the Lord Jesus being the Head and His people the members"), is given as the great principle to govern and regulate their conduct toward each other, and the impossibility of separating verse 27 from this.

Moreover, the address of the Epistle associates them with "all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord."

Every member is of the body. Nor is one independent of the others, or another. "If the foot shall say, 'Because I am not the head, I am not of the body'; is it, therefore, not of the body?" And is there any sense in which it can be said by a few to the majority of members, or any members, "Because you are not with us you are not of the body?" Yet this—if we will only leave out the article—is the teaching of the pamphlet. Evidently a body of which such a thing can be said is not the Body of Christ, for all saints are of that.

We think verse 21 a very blessed and yet a very solemn passage, in its bearing on our subject. There we are told that even "the head cannot say to the feet 'I have no need of thee.'" Wondrous truth! Our blessed Lord the Head will never say to any member of the Body, "I have no need of thee." How sovereign and absolute is this unity! How rich the grace of our God by which it has been brought about! We most sincerely believe that the theory we are reviewing is thoroughly inconsistent with it. But let us proceed.

"The leaving out of the article in such a case simply means that those addressed had the character of a body, though they did not actually form the whole Body of Christ."

We venture to say, in all good feeling, that the above is a most vague and grotesque statement, by which the writer attempts to accommodate Scripture to his theory. What is meant by "the character of a body"? It must, in itself, be

something other than the Body of Christ itself. There are many religious organizations to-day that have "the character of a body."

Again, what is the exact force of the words: "though they did not form the whole body"? This seems to imply that the writer thinks that the local gathering which has "the character of a body" does form *part* of "the whole body." If this is his meaning, that is just what we maintain. Then why say that they only "had the character of a body"? No one supposes that "*the Church of God which is at Corinth*" means the whole Church of God—"all the saints from Pentecost onwards"—and yet it is called "*the Church of God.*" But it is "*the Church of God which is at Corinth.*"

So also the body. If the Corinthian saints were part of "the whole Body of Christ," they formed the Body of Christ as seen at Corinth. And if the Body of Christ at Corinth, it included every member of that Body, for He has not two Bodies. We shut up to this, or else to form a different thing outside it—in practice, that is.

But we do not think that the above is the writer's meaning, viz., that that which "had the character of a body" was part of the whole body (we wish it was, and we would not quibble about words), for he makes out that there are many in the Body of Christ, in its absolute sense, that are not in that which has the "character of a body." So that the latter must be something else. Now, the important question for us is—Can that something else be found in Scripture? We believe not.

Who can read this chapter (1 Cor. xii.), without seeing that, while it speaks of the Body of Christ as a whole, the principles of that one Body and the vital relationship of the members are brought to bear upon the conduct of the local assembly, yea even upon the conduct of two individual members of that one Body? "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of thee.'" The whole passage speaks of the members of, not that which "has the character of a body," but "*the Body,*" in their relations to each other in consequence of being members of that Body. It—the whole—must therefore apply to the different localities in which the individual members are placed, hence to the

local aspect of the body ; and not one member is left out. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."

And note, although the injunctions given can only be carried out in local responsibility—that is, in the different places where the saints were to carry them out—yet it is the absolute principle of relationship, as concerning the whole Church, which is brought to bear. We might observe that the article occurs in Greek, as well as in English, all down the chapter. Twelve times it is "*the* Body," and three times "one Body," until we come to verse 27, where the article is left out, and we read "Body of Christ"—literally "Christ's Body." Is not the Church "Christ's Body" as a whole as well as locally? Would the writer say that "*the* Body" mentioned twelve times before in the chapter, with all that is said about it, does not apply locally? This is what the theory requires ; but, as we have seen, it cannot be conceded, for the truth of *the Body* is brought to bear on the conduct of the local Church. And if with the article the term "body" applies either locally or generally—*i. e.*, to the Church locally or at large—then its absence is not necessary to describe the local Church. "Ye are Christ's Body" is simply the application to them of all that is enjoined by means of the figure in the previous verses, but it is also true of the Church as a whole.

The fact that the absence of the article has not the significance given to it by the pamphlet is again shewn by its use in connection with the word "Temple" in 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. We read there, "Ye are the Temple of God." Here there is no article. It is a similar statement exactly in regard to the Temple of God as we have in chap. xii. 27 in regard to the Body of Christ. The theory in question renders it, "Ye are Temple of God," because it applies to the local Church ; but such an idea is refuted by the very next statement. Continuing the subject, the Apostle says "*The* Temple of God is holy [the article being present in Greek], *which Temple* ye are." Here we have the word "Temple," which is applied to the Church as a whole (Eph. ii. 21) both with and without the article, applied to the local Church at Corinth. Might they not in the same way apply in both cases to the Church generally? That is, the whole Church is "Christ's Body" and "God's Temple."

