

A Divine Movement and Our Path with God Today

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Philadelphia: What is It?

My purpose is, as the Lord enables me, to follow the track of what I have no doubt to be a gracious movement of God in recent times, and with which as such all His people are necessarily concerned; to seek to show the principles which characterise it, and their meaning and value as taught in Scripture; to speak also of the difficulties and opposition through which it has had to find its way; and in this my aim will be to exercise hearts and consciences (if un-exercised) with relation to it, and still more to help those already variously exercised to a settlement of questions which at the present time are pressing heavily on many.

I do not propose, however, any history of the movement of which I speak. For this I have no special competence; nor, if I had, would it serve so well the purpose that actuates me. It would raise question as to facts, and prejudice minds in opposite ways, by the introduction of names and persons, familiar and in reputation, perhaps the reverse. Our tendency is too much to make men commend the truth, rather than the truth commend the men who follow it. I shall look therefore at principles simply, with their necessary results (as far as these can be traced), only referring to history so far as may be necessary to explain their importance for us, and omitting wholly the names of those who have stood for them, or stood against them.

This may be deemed unsatisfactory by some, and of course leaves the application of principles to be made by every one for himself. But with divine light as to principles, and a soul truly before God, the application

will after all be comparatively easy. It will test us, of course, whether we be there; and that seems to me to be in His mind for us, in a special way, just now. Let us not seek escape from it; but that we may stand the test, and find the blessing which He surely designs us in it.

For He does design blessing. This is the end from which He never swerves. When special times of sifting come, the sense of weakness everywhere apparent, and the love we have to one another would make us gladly seek escape, for ourselves anii for others also. But, thank God, it is as vain as it is unwise and unbelieving. Satan is the sifter of God's wheat, and it is a serious thing indeed to have to do with him; but sifting is the ordained method of purification. Take Simon Peter as the great example of it in the gospels: he is in special danger, foreknown by the Lord as specially to fail, and yet cannot be spared the sifting. "I have prayed for thee," says the great Intercessor; not that thou mayest not be sifted, not even that thou mayest not fail, but "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and, when thou art converted," (or restored, as the meaning is,) "strengthen thy brethren." Here was good to come, (even for one who might seem to have failed utterly under it,) from the sifting of Satan.

What comfort for us in this, whether we think of ourselves or of others! And if the Lord had for us, in His abundant goodness, any work for Himself ready to be put into our hands, what wonder if, first of all, He were pleased to let us also - perhaps finding our way into it, even as Peter did, through our own self-confidence and imprudence,- find, though in sorrow and suffering, the value of Satan's sieve? We have, I believe, ground for the conviction that this is the meaning of what is now taking

place. But I go on at once to what is the matter that I have in hand, and raise the question which is at the head of this paper.

I do not propose now to work out the proof of what is familiar and accepted truth for most, perhaps, who will read these pages, that the Lord's addresses to the seven churches in Revelation contemplate, in fact, successive states of the Church at large, answering, in the same order, to the condition of these respective churches, or assemblies; and that unitedly they cover the whole period, from the apostle's day till the Lord takes us to be with Himself above. The great proof of this must be in fact the correspondence that can be traced between what is thus assumed to be the prophecy and its fulfillment; and this it is not difficult to trace as far as regards at least the first five churches. Let us briefly attempt this.

1. Ephesus, to which, in its first fresh fervour, the doctrine of the Church was declared by the apostle, is shown heading here a history of decline. Outwardly things still look well. The secret of departure is only realised by Him whose heart, seeking ours, cannot but be keenly conscious of it, if first love is no longer there. Here is the beginning of the end, a root upon which evil fruit of all kinds will be found, if there be not recovery.

2. Smyrna next shows us the double assault of the enemy upon the Church in this weakened condition. Persecution on the part of the world, as under the Roman emperors; internally, the introduction of a bastard Judaism, such as in its beginnings had to be met by the apostle, notably in Galatia, and which, in contrast with the heavenly Church, develops as the enemy's seed,

"the synagogue of Satan,"- the mixing together of true and false in a legal and ritualistic system claiming earthly position and promises, and already slandering - this I take to be their "blasphemy" - the faithful remnant.

3. Pergamos shows us then the pilgrim character of the Church lost: they are "dwelling where Satan's throne is." And while Nicolaitans ("subjectors of the laity") preach now their "doctrine," Balaam-teachers seduce the people of God into evil alliances with the world, and mere idolatry.

4. Thyatira carries this on to full development in Romanism, as we see today. That which Balaam-teachers did before as individuals, a woman (type, as we know, of the professing Church) does now, speaking as a prophetess, with the claim of divine authority, and yet branded with the awful name of Jezebel, the idolatrous persecutor of true prophets in Ahab's days. Here development in this line ends: a remnant is beginning to be marked out again ("the rest in Thyatira"), and prepares us for a different condition of things in the next address.

5. In Sardis accordingly, we have no indication of Jezebel or her corruption. There are things that have been received and heard, but they languish and are ready to die. The general state is that of death, though with a "name to live," and a "few names that have not defiled their garments" in this place of the dead. It is easy to see that we have here the national churches of the Reformation, with their purer doctrine given of God, though hard to be maintained in the midst of what - as the world claiming to be the church - is necessarily "dead," with "a name to live." There is here, and all

through, to this point, no possible difficulty of identification for a simple and honest heart, of what is presented to us in these churches.

But this brings us, as the next stage, to Philadelphia; and what is Philadelphia? This ought to be a question capable of answer surely, and of satisfactory answer too. There can hardly be a doubt, if the previous applications have been correct, that Philadelphia must be something following Reformation times, outside of the state churches which have already found their delineation, and something which the three hundred years that are past have been ample to develop. But there are things connected with the identification in this case which should rightly make us pause and be very sure of our ground in attempting any explanation.

Philadelphia has, as a whole, the Lord's approval in a way no other of these churches has; except indeed Smyrna, with which in another respect also Philadelphia is linked. For here the "synagogue of Satan" once more appears as there: there seems some recrudescence of the Jewish principles typified by this; or at least something brings these to the front in the Lord's address.

But it is intelligible why people should shrink from appropriating to themselves the commendation that is found here; while yet that very commendation must cause every Christian heart to crave the character which our blessed Master can thus commend. Thus it always must have appealed to Christians; and since no circumstances of our time can ever render it impossible for us to fulfill the conditions necessary to His approval, there surely must have been Philadelphians in every

generation of His people since these words were written. And here how blessed to see that what the Lord approves in Philadelphia is given in such absolutely plain speech. Keeping His word, not denying His Name, keeping the word of His patience: how simple all this seems; how simple it is, to a heart that is truly simple! And yet, if we apply it closely, not meaning to let ourselves off easily, these words will be found, I doubt not, capable of searching us out to the very bottom. But though thus there have been Philadelphians in all times, a Philadelphian movement is another matter; and this is what we should look for, from the place of this address among the other addresses. We shall have to face this, if we would be thoroughly honest with ourselves, and would not deprive ourselves therefore of the blessing of such a commendation. For while it is very well to take heed that we flatter not ourselves with being what we are not, there is another thing that is to be considered, and that is, if there be such a movement, our own relation to it. And this may well cause us anxious inquiry, may it not? and it would be a strange disappointment indeed, were we to have to accept that such an inquiry as this could not expect to attain its end. If the Lord have given me in His addresses to the churches to find a clue to His relation to the successive phases, complete or partial, of the Church on earth, then I must surely ask myself, where am I with regard to this? And if I plainly do not belong to that line of development which ends in Thyatira or Papal Rome; if also I do not belong to the state churches of the Reformation, or those similarly constituted, though they may not be established; am I to find no place in that which the Lord addresses? If I am, where must I find it, but in Philadelphia or in Laodicea?

Now if the Spirit of God be at work in the midst of such a state of things as Sardis implies, not merely to sustain a remnant, but in testimony against evil as a whole, in what direction will it necessarily be found working? Will it not be in separation between the living and the dead? that is, in leading Christians to seek out their company; or in giving expression to the "love of brethren"? which is only to say in English, in PHILADELPHIA?

Is it not plain that this has in fact characterized, in various degrees, many different movements that have arisen since Reformation times, in which more or less was affirmed the separation of Christians from the world, and the communion of saints as a visible reality? Every effective protest against the misery of an unconverted church membership has partaken of this character. And the maintenance of the diversity between the Church and the world has necessarily led on to the assertion of the related truth of the Church's practical unity. Philadelphia, "brotherly love," is a word which, going to the heart of the matter, covers surely all this seeking after the making visible of the Church so long conceived as necessarily invisible.

Putting all together, we may take this as clearly what Philadelphia means. It stands for a broad and well-defined movement in the history of the professing church, and which has assumed many different characters. These differences may indeed be pleaded against its practical nature as defining any distinct path for the people of God today. But this is only a superficial view of the matter. There are other things to be considered, which will essentially modify this first conception, and make us realise the word of God, here as elsewhere, to be "quick and powerful, sharper than

any two-edged sword," and requiring from us a real and complete integrity in our obedience to it, in order to such blessing as the Lord sets before us. Let us turn to consider now the first warning which He gives us in connection with this matter.

The Overcomer in Philadelphia

The separation of the Church from the world, and its restoration to visible unity upon the earth! if that be in the heart of the Philadelphian, as in his heart it must be for him to be this, how the Lord's words appeal to us, "Thou hast a little power." Power equal to such work as this is plainly not his; though He will graciously acknowledge what there is. The ideal before him is an impracticable one; though, thank God, this is to be widely distinguished from an unpractical one. Infidels have rightly declared that the Christian standard is an impracticable one; but every Christian knows that to "walk as Christ walked" is very far from an unpractical ideal.

If we are acquainted at all with the feeble efforts of Christians in the direction of which we have been speaking, of their inconsistency with one another, and with their real object, we shall surely realize, that, in the path in which Christ leads us, we have need of the deepest humility, if we would escape the deepest humiliation. It is not my object now to enumerate these; but the warning which the Lord gives to the Philadelphian is surely one that speaks volumes here, for it is upon his heeding it that all depends for him. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." It is in this respect that overcoming is to be accomplished for the Philadelphian. as it is plainly the only evil that is in view.

But with this his "little power" unites, to make the warning more impressive. The unattainableness of the ideal, the little progress that we make toward it, the

weakness manifest in others as in ourselves, all combine to dishearten and weary us. That seems to be often the failure of principles which is only the failure to act upon the principles. But this too is saddening enough. Let it be that the principles themselves have only failed by not being carried out, if they are too unearthly - too heavenly - for that which all the history of the Church has proved her to be, would it not be wiser to materialise them somewhat? If a lower path be more practicable, is it not after all the better? It is not realised that to give up a single point as to the Lord's will is to give up obedience as a principle. How many points we give up is then but a question of detail.

As a matter of fact, it will not be difficult to find the wrecks of failed Philadelphia strewn the centuries since Luther. Every genuine revival, as being the work of the same Spirit, has tended in the same direction. It has brought Christians together; it has separated them from the world; it has proved afresh the power of Christ's word; it has revived the sweetness of His Name. The sense of evils in the professing Church, intolerable to the aroused consciences and hearts of His people, has forced many, in obedience to the Word, to "depart from iniquity." Alas, is it not the constant reproach of such movements that hardly has a generation passed before the spirit of them is departed, they have sunk to nearly the common level of things around; they have no more been able to retain the blessing than a child the sunshine it has gathered in its hand? If wedded to some principle which the natural conscience owns, or some assertion of right which men value as their possession, such movements may still grow, and faster than before, while the old men weep at the remembrance of the days

they have seen, and realise their temple to be in ruins. So simply all this takes place, that it is easy to see it must take place, unless the power of God prevent the natural evolution. The first generation had to break through natural surroundings at the call of God; they had learned of God, with exercised hearts, and followed Him through suffering and with self-denial. And their children come into the heritage their fathers had acquired for them, necessarily without the exercise their fathers had. Nature attracts them to the path, not warns them from it. They accept easily, and can easily let go. They know not the joy of sacrifice. They have not the vigour gained by painful acquirement. It is easy to predict what will naturally follow; not necessarily from anything wrong in what they hold as truth, but from the incapable hands with which they hold it.