But let us hear what the writer of the pamphlet says about

this passage: "Know ye not that ye are Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" His remarks are, "Here, again, the article 'the' is left out, shewing that the Apostle is not saying that the Corinthian Assembly was the whole Temple of God, but that it bore a similar character. It was builded together for a habitation of God, through the Spirit, as in Eph. ii. 22."

Now just what the writer of the above says the Apostle is not saying; he positively does affirm in the very next verse, "*The Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are,*" or "which ye are." The Greek article *is* present here. What becomes of all that is built upon the absence of the article after this?

The words "whole Temple" are used ambiguously; we do not suppose that the Corinthian saints were that, but the article is there nevertheless. They were the Temple of God at Corinth.

As to the significance of the Greek article, it is not our object to go into that here; enough for our present purpose to shew that the use made of it, or its absence, in the pamphlet before us will not bear investigation.

Thus we have seen that the terms "*The Church of God*" and "*The Temple of God*" are applied both generally and locally; and that ye are Christ's Body is also true of the whole. It is quite true that the words "ye are" localizes the application, or at least gives it a direct bearing upon those addressed in either case. But then the term thus localized with the relationship it implies is true of the whole—indeed, it is because it is true of the whole that it is true of any local part. It is, we repeat, the same thing from different points of view.

But the pamphlet makes the local church another thing altogether, additional to the Church which is the Body of Christ, which real members of this latter must join themselves to, otherwise they are completely outside of it in every sense. A child of God—member of the Body of Christ, however godly and devoted, is not in it. If he wishes to be, he must be brought into it "by his own act and the act of the Assembly also." The church of this theory, in itself, has no vital relationship, no unity of the Spirit, no living bond to bind its members to each other, no vital link between itself and the living Head in heaven.

Perhaps some advocates of the theory begin to be somewhat impatient, replying most emphatically, "Why, all these things we hold to be *essential* to Church of God." Yes, but they do not belong to it, for they are all true apart from it; therefore, we say, as far as the theory goes *in itself*, it has none of these great fundamental relationships. If it were formed on the ground of, and regulated by, these, everyone demonstratively in such relationships would be looked upon as a member of it, though he might not avail himself of its privileges as he should do. But the writer protests that neither the new birth nor the being a member of the "whole Church," or the being in God's "unity that none can break," brings a soul into "Church of God," but mutual agreement—or at least mutual action—between him and it.

What we here desire to shew is that, while those who compose this local Church may be in these vital relationships, yet their Church theory is not founded on them, else all others in the relationship would be taken into account, and could not be considered outside such Church.

A man is born again into the family of God; he is a member of the Body of Christ; he is indwelt by the Holy Ghost; he is associated to the living Head in heaven; and yet he is not, by virtue of these, in "Church of God" in the locality in which he lives; and this is so obvious that the writer of the pamphlet feels "almost ashamed to lay so much stress upon it!"

No doubt the reason for which he finds it necessary to lay such stress on that which is "so obvious," viz., "because of the utter confusion that commonly prevails in regard to the whole subject," is too true. Confusion does indeed prevail, alas! among God's dear people. We have sadly failed.

But we do not believe that the making a little Church of our own alleviates in the slightest degree that confusion. The writer seeks here to make use of it in favour of his Church theory. He does not appear to see the difference between the objective and subjective state of the Church of God; at least he ignores it in his reasoning here. The subjective for him is not a different aspect of the same, but another thing.

Souls are born again into the Church of God which is the Body of Christ; saved into it; members of it by the



indwelling of the Spirit of God. It is this relationship, this unity, that is set forth as the ground-work of the Church practically—that should be expressed—evidenced in its practical aspect. Our guiding principles are found in it; our relative conduct is based upon the blessed truth.

The difficulties in the way of such a practical expression of the truth of God concerning His Church in these days of confusion are great. For while the Church is one absolutely, and should be practically, it is also *holy* absolutely, and should be practically. Holiness becometh the Assembly of God, and must be maintained.

Exercise of Godly care (in view of seeing to it that all in the Assembly practically are demonstratively so absolutely), is quite compatible with the fact that members of the Church of God, the Body of Christ, are made such by birth, by salvation.

True it is, indeed, that much that teachers may say and do may be inconsistent with the truth, even with the truth as held by themselves, but that does not alter it.