But the argument from such failure seems to be used so disastrously with souls today, that it is worth a deeper consideration. Does "success," as men count success, argue anything as to the goodness before God of that which succeeds? Or conversely, does failure and break-up, to any extent you please to name, prove that that which has been made shipwreck of was evil, or that there was evil at least inherent in it? Carry it out thoroughly and honestly, such a supposition, and see where it will land you. If you know the Apostolic Church, as seen in Scripture, and the blessed heritage of truth with which it was endowed at the beginning: tell me where shall I find this Church, when I come to the beginning of uninspired history? and where shall I find this truth possessed by her even in many of its fundamentals?

The answer is too plain and terrible,

Scripture itself preparing us indeed for it. It was needful, even while this was being written, that Jude should exhort to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." And Paul speaks of the "mystery of iniquity already at work"; and he and Peter of the special evils of the last days. And John could find the signs of the "last time " in there being already "many antichrists" (I John ii. 18).

Outside of Scripture, it is enough to say, in the language of another, that the historical church "never was, as a system, the institution of God, or what God had established; but at all times, from its first appearance in ecclesiastical history, the departure as a system from what God established, and nothing else." And as to doctrines, "it is quite certain that neither a full redemption, nor (though the words be used once or twice) a complete possessed justification by faith, as Paul teaches it, a perfecting for ever by His one offering, a known personal acceptance in Christ, is ever found in any ecclesiastical writings, after the canonical Scriptures, for long centuries.

But what, then, about this apostolic church which, in some of its most important doctrines, seems to have vanished out of the world in such a manner, for so long a time? Were its principles at fault or what, that it failed so quickly? What principles of Scripture shall we find that will secure us from failure, though they could not secure those who had them at the beginning? Is it not plain that Scripture exhorts us, if we be Philadelphians, to hold fast and does not this recognize the danger of not holding fast? No one need wonder, then, if the wrecks of Philadelphia are strewn along the road; while Rome retains, century after century, her boasted unity

and power over souls. It is accounted for by the simple fact which Scripture recognizes, that error roots itself in the world more easily than truth. And so the Lord asks by Jeremiah (ii. ii): "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods ? but my people have changed their glory for that which hath not profit." Rather, then, may we argue the reverse way, that if, in an adverse world, and with Satan's power rampant, a people could find a flow of steady increase and prosperity, this exceptional vigour would have to be accounted for, and not the fact of reverses and discouragements.

Yet after all, it should be clearly understood to what the Lord's warning words refer: "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." What is that which they are called to "hold fast"?

I beg my reader's earnest attention to the answer which the message itself gives: this is not a certain deposit of doctrine clearly. I do not mean to deny such a deposit - very far from that; nor, if there be such, that it is to be held fast. Necessarily it is; and yet, I say again, this is not what the Lord speaks of here; whereas in the message to Sardis, it is this this unmistakably.

The comparison between the two is in the highest degree important. To Sardis it is said, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." There a measured amount, a clearly defined deposit of truth is indicated: and this is simple and most instructive, if we recall what Sardis means. A wonderful blessing was given in those Reformation days. Many a truth of immense significance and value for the soul had they "received and heard." And they knew the value of it all; but in their eagerness to secure it for the

generations to come, what did they do? They put it into creeds and confessions; and I say not, they were wrong in this. Nay, they had clearly a right to say for themselves and declare to others what they believed they had received from God. Those "confessions"- truly such they were in those days of martyrdom - read by the light of the fires kindled by their adversaries for the signers, are blessed witnesses today of the truth for which, when felt in power, men could give their bodies to the flame, and quail not.

But the wrong was here: they took those creeds and imposed them - with all the emphasis that penalties enforced by a State-church could give - upon the generations following. Their own measure of knowledge was to be that of their children and their children's children. If there were error in the creed, that error must be transmitted with it. And all this was given into the hands, not even of spiritual men, but of the world-church they had reared up, to care for and maintain!

Necessarily the Spirit was grieved and quenched. He was leading them on - you can see it in Luther's letter to the Bohemian brethren - far beyond where they actually stopped. He was ready to lead them into "All, truth" (Jno. xvi. 13). They put up their Ebenezers not to show simply that thus far the Lord had helped them, but as the Ultima Thule of knowledge. What wonder if they really, to those under the sway of these systems, became such! Henceforth it was to "what they had received and heard" in the sixteenth century that they looked back, The word now was no longer, as with the Reformers, when they were reformers, "On with the Holy Spirit of truth, our Teacher," but "Back to the Reformation," The words of the Lord to Sardis are therefore precise in the

marvellous accuracy which His words necessarily must have. "You have taken," they say, "the measure of truth you have, as if it were truth: well, you have limited yourselves how much; but at least be true to what you have got: 'be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die'." In view of infidel criticism everywhere undermining today the foundations of Scripture itself, how are the Reformation churches responding to this?

But Philadelphia is called to "hold fast," too. Yes, but what what she has, of course; and that is a little power, and Christ's word kept, and His Name not denied. Notice that there is no longer a measured quantity "what thou hast received "; nor is it His "commandments" or His "words," but His word." The distinction is so clearly drawn in the gospel of John (xiv. 21—24) that, although it may be familiar to most who read this, I shall briefly state it.

Love is not to be measured by profession or by emotion, but by obedience. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," says the Lord, "he it is that loveth Me." The response to this is "and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him," But there is a deeper love than that manifested in keeping commandments. It is that which takes account of all His word, whether positive command or not. And here the response is greater correspondingly. "If a man love Me, he will keep my word" - so it should read, not "words"; "and my Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make our abode with him." Here it is plain that there is a fullness and permanency of communion not to be found in the previous case.

Philadelphia has kept - is keeping, as long as she remains Philadelphia - not His commandments, but His word: this as a whole. Not, of course, that she knows it all: that were impossible. But, just for that reason, she has not a certain amount of truth which she has received, and to which she is faithful. She is like Mary at His feet, to listen and be subject to whatever He has to communicate. His word as a whole is before her. Not limiting the Spirit, she will be led on; for He leads on, Her ear is open. She has the blessedness of the man "that heareth Me," says the eternal Wisdom, "watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors."

Of course, this is no peculiarity of any special time; it is God's way at all times to lead on the soul that is just ready for His leading. And at all times of special revival this has been seen especially. But of late, many will recognize that Scripture has been opened to us more as a whole than at any former time since the apostles; and that this has been in connection with such a movement as had the features, if I have interpreted them aright, of what in the Apocalypse is called Philadelphia. Certain great truths being recovered to the Church have helped to open up in a new way the Old Testament as well as the New. The dispensations have been distinguished; the gospel cleared from Galatian error; the place in Christ learned in connection with our participation in His death and resurrection; the real nature of eternal life, and the present seal and baptism of the Spirit in contrast with all former or other operations and gifts; the coming of the Lord as distinct from His appearing: do we not owe it to the Lord to acknowledge without reserve what His grace has done? and must we not connect it with the

fullness of Christ's word here, in contrast with the "what thou hast received and heard" of Sardis?

We must recognize it in order to admit the question, which to me, I confess, grows more solemn daily: Is this attitude still maintained, and is it to be maintained? are we to go on with the Lord still learning, still to learn? or to make even these blessed truths a measure with which we shall content ourselves? A large measure is still a "measure"; and once getting back to merely "what we have received" is after all to accept the bucket (or say, the cistern) in place of the flowing well. At the feet of Jesus, who will presume to say we have the measure of His blessed Word?

You Have Kept My Word

The more we understand what is implied in the keeping of Christ's Word, the more we will realise its importance. To really keep Christ's Word implies going on with Him in steady progress, not wilfully permitting any part of it to be dark, unfruitful or in vain for us; not allowing ourselves to be robbed of difficult books or chapters. We often permit this to happen without a thought about it, as if God had given us too large a Bible and we were confused rather than served by the largeness of His gift. Do we really believe that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3: 16)? Are we sure that this is true of prophecy, history, type, parable, even of the long genealogies, of the lists of David's officers, of the cities of Israel, etc.? Are we personally seeking to make all of it profitable to us?

Let us be absolutely honest with ourselves and with God. If we do not accept the profitableness of all Scripture, are we not denying in some measure the doctrine of God's inspiration of Scripture? If so, then we are not "men of God" for whom all Scripture is fruitful (2 Tim. 3: 17).

Is this not a serious matter? Take the admonition from the typical history of Israel. Was it not evil that Israel, brought into the promised land by God's power, failed to possess it all? Is it not a serious matter that for us also, "there remains very much land to be possessed?"

Two things - apart from unbelief as to the inspiration of God's Word - are used to argue against the above, but

they are both evil, unbelieving arguments. However, since they sound reasonable, they need exposure.

The first is an old argument of Isaiah's day (Isa. 29: 9-11) against the divine vision. Delivered to the learned with the request to read it, the answer of the 'learned' is, "The book is sealed." So today, man's argument is, "The language can't be understood: history, type, parable, are strange speech. People everywhere disagree as to the interpretation. How can we succeed where so many have failed? What good is guessing?"

Of course, no good can come from guessing, for uncertainty as to truth makes it dangerous to proceed or even to stand still. The plain duty of every Christian is to keep on the firm ground of known truth. Scripture has been used so carelessly as to make it the mere plaything of the mind, hardly to be taken seriously. However, there is certainty at every point for anyone who, in faith, will seek it.

"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God... and it shall be given him" (James 1: 5)

"If any man wills to do His (God's) will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God..." (John 7: 17)

If we believe that God deals truthfully with us, the above verses must be true. So, let us use the greatest care as to the interpretations that we accept. Otherwise, free license is given to the imagination.

The second argument, which also is as old as

Isaiah, is the most widespread and the most dangerous. It is the language of the people, not of their leaders. It appears as the language of humility: "I am not learned, so I can't understand." This denies the all-sufficiency of

the Holy Spirit as the Teacher of Christians, or it denies His presence with His people. It makes the understanding of God's things to depend on a man's education or on his I.Q., instead of on the Holy Spirit. It makes Christ, who dwelt among the poor and the needy, now to only reveal Himself to the educated, intelligent and wealthy. It makes the Lord's disciples, those unlearned Galileans, an anomaly for all future times. It gives the intellect a huge practical advantage over the heart and conscience - the moral being. It makes the learned the judges of truth for the unlearned. It makes Scripture filter through the minds of the learned before it is fit to be the living ministry of God to others. Thus, it subjects the many to the few, and fulfilling its own argument, makes Scripture inaccessible and impracticable for the mass of mankind. What wonder if, under the influence of such a belief, people find what they expect to find - a closed instead of an open Bible. What wonder if the Holy Spirit, grieved and limited by the unfaithfulness of Christians, will not "lead us into all truth" (John 16: 13).

The above isn't intended to discredit learning or to deny the right place of intellect in the things of God. In spite of sin, one who believes God must believe that God has made his understanding, reason, imagination, conscience and heart all for Himself. Consequently, when one receives the gospel and is in real nearness to God, all these things are made alive and greatly enlarged. Let a man really desire to know this God who has revealed Himself to him; let this desire be his top priority in learning, and then every bit of truth that he learns will be the means of daily strength and growth - not monstrous as when only the head develops, but the

growth of the mind, heart, conscience, all alike and together, on towards the perfect, always proportionate man.

This learning from God is the privilege of every Christian, regardless of his social-economic-educational position. Christ said, "Labour not for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures to everlasting life" (John 6: 27). This food is spiritual knowledge - knowledge of the highest kind, which is needful for the proper control of every other kind of knowledge. Since "all things were created by Christ and for Him" (Col. 1: 16), it is not possible to see things aright until we connect them with Him for whom they were created. Then, all natural science will become spiritual science; all -ologies will work into theology. What value will the world be to me if it is not God's world? Since the world and even the universe were made to manifest Him, how great should my interest be in them! Christians are partly guilty for the neglect which has allowed the natural sciences to become the possession of unbelieving men. So, instead of Christianity standing firm on the two feet of Nature and Scripture which both testify of God, it limps along with one useless foot a burden on the other.

Knowledge? Yes, labour for knowledge, but first get Christ who is the key to it, and then the whole field lies open to you. Take possession for Him of all things. Labour, be loyal, be in earnest: "every spot that the sole of your feet shall stand on shall be your own." Labour more earnestly for spiritual food than for what you call your 'necessary' food. Every instinct of your spiritual nature desires spiritual food and if these are denied,

starved, neglected, you will dwarf yourself spiritually and become satisfied with what is almost starvation. Only eternity will reveal to you the extent of your loss, but then, it is too late.

As I have said, I believe that God has since the mid-1800s opened up the Bible to us in a remarkable way, and now He is testing us with it. Alas if we turn away! Are not these newly-revealed truths for us? Do we have faith in Him who has given them to us, that He has not mocked us with His gift? Shall we be bewildered and oppressed by the greatness of these riches? The field is boundless, but its green pastures and glorious distances invite us to explore them. Where are the people who find in the labour needed for this exploration, the necessary exercise for spiritual health and vigour? Here are endless beauties and glories, so little realised, which can be the possession of all of us because they belong to all of us! Do you say that your measure only can be small? Beloved, have you earnestly tried to find your measure?

Are you positive that you have reached your God-given boundary line? Could you tell God that you are honestly and with your whole heart working hard to learn with Him all that He has for you? If so, God's rule, given in several places including Mark 4: 25, will apply: "To him who has, shall more be given." Where, then, will your limit be found?

Think of what God has done for us in giving us these things! Here is continuous occupation for us. Is that a loss or a gain? With the necessity of much occupation with the things of the world just to get daily food and clothing, is it loss or gain that we should have, at the same time, an equal necessity for spiritual things?

It is a necessity. "Labour not for the food which perishes but for that food which endures unto everlasting life" (John 6: 27) was spoken by lips that cannot lie, and here, the spiritual labour is said to be the more necessary. Who will disagree with the Lord? Who will say that this rule applied only to the Galilean peasants who could follow Him, not because of the miracles, but because they ate of the (spiritual) loaves and were filled, and does not apply to the hard-worked masses of today!

The necessity for this spiritual labour is inherent to the spiritual life itself, and has its corresponding reward and blessing. Among other things, it balances and relieves the natural labour. The weight of the earth's atmosphere presses on the average-sized man with a force of about 14 tons, yet we are not conscious of it because, as the air penetrates the body, there is an equal force acting outward. In like manner, the pressure of natural things can be met by the opposing pressure of spiritual things so that we may walk at ease and in freedom. I'm sure that you will find this true, for spiritual occupation increases our faith and spiritual energy, enabling us with divine power to meet life's demands.

Our spiritual land is good, but it must be cultivated for its value to be realised. Then, the profits from it will make it impossible for us to be spiritually poor. Unworked, however, our heavenly inheritance still will leave us in spiritual poverty on earth. Since we need so much occupation with our own things to meet the constant demands on us in the world, God in His faithfulness to us has not put the truth into creeds which we might easily learn by heart and lay aside, nor has He written everything out so plainly that there is no difficulty in understanding it. Bitter arguments have

raged about even basic fundamentals. It is better in God's thought, that we should have constant need for reference to, and the most careful study of our Lesson Book, caused by exercises of the most painful nature, than be allowed to sink into spiritual laziness.

Most truth is not in the plain language of the epistles. The Lord taught much in parables. The book of Revelation uses symbols almost entirely. The Christian truths in the Old Testament are taught in types and history, which we are taught to allegorise. The man of understanding in Proverbs is expected "to understand a proverb and its interpretation, the words of the wise and their dark sayings" (Prov. 1: 6).

So, "if you cry after knowledge and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then shall you understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2: 3-5) We even are told that "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Prov. 25: 2) - hiding it where a diligent person can find it as a reward. All this implies a personal labour that cannot be delegated to another, although we all are to help one another in it. God does not recognise a laity to be spoon fed once or twice a week, taking with little question what is given them. God does not recognise a division of labour - worldly things for the common people and spiritual things for a special class. No, we personally are to "be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height" (Eph. 3: 18). Indeed, we need every Christian to help us understand the Scriptures.

Of course, there are God-given teachers. No one with Scripture before him could deny that. But Scripture does

not restrict teaching to the teachers, any more than it confines evangelising to the evangelist. It is the intended glory of all these special 'gifts' to enable those whom they (the teachers, etc.) speak to, to do without them - to send men from themselves to Christ. Sitting at His feet, then, we hear Him say, without reference to any special gift, "one is your Master (Teacher), even Christ, and all you are brethren" (Matt. 23: 8). Teachers are special helps given to the entire Church by the ascended Lord, and he who undervalues the help given, dishonours the Lord from whom the teachers have their mission and qualification. But men often turn special help into special hindrances and this often has been done with teachers. The moment the teacher is allowed to give authority to the truth - making it true because he says so - instead of the truth he teaches giving him authority; the moment the teacher is allowed to come between men and the Word, instead of bringing them to the Word; the moment the teacher is made the substitute for personal labour in the divine Word instead of a help and encouragement towards personal labour, then there is perversion of the gift and disaster follows! The whole evil of the Church teaching - man's rule usurping God's rule - has come in this way. Clergy and laity are thus formed.

The message to Philadelphia presses on us that Christ's Word, which all Scripture is, is given to His people, and those who keep (obey) it are commended by Him. What I have been urging is that, for this, they must know for themselves what it is that they are to keep. All Scripture is before them, and they cannot have the spirit of a Philadelphian if they willingly allow any of it to be taken from them; if their Bibles are willingly permitted to lack,

as it were, whole pages, perhaps whole books of what is inspired of God for our profitable use. Further, the need for earnest, untiring labour in the Word is what is insisted on as necessary for all progress, for the maintenance of spirituality and for a right state with God on the part of all of God's people, not of just a special class.

Let me further press the last part of this theme. What a new state would begin for us if we would find that between our necessary work in the world and our still more necessary and fruitful occupation with Scripture, our time was so fully taken up that we would have little or none remaining for anything that was not absolutely productive and profitable; if all that was idle, vain and frivolous, disappeared out of our lives; if the newspaper was supplanted by fresh discoveries in the things of God. Peter exhorts us that "laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speaking, [we should] as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word that we should grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2: 1)

God does not desire us to remain babes. The milk is to make us grow up spiritually. Peter conveys to us in these words some of that energy which, under God, had helped to make him, the unlearned Galilean fisherman, a leader in divine things. We are to be, he says, as ardent after the Word as a newborn babe is for milk! The one business of a newborn babe is to get milk. Is the Word of God sought and longed for like that in your life?

Then notice the exhortation concerning the incompatibility of spiritual occupation with "all malice and guile and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil

speaking." If the Word of God is feeding our souls, all evil things will pass away just as the dying leaf falls, crowded out by the new bud. Psalms 1: 1 gives us a delightful picture: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." This is the negative side, but the positive side follows, and the power is in this: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law does he meditate day and night" (v. 2).

This is a sweet and glowing picture. Look at the result:

"And he is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth its fruit in its season; its leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he does shall prosper" (v. 3)

It would be a blessed thing if that picture was true of each one of us.

Holy and True

"Thou hast kept My Word" is the first matter of distinct commendation as to Philadelphia which we can lay hold of as showing what is in the Lord's mind as to them; and I do not ignore in this that the people thus commended are, first of all, Philadelphians. All the more striking on this account is what He commends in them. It is of great import and worthy of fullest emphasis that, while it is to a company of people who are characterized by "love of brethren" He is speaking, His praise is not that "thou hast loved the brethren." This does not even form part of it. His thoughts seem elsewhere: the commendation is, "Thou hast kept my Word, and not denied my Name." Again, "thou hast kept the word of my patience." Yet in the promise to the overcomer He does not omit what has reference to the name they bear: for on the "pillar", which he who has here but "a little strength" finally becomes, is inscribed not only "the name of my God," and "my new name," but also "the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem." This is the home of the "brethren," and has, I believe, distinct reference to "Philadelphian" character. Yet, I repeat, in His commendation of them, He says nothing of this. Is it not right to ask ourselves the reason of what is at first sight so strange?

Now the title under which the Lord addresses them fully accounts for it. They are Philadelphians whom he is addressing: it is thus plain that if people have not this character He has nothing here to say to them. It is to those He is speaking, whose hearts would seek, if it were possible, the recovery of this "Church," which

should have been like "a city set on a hill," or "a light upon a candlestick," but has dropped, alas, into the invisibility which men ascribe to it, as if it were the necessary and normal state. Yes, it is to these that the Lord is speaking; and the first words He utters remind these, the seekers of Church visibility, of His own essential holiness and truth: "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true." How much need will they have to remember this!

Think of the

Church that is scattered, and which we would so desire to see restored: what are we to do for its restoration? Shall we proclaim to them all, that it is the will of God that His people should be together? Shall we spread the Lord's table, free from all sectarian names and terms of communion, and fling wide open our doors, and invite all that truly love the Lord to come together? For in fact the "one loaf" upon the Table does bear witness that we are "one bread, one body"; and there is no other body that faith can own, but the "body of Christ." Why should we not then do this? I answer: "Tell them by all means that the Lord has welcome for all His own: that is right; but tell them it is the 'Holy and True' who welcomes, and that He cannot give up His nature." How has the true Church become the invisible Church? Has it been without sin on her part? is it her misfortune, and not her fault? Take the guidance of these seven epistles in the book of Revelation, and trace the descent from the loss of first love in Ephesus to the sufferance of the woman Jezebel in Thyatira, and on through dead Sardis to the present time: can we just ignore the past, and simply, as if nothing had happened, begin again? What would it be but mere hardness of heart to say so?

Suppose your invitation of "all Christians"

accepted, and that in the place in which you give out your notice, you are able really to assemble all the members of Christ at the table of the Lord; - bring them together with their jarring views, their various states of soul, their entanglements with the world, their evil associations: - how far, do you suppose, would the Lord's table answer to the character implied in its being the table of the Lord? How far would He be indeed owned and honoured in your thus coming together? With the causes of all the scattering not searched out and judged, what would your gathering be but a defiance of the holy discipline by which the Church was scattered? what would it be but another Babel?

Can you think that visible unity is so dear to Christ, as that He should desire it apart from true cleansing and fellowship in the truth?

Surely this address to Philadelphia is completely in opposition - in designed opposition - to all such thoughts. Why should it be that here we have not the Lord presenting Himself as One who "has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" - plenitude of spiritual power, and His people in His keeping - but as "the Holy and True"? Strange indeed it may seem that dead Sardis should be thus reminded, and not Philadelphia! But to Philadelphia such an utterance would seem as if it meant no less than the recovery of the Church by their means. To Sardis it is manifestly exhortation instead of assurance. Philadelphia, even as Philadelphia, needs rather the warning that they must not mistake, in any sanguine interpretation of present blessing, what the days are in which they live, and that

they must guard against such a conception of practical unity as would set aside all the value of unity. How perfect in its place is every word of God!

Let us notice then, again, what the Lord commends.

"Thou hast a little power, - hast kept my word and not denied My Name, - hast kept the word of my patience." Every one must remark these "My"s, which continue to the end of the address. They show that the true Philadelphian clings to Christ Himself, to His word, His person, His strangership in the present, His certainty of the future. His work is to obey Christ, hold fast the truth as to Him, be waiting for Him. The work of gathering may, so to speak, look after itself, if this be done. We are to be united by the Centre, and not merely or mainly by the circumference. And thus alone can there be anything that shall have fruit for God or commendation from Him who here speaks to His people.

It is easily to be seen then how the Philadelphian character may be lost by a false conception of it.

"Brotherly love" is a precious thing when it is really what it purports to be; but see where the apostle, in his exhortation, puts it. "Add to your faith," he says, "virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly love." If this be the order, (and as order he gives it,) how many things are needed to precede its proper development! No doubt all these things are in the Christian in some sense at the beginning, just as petals, stamens, and other parts of the flower, are wrapped up in the bud before it opens. But there is a relation of these to one another shown in the order of appearance; and that is what is important here.

No "love of brethren" no Philadelphia - is true, save as these things are found in it. For it all, Christ must be both sap and sun; and this is what the word in Revelation emphasizes.