When it becomes clear that a man is a true believer, and therefore a member of the Church of God absolutely, he should be allowed to take his place subjectively, or practically, even with the feeblest remnant who own no other Church; he is a member of the Body, and our obligations and responsibilities extend to him in all Christian privileges and shepherd care. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

We may fail in our practical expression of the absolute relationships which we are brought into in common with all believers, but we are to aim at nothing less; we may very inadequately keep the unity of the Spirit, but it is that unity that we are called upon to keep nevertheless. The Church theory in question, as we have seen, has not the unity of the Spirit as its peculiar unity, for the unity of the Spirit exists independently of it, and most of those in the unity of the Spirit are outside the Church of the theory; its peculiar unity is nothing more or less than mutual agreement, brought into it "by his own act and the act of the Assembly also." Though there may be a good deal that is commendable in those who compose it.

The difference, as we believe, between the theory and the truth of Scripture is that the former makes something

peculiarly its own by its own acts, while the Scripture is continually inculcating upon us to own—to bear testimony to—what God has done, to keep what God has made.

A man may be a member of the Body of Christ, and fail to own it in a practical way; he may be called to the fellowship of God's Son, and yet fail to enjoy it; he may be in Christ, and yet not abide in Him practically; he may be a child of God, and yet give but little practical expression to the relationship. Here we have the difference between the absolute and the practical sides of the truth; though the absolute does not depend upon the practical, the practical is always based upon, and regulated by, the absolute. And our shortcomings are measured by the positive relationships into which we are brought. Many passages might be quoted shewing that our conduct is looked at in the light of such relationships.

But the theory of the pamphlet makes an entirely different thing of the practical, and uses this Scriptural distinction to support such an unscriptural idea.

The reader only need study the paper in question, in the light of these two aspects of truth, to see the fallacy of the whole theory.

The author admits that every saved soul is "born into the family of God, and is there and then a member of the Body of Christ," *i. e.*, born into the Body, or, at least, brought into it in virtue of the new birth. Here, then, is all that is maintained. The salvation of God puts a man into the Church—that wonderful fabric which God Himself is building, and makes him a member of the Body of Christ, and brings him into the unity of the Spirit. This is the Church that we should keep before us. The Scripture knows no other. This governs all other aspects. But, though in this character the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, the practical is not so proof against the attacks of the enemy; this may be, and has been, greatly marred.

The absolute principles and relationships are our guide—the pattern that we should have before us. It is what God has before Him in Christ Jesus. This, as it were, is the pattern that has been shewn us; let us keep it before us, however short—to our shame and humiliation—we have come of it.

But this is not the pattern of the church of the theory in question ; it is quite true that souls are not born into it.

Let us cleave to the truth of God's Church, and own all that He brings into it, in every godly way possible. The house that our God builds is not built in vain ; we are sure of this. But if He build it not, they labour in vain that do so. Let us then be content to take our place, in a practical way, in God's building, and not build for ourselves ; let us ever have this before us and refuse *all* other plans. True, we are spoken of under the figure of builders, but we do not build the Church ; Christ builds that. We may be but a small remnant endeavouring to maintain the truth, yet the truth we seek to maintain embraces the whole ; and the relationships and principles of the whole should be allowed to indicate our attitude toward any or all.

#### MINISTRY.

What is said about shepherd care in the pamphlet we heartily agree with in character, but regret that its exercise should be so limited.

To limit, by ecclesiastical rules, the important work of such a shepherd, as is described by the author of the pamphlet, to the Church of the theory, we think, would meet with the displeasure of our adorable Lord, and be to the loss of many of the sheep of Christ, and of the shepherd himself.

The writer we are reviewing must admit that sheep go astray sometimes, and that it is the shepherd's work to go after them—to go in *search* of them. He would not deny that there are many sheep of Christ outside *his* Church. Now, even supposing that the very fact of their being outside marks them as going astray, should not the shepherd, who is sent by the Lord Himself, to tend His sheep—and not to build ecclesiastical walls between them—go out after them ?

But it just occurs to us that the term "Flock" is used in the pamphlet in the same contracted way as the words "Church" and "Body"—*i. e.*, the Flock of God in any given place is not composed of all His sheep to whom He has given eternal life, but only those who form this "Church of God," into which they put themselves "by their own act and the act of the Assembly." That is, a few of the sheep

of Christ are picked out and penned off; these are the Flock, and such enclosure describes the limit of the shepherd's care. If, in love for the straying sheep of Christ, he breaks through the fence, he stands committed to the censure of his brethren who are more loyal to the ecclesiastical theory.

The author lays special stress on the fact that the work of the elders and deacons lies in the Church—*i. e.*, of course, the Church according to his idea—hence the sphere of their ministry is limited to the few who compose that Church; the rest may go and “buy themselves bread,” hungry and scattered as they are. The Lord, in His deep compassion for the scattered multitude of His people, as sheep having no shepherd, may say, “Give ye them to eat,” but the reply, in effect, is, “Nay, Lord, we do not go to the sects after Thy sheep; they are not of our Church.” The obligations and responsibilities of elders and deacons—for him—end with the few who compose his Church.

Now, no one can study Eph. iv. and many other passages—indeed, the whole of the New Testament—on the subject without seeing that the object of all ministry is the edification of *the Body* and the conversion of souls—*i. e.*, the building of, and increase of, the Body. Indeed, the one great theme of the Epistles is not petty ecclesiasticism, but edification—not the edification of a party, but God's Church, and nothing less.

The gifts were given “for the perfecting of the saints” generally. There are no saints excluded from the object of the ministry as given in that chapter. “For the edifying of *the Body*.” This (with the article), we are informed, means the “whole Body”; then shepherd care should extend to every member of that Body within the reach of those who exercise it. So again, in verse 15, we read, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ”—the Head of the Church, His Body, not of a self-constituted Church built with the untempered mortar of mutual agreement.

But let us proceed. “From whom the whole Body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body unto the edifying of itself in love;” also Col. ii. 19. See also,

in harmony with this, the ardent desire of the Apostles, in all their Epistles, for the edification of the saints generally; not one, not the weakest and most feeble, is forgotten by them. If one is more susceptible of stumbling than others, for that reason he is the object of greater solicitude. How very feebly we enter into the thoughts of Christ about His blood-bought people!

How, then, in the light of Scripture, can we justify the wrapping up of the gifts, given by the ascended Lord, in the napkin of an ecclesiastical clique? This is not making for the edification of the body; it is building up a sect. There may be in it much that is admirable and helpful (as indeed there is while such saints as the author of the pamphlet are there), but this only makes the sectarian limitations all the more to be regretted.

#### THE FORM OF ADDRESS.

There is much detail in the pamphlet under review that we need not go into, the fallacy of which will be seen in the light of what we have already pointed out. Indeed, there are some points that carry their own refutation on the surface—see, for instance, what is said about the Epistle to the Philippians (pages 16, 19).

The writer seems scarcely to know what to do with the fact that the Epistle is addressed to *all* the saints at Philippi. It is, to say the least, inconvenient to his theory. After laboured effort to explain away the obvious meaning of such address, he leaves us to conclude that though "Church of God" included all the saints in Philippi when the Epistle was written, it would not do so, in any locality, in the present day. So that before the Epistle can be applied to any particular place now it would have to be modified somewhat after the following manner: "To all the saints 'who are associated in worship, in service, and in mutual care for one another,' with the bishops and deacons." But we believe it *still* applies to "all saints" in any place. The words here quoted from the pamphlet not only give us one of the ways of defining the writer's Church, but shew, at the same time, that he thinks that "mutual care one for another" is also limited to its narrow confines, at least for those who are in it. It is the will of God that all His saints should be associated

in worship, service, and mutual care; to this end the Scripture always points, and we should endeavour, as much as lieth in us, to bring it about.

The diversity of address characterizing the Epistles generally is against the theory. The Epistle to the Romans is addressed: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." All believers are "beloved of God," and "called to be saints."

The writer of the pamphlet acknowledges that in the Apostles' day the Churches in different localities embraced all saints; and in almost the same breath denounces the idea as unwarranted by Scripture, saying "There is no warrant in God's Word for such an idea"; he happens to make a special point of the idea that all saints in Philippi did form the Church there, and in all the "various localities"; so that on his own shewing there is warrant for the idea. We observe the writer's qualifications: "Without regard to whether or not they are associated in worship, &c." "But the saints in the town would not have been a Church if there had been no gathering together to the Name of the Lord Jesus, no being built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." These qualifications are absolutely necessary to the theory; but "there is no warrant in God's Word" for them.

Where did the writer get such information from? We sincerely ask for one single passage from God's Word informing us that the Church, and the habitation of God through the Spirit, are brought into existence by the association of the saints in worship, &c., or in the gathering together to the Name of the Lord Jesus. Important as these latter are, they are the effect and not the cause, the outcome of the relationships, and not the means of it. Again here the absolute truth itself and the practical expression of it are greatly confused.

This fact, concerning the Churches in Apostolic days, is not a quibble, it is a crucial, if not a cardinal, point; for it shews that in those days, at least, no such Church as is contended for existed. Then, as shewn in the pamphlet, "all the saints" formed the Church—formed the habitation of God through the Spirit, and the Body of Christ; and all exhortations to association in worship, service, and mutual care are based upon these absolute truths.

## THE GATHERING OF THE CHURCH.

Where are we told that two or three, or any number of saints, gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus form the Church? There are two or three passages which speak of the *Church* coming together. "When they had gathered the Church together" (Acts xiv. 27). We have been trying to read this passage according to the Church theory of the pamphlet, but we find it rather difficult. Suppose we put it thus: "When they had gathered together those gathered together to the Name of the Lord Jesus"! Is not this the only way it would fit in at all with the idea that saints must be already thus gathered together before they constitute the Church? Again we read: "If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place."