Philadelphian gathering is to Christ, then; and it is Christ who gathers. A common faith, a common joy, a common occupation, find their issue in that which is the outward sign of the spiritual bond that unites us. Who that knows what gathering at the Lord's table means would suppose that communion there could be other than hindered by the presence of what was not communion, any more than harmony could be increased by discord? Of want of intelligence I am not speaking: there is no discord in the presence of a babe; but an unexercised conscience, a heart unreceptive of divine things, - which means receptive of how much else! - how must the power of the Spirit be hindered by them! The Scripture rule for times of declension is - "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. ii. 22); and the way to find these is not to advertise for them, but to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace" walking on the road in which they are walking.

It results,

I'm confident, that if we really seek the blessing of souls, we shall guard with more carefulness, not with less, the entrance into fellowship. We shall see that it be "holy and true," as He is with whom all fellowship is first of all to be. Careless reception is the cause of abundant trouble, and may be of general decline. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Men cannot walk together, except they are agreed. When trial comes, those that have never been firm of purpose,

never, perhaps, convinced of the divine warrant for the position they have taken, scatter and flee from it with reckless haste, carrying with them, wherever they go, an evil report of what they have turned their backs upon. Such persons are, generally speaking, outside of any hope of recovery, and often develop into the bitter enemies of the truth.

We are incurring a great responsibility if we press or encourage people to take a position for which they are not ready; in which, therefore, they act without faith. It is just in principle what the apostle warns us of, the danger of leading others without an exercised conscience, to imitate a faith that is not their own. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." No wonder there are wrecks all along the track of a movement for which this is so constantly required, and in which so many are endeavouring to walk without it. Ought we not to remember that it is the Holy and the True that is seeking fellowship with us? and that nothing but what answers to this character can abide the test that will surely come?

"Thou Hast Not Denied My Name"

It is a revelation of Christ's Word, and the freshened sense of relationship to Christ - the new realization of what He is to His people, - that practically produce Philadelphia. Every genuine revival, as I have already said, necessarily has something of the spirit of this, - tends, at least, towards it. Of course, when I speak of revival, I do not mean simply the conversion of souls, even in numbers: the revival I am speaking of is of saints, not sinners, although naturally the effect of this will be seen in a new power in the gospel for the conversion of sinners. But when interest in the word of God is revived, and the love of Christ is felt in new power in the soul, increased communion with Him will issue in the "communion of saints" being more valued and more sought after, and the spirit of obedience will cause the "yoke" with those who are not Christ's to be an intolerable bondage.

If such a revival were felt in the whole Church of God, how surely would every chain of this kind be broken by the energy of the Spirit of God, and the whole Church be brought together! But such a thing has never taken place, and the consequence of local and partial revivals has been therefore in fact more or less to separate Christians from Christians, - those who can go on with the world and with the worldly from those who cannot do so. Hence every such movement has to bear the reproach, on the part both of the world and of many Christians quite as much as the world, of causing divisions, which it is true it does and must do, and which the Lord's words declare he came to do - not to send

peace, but a sword, and to make a man's foes to be 'those of his own household.'

In a state of things like this, compromise and expediency soon begin to do their fatal work. That which the Spirit of God alone can accomplish is taken in hand by the wisdom of man, Scripture itself being perverted to its use - for they cannot do without Scripture. 'Froth must he partly clipped, partly suppressed, or else not insisted on charity will he invoked, and liberal tolerance, with promise of wider and speedy results, - the seed in this case needing no "long patience" on the part of the husbandman. From such attempts have arisen the religious confederacies of the day, assuming soon the large proportions which seem so triumphantly to justify them, but in all which the "dogma," the unyielding truth of God, tends to be thrown out or ignored, that men may keep company with one another.

For the truth, somehow, - the uncompromising truth - does seem to rouse men, and set them at variance. The jarring sects of Protestantism, have they not arisen from those 'private interpretations' of an open Bible, which wiser Romanism has condemned in favour of what is strangely affirmed to be catholic,' even while it is plain that put it to the free, unconstrained votes of the "Christian world," it could never be. Rome's word, however, is not compromise, but authority.

Protestantism too loves not the word Compromise, but rather tolerance; you must be liberal in divine things, where you have no rights; for the word of God, too, claims authority, and of the highest kind, as is evident, if it be that. Scripture is not, in that sense, tolerant: as how could he be who could write, "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge

that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord"? (i Cor. XIv. 37.)

Scripture therefore - spite of Sunday-schools and what not - tends with its sharp-edged teaching to be in a certain disrepute to-day. As men did with Him of whom it speaks, in His day, so now: they bow it out. With studied respect of manner, they seldom allow it to dictate to them where its voice is unsupported by some other authority, or where obedience will cost them much. Few there are, it is to be feared, who are absolutely ready to receive and welcome all the truth of God; for, there is really no other reason, and can be none, why all Christians are not of one mind to-day, than this, that they do NOT In heart desire at all costs to follow the truth. "He that willeth to do God's will," says the Lord Himself, "shall know of the doctrine" (John vii. 17). How could it be otherwise, if God be what He is? But then what does the confusion abroad in Christendom at the present time, tell of the condition of soul prevalent among the true people of God themselves. For the most part, it is not strife about doctrines that is so characteristic, as indolence and indifference about them. Some, very active in eager evangelism, have given them up pretty much, as only hindering their work. If they pause to realize the meaning of this, they will have to own that God has made a mistake, or they have; - God's word is not in harmony with His work; - He from whose love to man the gospel has come, cannot have foreseen the effect of His truth! And how many, on the other hand, have just received what has come down to them from their fathers without exercise of soul about it! without following the apostle's well-known rule, to "prove all things, hold fast that which is good"!

As a consequence, many things carelessly received make Scripture, in all that is inconsistent with these, really unintelligible; and this lies really as an accusation, though they would not openly formulate it, against Scripture itself. It cannot fail to be so. The searching it, produces but perplexity. They hold to it in general - give it up as to minor details: would be astonished, could they seriously examine it, how much of what they believe God has given to them has thus exhaled altogether; - how much is but as a dead thing - dead without any lamentation over it - not the living word of God at all.

And this affects even the most central truths, - truths about the Person of Christ, truths about His work. How many conflicting views about atonement prevail in the so-called orthodox denominations What is the remedy? why, leave out the "views" then, say many: do not define. But suppose Scripture does? This will mean in that case, "don't go too deep into Scripture." And that is what is at the bottom; we should know surely whose voice it is that suggests this. It is one and the same voice that says to one person, "Be humble: don't imagine that your opinion is better than anybody else's"; and to another, "Be charitable: good men differ about these things"; and to another, "Don't contend for this: you will make enemies, you will lose your friends"; and to another, "You are not learned: don't occupy yourself with what requires a theologian to decide about"; and to another, "The Church has settled this"; and - getting more and more the dragon's voice - "Oh, but surely there are mistakes in the Bible : you do not mean to contend for verbal inspiration?" So the form of the argument varies; but the voice is that of the "liar from the beginning," him who

"abode not in the truth"; and his aim is ever to discredit the truth. "Don't go too far." "Don't be too sure." "Don't be dogmatic." "Don't be uncharitable." The devil knows men well, and what is the chord in each that will be most responsive to his touch. He is a good chemist too, and can mix his poisons so that there shall be scarcely taste or smell of the principal ingredient: all the same it will do its work.

And amazing it is, the easy-going torpidity of Christians, that will allow their best blessings to be stolen under their eyes, and never discern it. In other matters they will be quite other men. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light"; but now, with a large number of Christians you shall find (and not insignificantly) in worldly matters all the wisdom of the world, and in the things that should be their own things as Christians, the most childish incapacity. I may seem to be wandering from what is before me, in dwelling upon these things; but in fact I am fully keeping it in mind all through, and that it is "he that hath ears to hear" that will listen to it. And the Lord insists upon this in all His addresses to these Asiatic churches.

What is the meaning of this word to Philadelphia, "Thou hast not denied My Name"? You have not, at any rate, denied it, my reader? I trust not, indeed: but perhaps you think of this as mere gross apostasy, or as the lapse under pressure of such days of persecution as have been, when a little incense thrown upon an altar to some heathen god would save one's life by abjuring Christianity. Few are tempted that way now, and you have no need to look closely at it: is that so? Yes, it may do, if we want to let ourselves off easily. But if

Philadelphia in its deeper application just applies to such professedly Christian times as these, then it will seem surely strange that the not having done what few among us have any strong temptation at all to do, should be, in the Lord's eyes, a special commendation of Philadelphia! As to this also, we need not in that case lay much emphasis upon the warning, "hold fast that which thou hast"; and overcoming will not be in this application difficult; - or in another view of it we may say, perhaps, will scarcely be possible, when there is for the mass no difficulty to "overcome."

Have we possibly, then, misinterpreted it? For one would say, rather, that there would be on the contrary some special and exceptional suitability in the commendation and warning both, which would infer some special liability, just on the part of Philadelphians, to this specific sin, - some special trial in this respect to which they would be exposed! Can that be true? Does it seem unlikely? In the gross form in which we may be disposed to take it, yes. But is the gross form then the true interpretation? can it be so, when it leads to such a result as to almost evacuate meaning from it, as applied to Philadelphia? What is it, to deny His Name? What is "His Name"? All names are significant in Scripture; but the names of God and Christ, how specially, how transcendentally significant! If God acts "for His Name's sake," that means, to declare what He is. If we are "gathered to Christ's Name" - which is the true form of the words (Matt. xviii. 20), "to," not "in," - it is because what we realize Him to be, draws us (each and all together) unto Him. "His Name" is thus the revealed truth of what He is. He is away from earth; and we have not Himself, visibly, to come to. But the truth of what He

is, draws us together, and as so drawn, we confess what He is to us, and so coming have the promise of His (spiritual) presence. This is how we are united together, as a wheel is; by the circumference surely; but if that were all - if it were the main thing - the wheel would have no strength: its strength depends above all, upon the centre; so our union is (in a way that transcends all that the figure can express) by the Centre, which Christ is to all of us: and this, in proportion as it is true, defines and secures also the circumferential union - that to one another. Carry this back to our subject: think of what Philadelphia stands for and expresses. If the gathering of Christians is in question in it, and it is to a true Christ (to the truth of what Christ is) they would be gathered, then what more central for the Philadelphian than not to deny this truth of what Christ is - this all-essential, all-sufficing Name Now another question - and let no one who values Christ treat it lightly: if there be a devil, the enemy of God and man, the constant and subtle opposer of all good, and with such knowledge as such a being may have, of what it is that he is opposing, how would he seek to corrupt and destroy such a movement as that of Philadelphia? The answer is not in the least doubtful: he would attack it at that central point upon which all depended: he would attack the truth of Christ, His Person and work. As surely as that is true, so sure is it that a main test for the Philadelphian would be the **CONFESSION OR DENIAL OF THE NAME of CHRIST**, the Centre of gathering.

Look at this all through, and see if I have strained the argument in any wise. See if any link in it is missing, or if any is insufficient. If it be not, let us take one most evident step further. These addresses are prophetic:

this particular address therefore is a prophecy. There is implied here then, in connection with this movement to recover (on principle) the Church of God, that there would be an attack of Satan upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the Centre of gathering. Has it been so? Brethren who have knowledge of the history of the last fifty years in relation to this movement, I cite you all to bear witness as to this before God: have there been questions affecting the Person of Christ and the gathering to His Name? I charge you, as you would listen to His word, to answer the question: has not history fulfilled this prophecy? And how then does the prophecy affect our position, whatever it may be, with regard to our Lord's own commendation here: "Thou hast not denied My Name"?

But again, let us remember that the great enemy of us all is one well versed in the ways of this terrible warfare. He has skill acquired in six thousand years' multiform experience. "He is a liar, and the father of it." The covert and the wile are his. Nothing is more common than to see him in the garb of sanctity; and he is familiar with the habit and the speech of love. He can appear as an angel of light, and his ministers be as the ministers of righteousness. He can be Satan, and denounce Satan; only putting Satan for God and God for Satan. Well may we look to our armour; well may we cleave to the word of God; well may we be "praying with all prayer"; well will it be, if in truth it can be said of us, that "we are not ignorant of his devices." All the world is on his side. The flesh, even in a Christian, pleads for him. Nor can we meet him with his own weapons, nor foil him by the adoption of his own tactics. In the encounter with him we have always to keep in mind what Proverbs says of

the "strange woman": "lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life, her ways are changeable, that thou shouldst not know them."

Let us fix this firm in our minds, that the Lord here, in commending Philadelphia for not denying His Name, assures us of what is the great danger in such controversies as have arisen. The great danger is lest the Philadelphian in his aim to have together the people of God should forget in some way the gathering Centre, should link himself with the denial of the Name of Christ. We shall look at "links," if the Lord will, by and by; but let us already anticipate the apostle's warning words that one who "receives" or even "greet" the man who "brings not this doctrine" (of Christ) is "partaker of his evil deeds" (2 Jno. io, ii); therefore that one who knowingly "greet" the denier of Christ's Name is "partaker" of that denial. The history - which here I do not give - of the first attack of the enemy makes undeniably clear where it began. And as to those affected by it, it is just as clear where alone any suspicion even of such denial, or of greeting of the deniers, has attached. One body there was (of those divided at that time) which even those separated from, did not and could not charge with such denial, or with any compromising adherence to those denying. The same could never be said of the other side: there, if anywhere, (and the attack of the enemy is certain,) the danger-signals of the prophecy alone display themselves. Satan here was certainly permitted to be the sifter of God's wheat, and he does well in that way what he takes in hand to do. Plenty of failure, no doubt, could be urged on both sides. Piety too could be urged on both. In a sieve things naturally get well mixed. So

much the more important is it to stand clear upon the ground given by the prophecy, and see that while on the one side men were pleading for the Centre, the other side was all the time thinking of the circumference. Both surely need to be maintained, and it is quite possible, of course, to err on all sides; yet he who holds fast to Christ will find that Christ is an attractive power for His people; it is Christ whom the Spirit of God glorifies; it is here that government of heart and mind is found. It is only from the centre that the circumference can be truly drawn. Philadelphia is neither praised nor blamed for her conduct in relation to the people of God, as we have seen: it is "My Word, My Name, My patience," that are spoken of: and to get His point of view is all- important.

If Christ be honoured, the Spirit of God is free, truth finds its place in relation to Him, and there is progress: souls can be led on. All that will, can judge in the case in question. The Spirit of God cannot be mistaken in this, or turned aside into other channels than those connected with the Rock from which the water flows. And here is a distinct and precious evidence of Christ's approval. Apart from this, the stream grows sluggish and dries up. Souls may be blessed and ministered to, for God is gracious; but the supply is elsewhere.

No one can, I think, deny these principles. If they are true, they will not mislead in honest application. Nor do I write a word for those who have no heart to make it.

The Question of Association

I turn aside for the present from the question of the doctrine of Christ, not as if there were no more to be said about it. There are counter charges and later developments which cannot be ignored; and I do not mean to ignore them. But already it will be seen that another matter has to be looked at in the light of Scripture, in order rightly to settle how far-reaching may be the guilt of the denial of Christ's Name. We have had in fact to refer just now to the question of association; but its importance demands a much closer examination, both to see how Scripture treats it, and that we may realize its moral significance also: this, of course, as Scripture puts it too. It is a question which is in such intimate relation to the whole character of things to-day as deeply to concern us all; and Scripture is distinctly against principles which are so inwrought into the whole texture of society to-day as to make it difficult to gain the attention of Christians for what is adverse to them Yet "the world passeth away;... and he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

The association of man with man is a divine necessity. The institution of the family recognized it from the beginning. The difference of capacity in men brings them necessarily together, the lack in one being met by another's efficiency. Union means ministry of each to each; the need of it being a most helpful discipline, the supply of it an appeal to affection and gratitude. The Church of God is an organization in which this principle is fully owned; a union founded upon both difference and unity: a body which is built up by that which "every joint

supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part." Sin which has come in is everywhere, however, that which transforms all good into evil: the greater the good, alas, the worse the evil. The union which obtains so largely to-day is mere confederacy; we may often call it indeed conspiracy. In it the individuality which God's union always provides for and maintains is interfered with, conscience is oppressed, evil is tolerated for supposed final good, morality is superseded by machinery. God's word as to it by Isaiah is: "Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. But sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." (Isa. 12, 13.)

Whether it be fear or whether it be greed that inspires the motive, the true fear of God is surely the one remedy for it all. This fear is the effectual purgation of all union from the evil which, if it be admitted, soon dominates and controls it; or else it sets God's free man loose from this control. Walking with Him, we cannot hold out the hand to him who refuses His will as sovereign. The end must be His end, and the way to it His way. To seek to join God with evil is only profanity.

Necessarily therefore our associations are of the greatest possible importance. They witness to the path on which (whatever our profession) we are ourselves walking. We can only "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Scripture is full therefore of warnings and instructions upon this. In the Church of God, where our relationship to one another is of His establishment, not of our own will, it is inevitable that the reconciliation of

holiness in our ways with the eternal bond that unites us with one another should cause serious perplexity. The world in which the Church is, is its entire opposite, and the evil in it is ever appealing to the kindred evil in the saints themselves. Its hostility is not so much to be dreaded as its friendship: its peace is nothing else but covert war. Between its "prince" and our own not even truce is possible.

Already in the apostle's time the epistle which gives us the order of the Church of God shows us this threefold influence at work upon it, The wisdom of the world, the lust of the flesh, the power of Satan, were already invading the sacred inclosure; and the apostle has afresh to stake off its boundary-lines and to repel the intruder. The foundation doctrine of the resurrection was being denied, and bringing their whole profession of Christianity into question. If such things could come in so soon in Corinth, as it were in the very presence of an apostle, how can we expect better times and to be permitted to escape necessary warfare? It is in his second epistle that he insists so earnestly that the yoke with unbelievers forfeits the enjoyment of the relationship to the Father as he would have us know it. We must come out from among them and be separate, and not touch the unclean thing, and then we have the assurance, "I will receive you, and be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." The peril of evil association could scarcely be more emphatically affirmed.

But it has been said that this has only to do with unbelievers, and does not define our attitude toward the children of God. We shall have to look therefore at texts which speak of these. But before doing so, I would pause

to deal with an argument which connects itself with such an objection.

It is urged that we must have direct Scripture, and not inference, to guide us in all these matters.

Now

Scripture gives us principles, and not a perfect code of divine law; and it necessitates inference at every step. Inference is inseparable from a rational life; and God Himself condescends to "reason" with His creatures. "Come, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." The argument against reason in the things of God has been carried to lengths which are as unscriptural as they are irrational. Where does Scripture decry any God-given faculty that man has? Nowhere. In speaking against what God has given, we speak, necessarily, against the Giver. Revelation everywhere honours God as the Creator by honouring His creation.

Sin has come in and perverted every faculty; but the work of God here is to purify and not destroy. When the soul begins to realize its relation to God, reason becomes most reasonable in accepting its creature-limit; and rationality pervades the life and character of the new man in Christ. One might as well say that if we have light, eyes become no matter, as decry reason in the things of God. It is only in the light that eyes are of use.

But moreover, God tests us by this very exercise of reason,- holds us responsible for having have our eyes open, and to use them honestly. This "exercise" the apostle speaks of as being what he found necessary, in order to have "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man" (Acts xxiv. x6). Exercise shows the man morally and spiritually awake; and by it he is kept in

health and vigour. God therefore insists upon the necessity of this, and acts with a view to its being maintained. Scripture is so written "that the man of God may be perfect";- not all the world, and not the drowsy and sleep-loving among Christians. Now let us apply these things to the apostle's words to the Corinthians, and we shall see that the refusal of such texts as having to do with fellowship among Christians is at bottom unspiritual and immoral. Does the principle involved in the question, "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" apply only to a yoke with unbelievers? Suppose we are all believers, may we accept a yoke with a believer, which implies that such communion is possible?

God is the same in His holiness, and in the requirements of His holiness, for one as for another, for saint and sinner alike: only that the sin of the saint is worse than that of the sinner, in proportion to the difference of light, and the grace which he has received. Thus then the unequal yoke may apply fully to a yoke between Christians, if one of these be allowing in himself the "unrighteousness" which cannot be gone on with in the unbeliever. Because men will not "infer," that in no wise hinders the just judgment of God as to the matter. The consequences of our acts will as surely follow as if we swallowed poison in the belief that it was wholesome food. How many have in fact found the disastrous effects of alliances, whether social, commercial, or religious, which they have permitted themselves to contract under the pacifying illusion that they were lawful because on both sides Christian. How many, so deluded, have woken up to find that after all, the question in the prophet was

a much deeper one than they had thought: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" In what various ways these principles affect our life is easily apparent. Wives go with their husbands in that which they believe wrong before God, because the scripture, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord," is supposed to release them from all moral responsibility. "Children, obey your parents in all things," is similarly quoted to reverse the moral nature of things, and set the earthly tie above the divine one. We are told too, that we have no Scripture warrant for judging assemblies, when, if it be true, the sins of these are not to be accounted and treated as sin elsewhere is. All these are the fruits of an immoral principle, as should be plain. And how can those who advocate and practise such things escape the woe of the prophet upon "them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter"? (Isa. v. 20.) The eternal principles of God's government are against them; and the immutable holiness of the divine nature.

To return, however, to the

Scripture-teaching as to association.

The second epistle to Timothy gives us the last word of the apostle Paul, when the Church was already far gone in declension. There is no more talk of the Church as the "house of God," as in the first epistle. Though it was, no doubt, still that, he compares it rather, on the one side, to a "great house," with its vessels even for dishonourable uses; on the other, as it would seem, and in perfect moral congruity, to a house in ruins, of which still, however, the foundation stands. Notice the

inscription on the foundation-stone: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." Precious assurance! but what does it indicate? What but that the Church was lapsing really into "invisibility," save to the Eye of Him who can never fail to remember every one who in whatever feebleness has committed himself to Him for his salvation. But on the other side, what is the inscription ? Just when all the difficulties of the path are being fully apparent,- just when evil might seem to have prevailed, and some laxity to be almost unavoidable,- the clue-line for the path through all the tangle is found in this direction, simple as can be, straight as the undeflected ray of light, stable as the glorious throne of God: "And, let him that nameth the name of the Lord DEPART FROM INIQUITY."

Yes, thank God! here is the clue-line: here alone is absolute safety assured us. Let a man keep fast hold of this,- let him commit himself to it unhesitatingly, no matter what the question he is called to decide, individual, social, religious,-no matter what the issue may be,-no matter what may threaten him,- he may find his path through a desert-solitude, up over the most rugged mountain, down in the valley of death-shade, yet "the path of the just shall be as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Yes, because the light of heaven is upon it.

Notice how the sacred Name that we have been thinking of is here: if one but name "the Name of the Lord "- so the editors read it,-the Name of Him to whom, in the face of man, he is to be subject- then he must depart from iniquity (unrighteousness). But what is unrighteousness? What is righteousness? Ah, you can

only measure this aright as you think of the place in which the blood of Christ has put you,-of the grace that has been shown you, and which you are to show,-of the blessed path in which you are called to follow Him: here assuredly, simple as is the principle, you will find its working out to be enough to give you plenty of exercise from day to day.

But let us go on with the apostle:

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." This shows us the disorder, and the rule in a time of disorder, both with regard to separation from the evil, and with regard to association with what is good. "Those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" are clearly the same as those who "naming the name of the Lord, depart from unrighteousness"; and thus the man who purges himself from vessels to dishonour, finds his own class. But a question here arises, which I think has not been sufficiently considered: are the vessels to honour and the vessels to dishonour the only two classes here? If it be only those who purge themselves from the latter who belong to the former, then it is certain that all unpurged must be classed as vessels to dishonour, or there must be a third class, simply left aside, as not meet for the Master's use: a solemn condition in either aspect!

If it be asked, Are we to apply this to fellowship in the assembly? there is manifestly no exception. The following of "faith, love, peace," with those purged from evil associations, implies that the unpurged cannot be in the assembly. If these are unfit for the Master's use, they cannot have their place there where each and all are plainly to be used by Him, The members of the body are by the fact of being such in responsibility to edify one another. If they are unfit for this, what disqualifies them for the one thing, disqualifies them for the other. If they cannot call on the Lord out of a pure heart, in what way can they call upon him? The assembly, if of one mind with the Lord, has to affirm His judgment. The principle is again exemplified here: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" The form of statement of it, put thus as a question, implies the clearness and positiveness of the answer. Every one's conscience, if it be right itself, is expected to respond.