These passages shew clearly enough that it is the Church that gathers together, not the gathering together that forms the Church.

There is one passage that is rather peculiar, but in no way weakens the force of the above: "When ye be come together in the Church" (1 Cor. xi. 18). This does not say that the coming together makes them the Church, or that they were not the Church before they were come together. The passage is speaking of their partyism and independent individual action when they were in the Assembly as gathered. In any case, this passage could not serve the purpose of the theory, for that, as we have seen, in this aspect of it, is built upon the perfect passive.

We think that the most serious part of the last quotation from the pamphlet is that which makes the few (out of the many of God's saints), who form the Church of the theory exclusively the habitation of God through the Spirit. The writer emphasizes the same idea again on page 52; he confounds "builded together" with "gathered together." Scripture never so uses the word "build." We are not builded together because we gather together; but we gather together because we are builded together.

We have dwelt a little upon Ephesians ii. earlier in this paper, so we enter no more into it here. But we do just ask the writer if he has really and seriously considered this passage? Let the reader note that this building goes on in Christ. It is absolute; they did not build themselves into

it. It does not say, "Build ye yourselves together" (nor can it be justly made to mean this); but it does say, "*In whom ye are builded* together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

There is great danger in thus attaching so much importance to a position which may be merely external, or even formal. Those who take this position are made to constitute the Church, the Flock, and the Body of Christ, and the dwelling-place of God through the Spirit, and all this exclusively, in any particular place; and all in virtue of the position thus taken, which may be merely nominal, even though it may have a certain resemblance to the letter of Scripture. We believe that souls are brought into these relationships (*i. e.*, Flock, Church, Body of Christ, and Habitation of God), by the salvation of our God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, locally as well as generally. But this is categorically denied by the theory, according to which saints are brought into something to which these figures are applied, by their own act, but which is not the absolute Body of Christ; indeed there is nothing absolute about it.

We are led to ask is it really so—that the taking such a position builds saints into the Church, and the habitation of God locally? If so, then those who take it are built in by the very act, irrespective of their real state before God; and those who do not take it are shut out, however acceptable their personal state may be before God. The danger and pretension of such a theory are apparent.

The writer admits the great absolute truth of the Church which is the Body of Christ, though giving it no practical effect, no expression in testimony; and borrows its character, figures, and principles, to govern something which is not it, but which is brought into existence by human, mutual action. The Church, Body, Flock, and Habitation, are all formed upon such mutual action; hence it is a self-constituted Church, Body, Flock, and Habitation.

The most effectual way of shewing the fallacy of any Church theory is to shew from Scripture the character of the true Church of God in the various aspects in which it is presented. This is what in our feeble way we have been endeavouring to do.

The Word of God, let us reaffirm, often appeals to what



is absolutely true of us by sovereign grace, to shew what becomes us practically. See 1 Cor. iii. 15-23 and vi. 15-20; also, again, the whole of chapter xii., and 2 Cor. vi. 16, and Rom. xii. 3-12. All these, and many other passages, shew that the absolute relationships into which we are brought individually and collectively, consequently upon redemption, should govern our lives and regulate our conduct; in other words, that our practical lives should be consistent with our absolute relationships—formed and moulded in accordance with them. This is invariably so in Christianity.

Sometimes when we take practically the place that is ours absolutely, God in the riches of His grace owns the relationship in a complacent way, as in 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18: "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." This exhortation is addressed to children of God; the taking a separate place did not make them such; they were brought into the relationship by the new birth and the spirit of adoption. But our blessed God and Father *delights to own* the relationship of His *obedient* children. God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by covenant grace, but when they took the place of strangership consistent with their calling, He was not *ashamed to be called* their God.

There is a great craving, in regard to Church position, for something definite—something to receive into, as it is said. This arises from the same human expediency to which all sects can be traced. To have something to receive into is one great point with the writer of the pamphlet; though he himself has no difficulty, he has something definite enough, as we have seen, into which to receive.

We are not here concerning ourselves so much about details as the great guiding principles; details must be looked at in the light of these, for this is how Scripture looks at them, as we have seen.

Now, Scripture (as we have before observed), nowhere says that the Church receives into itself in the sense of thus making its own members, as in the case of a club. If it is said that the Church receives in any sense, as Paul being received of the Church, the reception is an acknowledgment of the membership that

already existed. Nor does it, strictly speaking, say that the Church puts out from itself. It does say, "Put out from *among yourselves* that wicked person." It also says, "Receive one another;" "Those that are weak in the faith receive;" "Receive us." All these are the mutual acknowledgment of relationships that are already in existence, and absolutely true.