Fellowship must be really such. It is the voice of the "Holy and the True" that is heard here. Let evil be sanctioned by one or many, fellowship with Christ must cease. We cannot walk with God, and go on with sin.

Thus Corinth with the incestuous person in the midst, was leavened by their guilty allowance of it:

They had to purge the leaven out by self-judgment and separation from the evil, that they might be a "new lump." They were not, in their then condition, a new lump. The leaven then was in the lump, not in the individual merely. In Christ they were unleavened; and they must represent in their practical condition what grace had made them positionally to be. This is a well-worn topic; and yet it needs still to be insisted on: for

people still venture to say that, despite the allowance of evil in their midst, Corinth was yet unleavened. And if it were not, some add, it would be too late to purge out the leaven. The last assertion carries the figure far indeed, and denies the power of divine grace for every condition that can be found among the people of God. Yet it is true that there seems to have been something exceptional in the state of things at Corinth, which can be pleaded for no other assembly since. It may have been the fact that as to them they did not as yet clearly know what to do,- that as yet such a case had not been provided for. But they might have mourned over it before God, that "he that had done this deed might be taken away from" them. He gives them the command now as to it, that none might be able to say they had not this any more.

They were to put away from among themselves that wicked person. Some object to saying "from the Lord's table." In fact, it goes further, to say, "from among yourselves." To put away from the table simply, might for the careless be perfectly consistent with treating the person so dealt with as, after all, one of themselves in other respects. The apostle shows how much further it is to go, by adding, "with such an one, no, not to eat." There was to be a refusal of all association, such as even at an ordinary meal.

A leavened lump means something that in every part of it is capable of communicating leaven. That is, in fact, the idea in "old leaven:" it means a piece of the old lump which could be introduced into the new for that purpose. It shows us that every one who sanctions the retention of evil is really a "partaker" of the evil. He practically denies the holiness of God, and cannot therefore himself be holy. It is not any physical contact, of course, that has

wrought in this case. It is a corrupt and corrupting principle, that would associate the name of Christ with His dishonour, and in that sense deny His Name. Thus the Philadelphian is reminded that He is "the Holy and the True." But holiness is lost in communion with evil.

Purging out the evil means separation from it. Here it is the assembly acting. In Timothy, he that will be a vessel unto honour must purge himself from the vessels to dishonour: that is, he must at all costs separate himself. If the assembly stand in the way of this, then, - to keep a good conscience, he must separate from the assembly. In this, then, there is the judgment of an assembly, which some deny to be scriptural. And in this case, if we take part with him who has rightly separated himself, we, too, must separate ourselves; and thus judge the assembly. And if we do not take part with him, we are not with God.

We are forced, then, to judge; and to judge every individual in this leavened lump: to go with those who deny the holiness of God, is to be ourselves tin-holy; to deny the Name of Christ as the Holy and the True, is to cease to be Philadelphian.

"A Circle of Fellowship," or Independency?

Another question must now be considered, which unites itself to that which we have been just considering, We shall find that "independency" is one of the most successful means of evasion of scriptural discipline that could perhaps be imagined,- one of the most successful snares by which the children of God can be seduced into resistance to the will of God, while to themselves they seem to be standing only for the principles of the Word, against "confederacy," for purity, and unsectarian maintenance of the Body of Christ. We must therefore look seriously and with sufficient care into the matter: first, at what independency really is, and then at the fruits which make manifest the tree.

In its simplest and boldest form independency appears as the denial of any scriptural authority for any "circle of fellowship" outside of the individual gathering, wherever it may be; and this denial is made in the interests, as they imagine, of unsectarian recognition of the one Church only, which is the body of Christ. The formation and maintenance of any such circle is, they maintain, sectarian, and the adoption by such circle of a common discipline is Sectarianism full-blown. It constitutes the whole a "party," which may take the name of Christ, as some at Corinth did, and only be perhaps on that account to be the more avoided, as making that precious Name an instrument of division.

This charge is not, it may be, that of denying the

Name of Christ, but it approaches it so nearly as to make it of the most serious consequence. Those who hold to a circle of fellowship and yet refuse the adoption of a sectarian name, with what is implied in this, can neither afford to give up their claim of gathering simply to the Name of Christ, nor accept the truth of what is charged against them. Let us examine then what is meant by these assertions, neither shaken from our convictions by their boldness, nor refusing to bring all these to the test of Scripture, as often as may be needful. That which is true will only gain in its hold on us by every fresh examination, and the only danger is in this being lightly and not thoroughly carried out. We should be thankful for any suggestions that awaken fresh inquiry.

Now what is a "circle of fellowship"? That all such is not forbidden must be believed by the objector himself, if he have but "two or three " gathered with himself in any local assembly. For this, I suppose, is not the whole "assembly of God" there, but something indefinitely less than this. Yet, here there must be a within and without, a being, in some sense, of us or not of us,-a something which is saved from being a party, not by having no walls or door, but by its having no arbitrary, no merely human, terms of admission. If it have no terms, then it is a mere rabble of lawless men, and as such to be refused by every Christian.

If you say, "No, it is Scripture to which we are subject," that brings in at once the implication that it is Scripture as you see it, not as your fellow-Christians see it; and you take your place as before the Lord, to be judged of Him in regard to this. Your being a separate somewhat, a "circle of fellowship," does not constitute you a party:

you own Christians everywhere, as members of the body of Christ, and receive them wherever a scriptural hindrance to their reception does not exist, and you speak of being gathered simply to Christ's Name, without an idea that you are making the Name of Christ a badge, or sign, or instrument, of division.

Well, then, in the place, at least, there exists a gathering of Christians that I can recognize,- I suppose, ought to recognize,- apart from the whole body of Christians in the place. I say, "ought," because I have duties in regard to the assembling of ourselves together; and here alone I find those with whom I can assemble, no unscriptural condition being imposed on me. Were there another assembly in the same place and of the same character, there, I should have to ask why they were not together: for the sin of schism is a grave one in Scripture, and I should have of necessity to refuse this.

If, then, in this place, I repeat, there is a gathering that I can own, and must,- suppose, now, I went elsewhere and lived - found perhaps there also one that I had equally to own as gathered to Christs Name alone, would it be right for me in the new place to refuse to own as a separate company, those in that from which I came, whom, when I was there, I had to own, and whom, if I were now there, I should have to own? Is it possible that my going from New York to Boston should make that wrong for me at Boston which at New York would be quite right, and if I went back there, would be right again? If so, that is independency in earnest; or else it is the most curious shifting of right and wrong that one can conceive of; morality shifting every few miles of the road, whichever way I travel. And yet, if not, we are connected in principle, to a "circle of fellowship"!

The recognition of each other by such gatherings throughout the world is, therefore, right; and every thing opposed to it is false and wrong. Nay, it is impossible to maintain practically, if principles are of any value to us. For, were I taking the journey spoken of, must I not inquire for those who are of one mind with us in Boston? and would those in Boston expect anything else of me? To refuse a circle of fellowship may be held as a theory: the fact will always be discordant with the theory. The theory itself cannot be truthfully accepted by any one who has given it any sober reflection, except it mean independency of the grossest and narrowest kind; that is, associating where one will, and recognizing obligations nowhere but where I will. And this would be indeed the most perfect sectarianism that could well exist.

But we are to recognize the whole body of Christ! Surely, but not their unscriptural associations. In the interests of the body of Christ I refuse denominations; but in the same interests I am bound to accept the circle of unsectarian fellowship. The gracious words which, providing for a day of failure and confusion, sanction the two or three gathered to the Lord's blessed Name, sanction such gatherings in every place, and therefore a circle of such gatherings. It would be as sectarian to refuse identification with these as to take our place with the various denominations. Nay, it would be more so. Nor would it save us from this, to say we were acting for the good of the whole Church of God, when from Scripture itself the disproof is so easy.

Now, another step.

To accept these is to accept their discipline. For the Lord's sanction of the gathering is the express sanction of their discipline. Of course, I do not mean by that that they can add to Scripture, or invent a character of discipline that is not found there; nor yet that He could sanction what might be a mistaken judgment. He is the Holy and the True, the Lord and Master of His people always: and that is quite enough to say as to all this. But authority for discipline these "two or three" have; and woe to him who resists its rightful exercise:

"If he hear not the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican" is said of just such feeble gatherings as these.

It is plain that precisely the same thing is to be said for the discipline as for the gathering itself: if it is to be respected at A where it is exercised, it is just as much to be respected at B or at C. If it be the decision of a local matter, then the Lord has plainly put it into the hands of those who are in circumstances to judge of it aright, though protest and appeal are surely to be listened to, and they are bound to satisfy consciences where honestly exercised about it.

As to a question of truth, as such it affects all consciences; it can be put before all: no local gathering has authority in any such matter; it would be making a creed to be subscribed. The truth as to Christ is a deeper and more vital matter, for we are gathered to His Name. Where truth of this kind is subverted the gathering exists no more, except as an instrument in the enemy's hand, and is to be refused, with all who take part with it.

If on the other hand, the question be of facts, then those who have them are bound (if these affect more than the local gathering) to make them known to their brethren; and here a circular letter may rightly have its place, not to establish a rule or principle of action, but as a witness: which of course is open to question, as all facts are, if there be contrary evidence, or that given be insufficient. No circular has authority in itself: it is purely a question of facts and of the credibility of the testimony.

With these limitations, which are the results of the frailty and fallibility which are common to us all, we have necessarily to own a circle of fellowship and the discipline connected with it, if we would be free from the charge of real independency.

And real independency is not of God, but always and everywhere acts against Him. It is to make the members of the same body say to each other, "we have no need of you," and to deny the unity of the Spirit which should pervade the body. The more we lament and refuse the sectarianism which exists, the more are we compelled, and shall rejoice to own the body of Christ wherever possible. And this circle of fellowship, while it is not the "body," furnishes us with the means of owning this in a truthful and holy way, so far as the state of ruin in which the Church exists permits it to be done. With love to all Christ's own,- with an open door for the reception of all according to the conditions of truth and holiness,- such a circle is not sectarian, but a protest against it, while the meeting that refuses connection with it is sectarian in fullest reality. And this is what is meant by the "ground" of the one body. It is as different as possible from any claim to be the one body, and does not in the least imply

any sectarian conditions of intelligence in order to communion. The maintenance of a common discipline is in no wise sectarian, but part (and an essential part) of that communion itself: absolutely necessary if the holiness of God be the same thing wherever it is found, and not a thing for the "two or three" anywhere to trifle with as they list.

Independency, in setting aside the practical unity of the Church of God, sets aside a main guard of holiness itself. It makes this no object of common care; it does not seek common exercise about it. It releases from the sense of responsibility as to the house of God: it is my own house I am to keep clean after my own fashion. And this real laxity as to the people of God at large (but which is so consoling to an unexercised conscience, that it is the great charm undoubtedly to multitudes to-day) naturally has the effect of lowering one's estimate of holiness altogether, and so prevents my own house being kept really clean.

Where, however, a circle of fellowship is in fact maintained, along with and spite of the protest against it, or where there is not the maintenance of a common discipline - where perhaps as the natural fruit of independency also, the unholy principle is contended for that an assembly cannot be judged for that which would compel the judgment of an individual, there, as is natural to expect, any local discipline almost can be evaded by a little dexterity. If the gathering at B will not receive you from A, it will from C, and C will receive you from A. No one is safe anywhere from the violation of a discipline which he himself recognizes as a scriptural one. Any particular person, if he be not too prominent, becomes lost to the eye amid the maze of bewildering

differences. He who has conscience, and would fain be clear, has soon to resign himself to a general hope that what looks so like confusion will in the end conserve the interests of holiness; or in despair, to wash his hands of what he cannot avoid.

Yet it is an ensnaring system; for in this way pessimism and optimism both can find apology for it, and go on with it. One gets free of an amazing amount of trouble; and while not seeming to have given up all ecclesiastical ties, as many have, yet be practically as free as they for the gospel and from the wearying responsibility of being one's brother's keeper. Why should we be? when we only get our trouble for our pains, find a narrow path instead of the broad, open one, which is so pleasant to all of us, and for this have only to shut our eyes at the proper time, and ignore what it seems we cannot help. And in fact the countless small breaches of independency make less show than the terrible rents Which we are exposed to otherwise. Why not let this sad-faced Merarite go, with his pins and cords of the tabernacle always getting into entanglement, and be content with Kohath and with Gershom?

Still, if the TABERNACLE OF THE LORD is to be set up in the wilderness, how shall we do without the pins and cords?

In result it will be found that it is the truth of God which suffers, and tends to pass away and be lost. What wonder when we begin with choosing what we will have of it, and what we will discard? Fellowship becomes a thing of most uncertain quality: and what wonder, if obedience to the Word have anything to do with fellowship? Worship is largely displaced in behalf of

service: for we have lost the necessary pins and cords. We may go on with the help of what truth we can still borrow and find room for; but the truth tends somehow continually to slip away from us; and in the jangle of many utterances, it is ever getting to be of less account.

One's voice may be little heard in a day like this; but I would do what I can to press upon the people of the Lord first of all their Master's claim. I press that this independency, little as one may imagine it, little as many may care to entertain it even as a question, means ultimately shipwreck to the truth of Christ, because it means independency of Him. One may find in it plenty of associates, for it makes little demands upon one and gives the kind of liberty which is so coveted today. The authority of Christ is not in it. It may support itself by the help of other names - names in repute as Christians too- and be in honor. It cannot have the commendation which Philadelphia, spite of its "little power," finds from her gracious Lord:- "THOU HAST KEPT MY WORD, AND NOT DENIED MY NAME."

Clerisy and Ecclesiasticism

There is no position that we can take, however right it may be, that will free us from dangers that, in a world which is Satan's world, yawn for us on every side. We have no sooner escaped them in one direction than we are made to realize that we have only thereby drawn nearer to them in another. The church is truly militant. To have learned our place in the ranks is a very different thing from being withdrawn from the battle. Nay, it is those who are with God who will be most of all the object of the enemy's attack; and God permits us to learn war, that thereby every spiritual sense may be compelled into activity, that we may "by reason of use have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil," and to make us learn thereby the value of what is our own, as men realize the value of what they have been in peril of losing.

In Israel's wilderness journey, all the people were in camp. The dangers by which they were surrounded were dangers for all alike. And in Christianity, in proportion as the warfare is more purely spiritual, so does it come nearer to us all. There is no non-combatant class. There are none by sex or in any other way exempted from the drill and discipline and actual encounter. Just as every Christian is a priest, and every Christian is a minister of Christ, so every Christian is a soldier of Christ, and must have the knowledge of his weapons, and the nerve and dexterity only to be acquired by practice, and must understand the tactics of the foe he faces.

There are leaders, of course. In Israel every one was ranged under his standard and his captain. But it is

important that we should realize in this the great difference between the fleshly and the spiritual warfare. In the former, the responsibility assumed by the leader is correspondingly the acquittal from re-sponsibility of those that follow him. In this case you have nothing but admiration for the unhesitating devotion of those that go forward, even to destruction, at the will of another; knowing full well, perhaps, that "Some one has blundered."

In the spiritual warfare one can have pity for such, but no admiration. The responsibility of the leader takes not one atom of responsibility from the follower. And if he is misled he is guilty for being misled. He has not only compromised himself, but the whole cause with which he is identified; and he is guilty: just because there is really One only and infallible Leader for His people, whose voice is to be heard every where amid all the din of the battle-field; and every lesser leader has only to make men listen to that Voice;-every one of these has to say, "Follow me, even as I also follow Christ."

If we value the welfare of God's people, we must press responsibility upon them to the full; and that none can save them from it, in any part of Christian practice. And yet this is what the great mass of even Christian men and women seek in some way or other, escape from. They believe largely in the practicability of substitution in almost every line of Christian activity; and in all that concerns the assembly especially, this principle avails to blind the eyes and lead astray the steps of God's people to an extent that calls for the most energetic and decisive repudiation of it on the part of every one whom the Lord has given any ability to influence the minds of his fellows. What does it proceed from but that state of

spiritual sluggishness and torpor to which we may apply the words of the wise man, twice uttered in the book of Proverbs (vi. xxiv, 33): "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man."

Christian, whoever it may be that reads this, suffer none to stand between your soul and Christ. He alone is your Master; to Him alone you must give account. The vigour, the brightness, the faithfulness, of your life depend upon how you abide in the place of dependence on Him alone. Not, of course, that you are to refuse the help that He would give you through another: that would be mere pride and self-sufficiency of heart. God has given us each to the other for all the help that we can give each other. Let not that thought be weakened in the least. But oh, let us remember that we fall into one of the most subtle and successful snares of the enemy when we allow the esteem we have for another, the rightful confidence in his genuineness, wisdom, piet, or aught else, to make him the director of our consciences in the things of God. It is Romanism in principle: for Romanism, all through, is nothing less than giving Christ a human "vicar," a substitute to whom, as if He were far off from us, we give His place.

We must seek no substitute for ourselves, we must have no substitute for Christ. We must not falsify the blest relationship into which we have been brought with Him. We must be for Him wholly. We must be with Him wholly. We must have nothing secular in our lives. Least of all must we consecrate another to fill the offices that we have vacated.

But this is what clerisy means,- the official taking up by a class among Christians of what the rest, and these the mass, have given up to them. It means the unspiritualizing of the mass - the "laity"- who resign the duties for which they are unfitted into hands more capable:- give up, that is, so much of their relationship to Christ, to be correspondingly freer for the world,- for its demands upon them Not, of course, that people think it out in this way; the mass of us have grown up in such an atmosphere, and we are apt to know little of how it cleaves to us. Nay, if we have measurably escaped from it, let but our spiritual warmth be chilled a little, and almost insensibly, and perhaps quite informally, we drop into it again.

To take up one point,- in which, if anywhere, also it may seem to have some shadow of Scripture for it, but only that,- does not sex seem to have something to do with conscience among us still? is this not really considered more a masculine characteristic than a feminine? With regard, for instance, to the discipline carried out in an assembly, is it always a matter of course that the women are as much exercised about it as the men? Nay, are they always admitted, even, to have as much title to be exercised?

Yet they are responsible for every such act, and if they take part in it with a bad conscience, must feel the effect of this in their whole spiritual life; nay, if unexercised, they are making it a small matter whether that which they do is according to God or not, and must have a dull conscience, if not a bad one. Of those cases in which they have been taught that matters of this nature are outside their province, because of the apostle's word that they were not to speak in public assembly, I

scarcely need to speak. It is as much as to say that they are either not part of the assembly, or that they are not moral beings.

But is it not true that women do very much incline to take the place that is here assigned to them; and whatever the motives, is it not a grave mistake? does it not induce a habit which is sure to cleave to them with regard to other things, and from them spread among the men also, until a large part of the assembly even merely confirm the judgment of their leaders, and the reign of clerisy is in this respect practically established? If questions graver than ordinary come now before them, their incapacity will only become the more apparent. The conscience habitually unexercised will not be found to possess the ability for judgment which can only come through exercise. The mere human motives which have always swayed them, will, for the most part, sway them still. They will be carried by arguments which derive their force mainly from the people that use them. Or they will drift, and perhaps break up, under the influence of family and social ties. Drifting is always favourable in the end to stranding and breaking up, simply because there is no intelligent guidance of the vessel. And this is only truer in spiritual than in natural things, because divine wisdom does not govern, is only, at the most, formally sought after all. In the divisions which have been among us, this has every where intensified the evil, as it was certain to do. Christian men and women, exercised before God, will necessarily walk together, act together; but the unintelligent followers of other leaders, when God permits the inevitable collision to test their state, fall asunder with these, if they do not break up into much smaller

fragments. A spiritual state of the mass would, to a large extent, hold fast the leaders; who, just as that, naturally lead the divisions; who, sensibly or insensibly, have in fact formed them. The mass are responsible, just for that helpless leaning on them, which has helped their fall, just because they have lost the One Voice, which never can divide - never can be in contradiction to itself - amid the many voices so apt to be discordant. And this is clerisy,- a state of spiritual declension, first of all, from Christ,- and which can never be remedied, therefore, by any external application, but only by the return of souls to their allegiance. He must be Master and Lord of every one of His own, in every detail of individual and collective life, and we must allow no substitute,- no "vicar."

We must look beyond the actors in these divisions, then. There was a state of things which favoured, yea, necessitated them. Wherever you find a state of things in which there is an unspiritual, unexercised mass, who can be wheeled into line at the bidding of some trusted man, or men, with at best slight knowledge of the facts, perhaps also with knowledge as slight, of the principles which are concerned with them,- there is the state of things which is at the bottom of the trouble. There is clerisy, and there is ecclesiasticism: these two things are but the complements of one another; and they exist all around us among those who have a horror of them in their developments elsewhere, while they know not that they are cherishing the very thing which has produced them.

This is no imagination of my own: it is the saddest reality. You will hear intelligent Christians say something like this with regard to things in which they have taken

definite sides with their party - and I let the word stand, offensive as it rightly is, because for those who can say so, it is but as with a party they have acted: "Well, we did not ourselves know much about these things: Mr. - looked into them, and we all had confidence in Mr.-," and so on. Sometimes - and not unfrequently indeed - and where widespread division has taken place, you may find that numbers of people have never known at all, even by the representation of another, what was in question, and every thing that would have enlightened them has been kept from getting into their hands! How can the commendation apply to such: "Thou hast kept My word," when they neither know, nor cared to know, to what, or in what way, His word applied?

Of course there are many decisions of an assembly, - nay, the mass of them - which, as with regard to local matters, must be reached there upon the spot, and ought never to be carried round. Of such things I do not speak. But these are not the matters that ordinarily cause any wide or lasting division. What does so is usually some question of truth or principle, as to which it seems not even yet to be understood by many, that the local assembly has no binding authority at all for others. Of course, if an errorist be in their midst, and they are satisfied that he subverts the foundations, their duty is simple: they must clear themselves. But appeal may be taken from their decision to the word of God; and the consciences of Christians every where are bound to consider the appeal. The judgment of an assembly in this case has no force whatever, except as they can produce the evidence of the evil which has necessitated their action. And with the doctrine before one clearly, such a decision has no binding power at all. The word of God is

the charter under which the assembly acts, and is above all its actions. The Church does not teach, or define doctrine: that is, again, the heresy of Rome. And the very semblance of power in its hands to set forth what is to be received among Christians is to be refused by every one who would be loyal to Christ Himself. Here individual exercise is therefore necessitated and imperative. We cannot bide from it behind one another. "Thou hast kept My word -" My word "- rings in our ears.

The truth committed to Christians is the most important trust that they can have. If of Israel it could be said, "What advantage has the Jew?... chiefly, that unto them were committed the oracles of God,"

- what then, must be the value of such an inheritance as is ours in this respect? And, if God has suffered a few to return to something like the simplicity that obtained at the beginning, to recognize the common relationship of Christians to one another; if He has freed us in measure from the traditions of men, and from human inventions in the things of God, it is to enjoy and profit by the unadulterated word of Christ. It is all we have for blessing. The Spirit of God, whose presence with us and authority in the assembly it has taught us to realize, is characterized for us by the Lord Himself as the "Spirit of truth." His great work on earth is to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us. If He be also the "Holy Spirit "- holiness is the "holiness of truth;" sanctification is by the truth. If we are taught of God to love one another, this Philadelphian spirit is shown us by the very apostle of love to be "love in the truth" and "for the truth's sake." Men are learning to talk of the "unity of Christendom," and they are proving by many experiments, the practicability of bringing masses of

Christians together, to associate and unite together for many good ends. But who can expect anything else than that by all this the truth as a whole must be set aside to maintain good fellowship? Differences must be avoided, even gross error condoned, and if "evil communications corrupt good manners" still, as they did of old, what must be the end of such association without even the guard imposed by the discipline- if there be yet a discipline-maintained in the churches?

On the other hand, if the Church is to maintain the truth, this can only be done by allowing full liberty for the truth to maintain itself, without sectarian restriction of any kind. Where the "doctrine of Christ" is held, and thus the gathering to His name is guarded, Scripture warrants no further restriction on the part of the assembly. It may, of course, always refuse for itself to listen to what is merely unprofitable and vain; but the truth only gains by being trusted as having full power to speak with its own authority to the heart and conscience of the saint. "Let the prophets speak, and let the rest judge," says the apostle: "prove all things; hold fast that which is good." The exercise of conscience thus is for blessing to all. Those who can go to sleep under the not to be disputed creed, are waked up by the discussion. The relations and consequences of truths are searched out and manifested. Have we not been too much afraid of that which, while it is reverent and brotherly in its character, tends ever to make the truth a present and living issue, and therefore to give it power? If God had seen the creed to be the better way of maintaining this, would He not have given it?