The passage in John, "Casting them out of the Church," speaks of the Church in a subjective sense, and is an act of violence by one individual. It did not make those cast out any the less members of the Church of God in the place, which, according to the theory of the pamphlet, would be the case. Indeed, according to it, the Apostle John would not have been in "Church of God" in the place where Diotrefes lived (had he been there), for the latter, who had cast out others more devoted than himself, would not receive John and his co-workers.

All this shews the merely nominal character of "Church of God" theory, looked at in itself. There may be any kind of failure in the outward expression of the Church, but its absolute character remains intact. The very thing we are seeking to point out is that the absolute is not dependent upon the practical, but that the practical should be moulded according to the absolute, and on the ground of it.

This requires that we follow the instructions of Scripture in a definite way, for definite Church order and ministry. But there will always be details, incidents, and individualities that call for spiritual discernment, exercise of heart and conscience, as well as patient waiting upon God. We shall never be able to draw such rigid ecclesiastical lines as will do away with the need of searching the Scriptures, and waiting upon God for guidance in this or that case. Nor would it be good for our souls that such need should be dispensed with.

Everything that tends to send us to God, in real exercise of heart and conscience, before Him, for guidance, with the sincere desire to know and do His will, we may be thankful for. Such exercise is always healthy for the soul, whether in connection with collective or individual matters.

“TWO GREAT MISTAKES.”

Mr. H——, the author of the pamphlet, on pages 28 and 29 informs us that “two great mistakes seem to be prevalent in regard to this subject” (with the pamphlet before us we should have to say “three great mistakes”). One is that of the Church of Rome or the Church of England, with which he associates “the late Mr. John Nelson Darby with all his wonderful insight into much of the teaching of God’s Word” and his federation of assemblies.

But what shall we call the other mistake? The writer does not definitely designate it, and we are rather at a loss to do so from his vague description of it. He does call it “the opposite extreme”; this, however, is a vague expression; what does he mean by it? The opposite extreme of error, we should say, is truth; but still the term is sometimes used to imply an error in the opposite direction to some other error, which, no doubt, the writer means. But even so, we are left in uncertainty as to what it really is, for the description of it is entirely negative. It is a “recoil from the first error”—“the opposite extreme”; and it has “nothing to which believers could join themselves”—into which believers could be received “to be one with themselves, to be cared for and instructed in all the will of God.” Perhaps they—of the opposite extreme—recognise the Scriptural truth that all believers are “joined” to the Lord and each other, that all believers *are* one with themselves, and so endeavour to instruct all without regard to party or party joining. But this the writer does not tell us.

It would seem from the description that their only error consists in their not being in the church of the theory. But this cannot be the case, for those referred to are, most of them at least, gathered with companies of believers who form what the writer, we judge, would call Churches of God. True, indeed, it is that they do not—nor do the majority, we think, of such companies in this country—believe as Mr. H—— believes about their own position; hence their error must consist in the fact that they do not endorse his views of such companies, so that the “opposite extreme” is not so bad after all. At the same time, we

need to watch against the tendency to rush from one error to another.

Now, many, indeed most, of those referred to, who have "recoiled from the first error," are known to us; and if they are convinced of one thing more than another, it is the error of sectarian and party ecclesiasticisms; and they carefully avoid, for the most part, the leaving one party to join another party; they desire to have nothing peculiarly their own "to which believers could join themselves" in a party way.

But the same thing has taken place with regard to the "Church of God" theory maintained in the pamphlet. A few years ago there was a general recoil, on the part of gatherings throughout the whole country, even from it, as propagated by Mr. H—— and some other, no doubt sincere, men.

We quite agree that the great thing is to test things, not so much even by their fruits (though it is true of principles, as of persons, that they are known by their fruits), as by the Word of God.

As J. N. D. and his mistake is referred to, it may be profitable to stop and ask what that mistake really is.

We hesitate not to say that to associate it, his view of the Church constitutionally, with the Church of Rome or England, is the most gross misrepresentation possible; both those Churches believe that souls are received into them by baptism, while J. N. D. was most emphatic on the truth that souls were brought into the true Church of God by salvation, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. His mistake was not fundamental, nor constitutional, it was administrative in its character.

We would say, whole-heartedly, "to the law and to the testimony," let us test by the Word of God, and we shall find that no expositor has presented us with such a Scriptural view of the Church of God, the Body of Christ, as has J. N. D. Let the reader take his writings ecclesiastical (which are to be obtained for a small sum), and the Bible, and study and compare both, and we feel sure that he will be brought to the above conclusion.

In speaking thus of that earnest and devoted servant of Christ, the present writer cannot justly be looked upon as a Darbyite, or prejudiced in his favour, for he suffered much

a few years ago by severing himself from views held by J. N. D. and his party.

His mistake was in the opposite direction to that of Mr. H——'s; or, to put it in another way, Mr. H——'s mistake is in the "opposite extreme" of J. N. D.'s. The latter, as we believe, held most Scriptural views of what the Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, is, and had a most clear apprehension of its wonderful unity. He saw also that *that unity* should find practical expression in the testimony of the saints down here; but his mistake, as it seems to us, consisted in his way of effecting this latter.

But Mr. H.'s mistake consists in the fact that he ignores altogether the practical expression of the Church that Christ loved and gave Himself for, that He is building, and the unity that God is making; and makes a Church and a unity of his own, composed of a few only of the members of Christ's Body.

We are not denying that Mr. H—— sees what the Church is in its absolute character; his reference to it shews that he does see this. He calls it "the mystical Body," "the whole Church of which Christ is the Head," and sometimes he is even more positive of than this, as we shall see presently. But the moment he comes to the Church in testimony on the earth, he has, not a different aspect of this, but a different thing altogether. He will allow the same figures and designations, but the thing to which they are applied is constitutionally different.

Let the reader do what we are sure Mr. H——, who loves the Word of God, would wish him to do (and which we feel sure he will not blame *us* for doing), with no other desire than to arrive at the will of God as revealed in the Scripture—*i. e.*, take the pamphlet and carefully test it by the Word of God—and he will find that it allows no room for the expression in testimony down here of the Church of which Christ is the Founder and Builder, or the Body of which He is the Head, or the unity of which the Spirit of God is the bond.

These absolute aspects are acknowledged; it is allowed that all saints are included in them; and then they are left; and a different thing is formed, which is not an expression of what is already in existence. It has no existence until it is thus formed by the mutual action of a selection of

members from Christ's Body. Hence the Church that God is forming—the Church that is built upon Christ, the Body of which He is the Head—is left without a testimony to it, as such. For a body formed which constitutionally shuts out the vast majority of Christ's Body cannot be a testimony to the latter.

J. N. D. had the Scriptural unity before him, but he sought to realize it by devise instead of natural and spontaneous means. It seems to us that he sought it by the concerted action of the Body instead of by individual and local subjection to the Head, under the guidance of the Word. The Head should rule, not the Body; but under J. N. D.'s plan the Body was called upon to rule; every particular part, wherever located, must act in concert with, and under the rule of, all other parts. Hence the very thing that was sought, and sincerely sought—namely, the manifestation of unity—was the thing in which the saddest possible failure manifested itself. Instead of each gathering of saints acting in the fear of God, and in direct responsibility to the Head, they are found acting in the fear of each other, as if they were responsible to the Body generally, and not the Head. Hence the great fear, on the part of any particular gathering, of being cut off by the others. But in spite of such fear the cutting off went on in a most humiliating way.

Now if each gathering had been made to feel its local responsibility directly to the Head, through His word, and made to feel that any practical expression of the truth depended upon subjection to Him; though there might still have been much failure on account of what we are, yet there could not have been the dividing up that there has been; gatherings would, at least, have been thus put upon a right and Scriptural basis of unity. The plan of unity referred to above only accelerated, if it did not necessitate, division.

As to the Church of the pamphlet before us, it, in itself, as we have seen, has no Head. Mr. H—— admits that "Church of God" in any place is a different thing from that Church of which Christ is the Head, so that it must be a Church of which He is not the Head.

The moment the Head of the Church is before us, that Church of which He is the Head is in view. If any

member receive a message from the Head and minister it to other members, or if he is able to minister any thing in the way of real spiritual nourishment to the souls of other members, it must be as a joint in that Body of which Christ is the Head, and for the increase or building up of the same; whether he be in the Church of the theory or not, this is true.

May we know more what it is to keep in touch with the Head, to hold on to the Head (Col. ii. 19). Let us look at the members, all in their relation to the Head.

Another most sad and mischievous feature of Mr. H——'s theory is that it abandons the bulk of the sheep of Christ to the false teaching of Christendom. Right in the teeth of Scripture, as we have shewn on previous pages, he condemns servants of God for their efforts to reach the Lord's people, in pursuance of the whole spirit, teaching, and example of Scripture, and qualifies even the commission of the Evangelist to preach the gospel to every creature. He may preach the gospel to every creature except those who are wont to go to sectarian places, or at least in the places they go to, where alone, as a rule, they may be reached.

It does seem strange that one who takes the pains that Mr. H—— does to shew that the Church is not a building of bricks and mortar should nevertheless attach so much importance to a building of that character, if it be called a Church, as to think it evil to enter it even for the preaching of the Gospel.

Is not the truth the same, when preached in such a building, as it is when preached in any other building, or in no building at all? The plea is that it builds up the sects to whom the buildings belong; but we do not see how the preaching of the truth can build up error. Did the preaching of the truth in the Jewish temple and their synagogues by the Apostles build up Judaism? The Jews did not think so, when they cast them out again and again. Nor do sectarian rulers to-day think so, or they would not keep their bolts and bars so fast against those who preach it as they do.

Such a plea is utterly unscriptural and illogical. Many passages of Scripture will occur to the mind of the intelligent reader which shew the important place the feeding of

the lambs and sheep of Christ and the general edification of His people has in His mind. The tending of His lambs and sheep is the true test of professed love to Him.

We are not afraid that such an argument will have the slightest weight with those who seek the guidance of the Word of God and the approval of the Lord in their service, while entering, in some measure, into His thoughts about His blood-bought people. And we feel sure that the evangelist who realizes the solemn obligations and responsibilities that devolve upon him, making him a debtor to all men; and who also has a real love for souls, believing in eternal realities concerning them, will not allow barriers which are merely ecclesiastical or sectarian to hinder him in his efforts to reach them. To such an one, Church boundaries and sectarian walls are nothing. The eternal import of his message weighs heavily upon him, the lost condition of souls is a reality to him, and in faith and love he will scale all such boundaries and walls that ecclesiastics think proper to erect.

If you enter Mr. H——'s Church, his teaching demands that you curtail your efforts to build up and increase God's Church of which Christ is the Head.

Pages 31-33, we must say in all good faith, are vague and unintelligent. The pointing out of a faulty phraseology may be helpful to that exactitude which prevents our playing into the hands of those who deny the truth we set forth. The point of the two paragraphs about letters of commendation we fail to see. The idea of receiving into a much larger body belongs to Rome alone, as is tacitly admitted in the beginning of the next paragraph, where it is said that Rome alone assumes to be *the Church*; hence she is the only one that presumes to receive into *the Church*. If we understand this part of the pamphlet, it again confuses between the general and local aspects of the Church. But the writer, of course, looks at the whole question of receiving from his own point of view, and attributes to it the meaning that it has in his own mind when used by others.

We have said that Mr. H—— knows what the Church is in its absolute character; and it is not a little remarkable to find here such an expression as the following: "For the Scripture knows of no Body except the Church, which



is Christ's Body (Eph. i. 22-23), and that is composed, not of a number of associated Assemblies, but of all saints (1 Cor. xii. 12-13)." And yet he has another body before him all the time. On page 13 he speaks of a body which is not this, and the whole argument is for a Church—a Body—which is not the one referred to above, and yet the Scripture knows no other beside this latter!

What is the body that Mr. H—— receives into? To use his own words: "Either that body is the whole Church of God, or it is a sect." He tells us more than once that it is not the whole Church of God; hence, out of his own mouth it is a sect. It may bear a "similar character," which shews it cannot be it. It has "the character of a body," though not forming "the whole Body of Christ." Now, as we have before remarked, no one supposes that the local Assembly does "form the whole Body of Christ." What is maintained here is that it is the Body of Christ as seen in its own locality, hence representing the whole, but, if so, it includes all the members, *i. e.*, all the saints in the place, much as they may fail to give practical evidence of the blessed fact. Either the writer's Church is this, or it is a sect.

The local Church of the pamphlet does not include all saints.

It is a body formed, as we have seen, by the act of the individual and that of the Assembly; hence, a body other than the only one known by the Scripture.

Souls are saved into the only Body known by Scripture; they are not into that which has "the character of a body;" if they were, all the saved would be in it; and if the majority of saved are not in it, it must be a body other than that in which they certainly are!

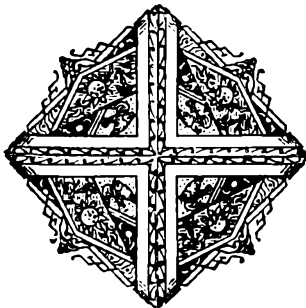
As another instance of the confusion of ideas in the pamphlet, we refer our readers to page 36, where we find the following: "But it is not because of their fellowship with other Assemblies, but only because of their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that He calls each company of saints, who own Him as Lord in the midst, a Church."

What does the writer mean by this somewhat confused statement? That the saints are the Church "only because of their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ" is what we most fully believe; in which case all saints—generally or

locally—being in the same relationship with Him are in the Church, even when viewed in any locality. So far all is clear, but what does the writer mean by the qualification “who own Him as Lord in the midst?” According to the teaching of the pamphlet, it is *this* that constitutes a few of the saints of God in any place “a Church”; hence it cannot be “because of their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Unless their “owning Him as Lord in the midst” not only constitutes them a Church, but brings them into some vital “relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ” that is not true of other saints! That is founded upon mutual agreement of action and not upon redemption!

It is quite true that the *practical relations* of a faithful and obedient child of God differ from those of a disobedient one, but the *vital relationship* is the same.

We think all of importance that appears on the remaining pages of the pamphlet has been previously met.



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