Heresy

But thus we have reached this formidable word "heresy," and must examine what Scripture says about it. Not that there is much difficulty in what Scripture says: the difficulty is in what has been attached to it from elsewhere.

The word for "heresy" is, as frequently as not, rendered "sect" in our common version. The "sect" of the Pharisees, the "sect" of the Sadducees, (Acts V. 17 XV. 5,) show us the general thought. These were not divisions in the sense of separation from Judaism, but doctrinal parties in it. When Paul speaks of having "after the straitest sect of our religion, lived a Pharisee," he acknowledges other sects of our religion, and certainly could not have meant to use the word in any offensive manner. The impossibility of using the word "heresy" in these cases shows how little our modern idea of it can be taken as that of the New Testament. Christianity was looked at in its beginning as but a similar "sect"- the "sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts xxiv. 5); and it is to be remembered that Christians were not yet separated from the Jewish worship. When the apostle therefore before Felix confesses that "after the way which they call 'heresy,' so worship I the God of my fathers" (Acts xxiv. 14), we must not import these newer ideas into it. They would have used the same word of "parties" to which they themselves belonged; and that was the force of the word,- literally, a "choice," an "adherence." Those who used it did not mean to decide by it as to right or wrong, but simply to classify as different the schools of thought or doctrine which they saw existing. The apostle

might well refuse for the Christianity which he professed, that it should be so classified. The term was offensive to him as ignoring the divine revelation which had been given in it, and characterizing it as a mere human choice - an opinion. On the other hand, it is plain that he could not have resented the imputation of its being a doctrine or system of doctrines which was in fact, and in design, claiming men's adherence and gathering disciples. This it certainly was doing in the most distinct and positive way. And the apostle asserted this claim (which is the claim of truth everywhere, and at all times) in the very presence of those who called him before their tribunals for it. He could seek to "proselytize" the king Agrippa before their eyes. Yet he refused the denomination of Christianity as a 'sect,' and for that very reason. God had spoken in it: all men were to hear. It was no opinion, but revealed truth; and this is the key to the condemnation of "heresy" in the apostolic writings. There is to be no opinion, no mere human "choice," among Christians. The one truth claims the allegiance of all. The word of God has been given to us; and the one Spirit to bring us all to one mind about it. All departure from this is to be condemned utterly.

There are but three passages in the Epistles in which "heresies" are spoken of. In the second epistle of Peter, the "damnable heresies" of our English version has doubtless tended to some obscurity of thought. The phrase is literally "heresies of destruction," - that is, heresies that destroy men. They are brought in by false teachers, and are doctrinal clearly - doctrines in which they even deny the Lord that bought them. Thus fundamental error is, of course, intended but this does

not show that all "heresy" is fundamental error. The term is a much wider one than this.

Notice, that they bring in these "privily" - not necessarily whispering them about merely; for the word means strictly "by the side": thus, perhaps, in an indirect way, not straightforwardly. Satan, in attacking the Lord among Christians, would naturally take his own subtle, sinuous way. To expect straightdforwardness in such a case is not to know the foe with whom you have to do.

In view of the

"divisions" of which he had heard in Corinth, the apostle adds, "And I partly believe it: for there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. xi. i8). Here the differences among them were openly showing themselves when they came together at the Lord's Table. These differences came from follow'ing different and discordant teachers (chap. i. 10-13); and therefore he puts them down as the fruit of " heresies. " These, too, he speaks of to the Galatians as "works of the flesh" (v. 20). This is all that we have in Scripture as to heresies themselves.

But there is still one mention of a heretic: " A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, heing condemned of himself" (Titus iii. to, r).

For "reject," the

Revised Version has "refuse," or, in the margin, avoid "; Alford and Ellicott, " shun "; J. N. Darby, "have done with. " Literally, it is "ask off," or, in familiar parlance, "

ask him to excuse you so that "have done with " seems to be the best rendered among these. It certainly is not the discipline of the assembly which is implied, and the assembly is not in question. In dealing with a man bent upon having his own opinion and maintaining it, after this is clear, leave him to himself. The reason given is: "for he that is such is subverted "- rather, "turned aside," is gone out of the way, and cannot be helped: "he sinneth, being self-condemned." The truth bears its own testimony to the conscience; but he hardens himself against it: there is therefore no use in going on with him.

As for assembly - discipline in such cases, we must find the principles which regulate it elsewhere, and not here. Manifestly, the whole question is, whether that which is fundamental is at stake or no. Here every Christian has the means of judgment and the responsibility of it. As to what is not so, one could not expect all to have the same competency. The party-making, if there be such, is to be treated as the apostle treats it, by appeal to the conscience and the heart. The assembly has the right also to refuse what is unedifying. For the rest, God must be trusted, and we must learn patience with each other. The truth can be trusted to make its way with the true-hearted; and authority - short, that is, of the divine - can never help it. All manner of creeds and subscriptions have failed, in all countries and in all ages, to maintain the truth; and an unwritten creed will be worse in this respect instead of better: more uncertain and capricious, as subject to the will of the few, and varying with their character and temperaments, their learning or their ignorance, and with the many influences that may work upon them.

Nothing must stand between the word of God and the soul of the saint; and the Spirit of God must be the only authoritative Teacher. "Ye need not that any man teach you," should be graven upon our memories and hearts (x John ii. 27). only where the Spirit of God is honoured and relied on,- only where the word of God is received, not as the word of man, but as it is indeed, the word of God, can there be the least security for anything. If this be doubtful, where shall we find anything that is less so Nothing, again, must stand between the conscience of the teacher and his Lord as to what he teaches. "He that hath My word," says the Lord to Jeremiah, "let him speak My word faithfully" (xxii. 27). Who shall venture to dictate to him what the word is that he is to say, or to refrain from saying? who is to dictate as to what the Lord's people shall receive - some would say, even listen to - or not receive? who is able to take the place of vicar of the Spirit of God among His people, and to do for them what He Himself does not do, - nay, what He Himself expressly refuses to do,- keep them from all need of "proving all things," by keeping from them what shall need the proving, and giving them only what has been before decided to be good and wholesome food?

Could it be done, (as has often been said, but can hardly be too often repeated,) it would not be well done. It would be just to keep the children of God babes, unexercised, unaccustomed to decide for themselves between truth and error. Were their teachers, possibly, not so competent as they believed themselves to be - possibly in error even, in some things - it would ensure that those accustomed to receive without exercise what came to them from certain quarters, should receive the error now with no more question than the truth. Such

principles received and acted on would introduce more than all the evils of an ordained clergy; they would introduce a practical Romanism, which would prepare the way for a large departure from the truth of God.

Such infantile Christianity, as the right condition for the saint, is advocated now in many ways, and in unexpected quarters. I have before me some correspondence of two brethren with a third person; and one of these refers to a book of essays written by rationalistic high-church Episcopalians, "Lux Mundi." The other retorts with a remark as to "his allusion to an infidel book (which he should know nothing about)." There is no qualification as to this whatever. He knows nothing of the motives which might have led the brother in question to read such a book. He is not suggesting caution in such matters. His words are equivalent to a statement that no motives could justify a Christian in acquainting himself with a book of the kind.

This is not as far as others go. They will refuse even to read the defence of those whom they know to be Christian men, and whom they themselves have charged with heresy! One gave as his reason for not reading a reply to his own pamphlet, that "those who read it fall under the power of it"!

Such Christianity is hardly suited for the days on which it has fallen,- hardly suited for anything but some paradise (if it could be found) with evil carefully fenced out from all intrusion. Such ideas would condemn every book written in defence of Christianity itself, if this suppose a knowledge of what is said against it. But they are as well suited for an entrenchment to keep in error as to keep in truth,-to keep out truth as to keep out

error. For such persons the apostle's "prove all things" must be too lax, too dangerous; or it must be intended for some special safe class who are to be the custodians of others, but who unfortunately are not indicated. Their rules would evidently, with slight alteration, suit every kind of heresy under the sun, while Christianity under them would become a mere hot-house plant, to which a breath of cold outside air were almost fatal.

God forbid that I should say a word to induce any to be really careless as to how they expose themselves to what are the attacks of Satan; but carelessness is the very thing induced by such contrivances for shutting him out: in proportion as we can suppose we have done this, we shall naturally, necessarily, be less upon our guard. Where does the soldier stand at ease most? In the battlefield? And shall we prosper by being ignorant - or being "not ignorant of his devices"?

Light, loose, careless dealing with Scripture is the trouble everywhere. Scripture is the pilgrim's guide-book, the soldier's manual, the furnishing of the man of God to every good work. But we must be pilgrims, soldiers, men of God. There is no help, no hope, but in this. And then Scripture, as interpreted by the Spirit to the honest heart, is amply sufficient for all possible demands upon it. Let us trust it, not be afraid for it. The unreasoning cry of "heresy" has for years been used to terrorize the souls of those who, if any, should have been God's freemen. They have been made afraid to look at the word of God for themselves, apart from the guidance of some recognized interpreter; and there there must be no question. People have been cut off as heretics for putting forth that which in a "believer knowing no more" would not have excluded him from fellowship; and again,

because they have put upon paper what they might have held privately, or talked about here and there to others, without such action following! To publish what they held was to form a party by it, it was said, and a man became a heretic by this.

We have seen already all that Scripture has to say of heresy, and any one that will can judge. What I urge now is how, of necessity, this view and treatment of it must act to hinder and limit the Spirit of God, and therefore to stop all progress in the knowledge of divine truth. The only safe thing becomes to reiterate the old truths in the old formula; or if there is to be development, this must be justified, if possible, as a development of human standards, not fresh truth from the divine. The Christian gathering becomes thus a sect, or (according to the Scripture use of the word) really a heresy - a school of doctrine. The spring of living water is exchanged for the cistern or the pool: it will be well if it do not become, in the end, a marsh.

Again, the Lord's commendation of Philadelphia must be heard here. "Thou hast kept My word" implies, for all who are to receive it, that they allow none to rob them of their right, which is their responsibility, of knowing for themselves what Christ's word is. The apostle's "prove all things" applies to us all individually, and we cannot commit this proving to the hands of others. No assembly of men, whatever its Christian character, can be permitted to decide for us between heresy and Christian truth. "My sheep hear My voice" is too precious a privilege, too absolute a characteristic of the people of Christ, to permit it to be taken from us under any plea or pretext whatever.

Have I any truth that I believe in my heart to be such,- the people of Christ have a right to claim it from me. If I have any, I have it in trust to communicate to others. That done, it is for them to say whether they can receive it as such: and here comes in the opportunity for all that help which we can give each other by brotherly conference and free discussion, which these ready charges of heresy tend to make impracticable. If there be nothing that subverts fundamental truth, there is nothing to hinder the freest and widest circulation of all that can be said about it; and the more fully this is done, the sooner will that which is of God be sifted from error, and the honest-hearted find what He has for them in it. Exercise as to the Word will accomplish for us the more intelligent possession of what we had before, even if no fresh truth result from the sifting.

The Assembly, in its Practical Working

We come now to consider the assembly itself in its living operation,- as filling (in the power of the Spirit, as alone it can) the place for which God designed it. This place it must, of course, fill, in order to satisfy and to be practically owned of Him; and the ruin of the Church, which all that have the mind of God must acknowledge, has not lowered His standard for it, nor set aside one word that has gone out of His lips. Gracious too, He is, and will be, or who could stand before Him? but this does not imply the toleration of even the least departure from His word, which would mean the giving up of His holiness and truth, and of His love itself.

That the Church has failed, miserably failed, is a solemn truth indeed; and this failure has altered largely the circumstances in which we are placed today, and encompassed our path with difficulties, while it has deprived us largely of the help that we should have gained from one another. But it compels no one of us to disobedience to the least word that God has spoken, nor deprives us of either the wisdom or power necessary to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Difficulties are only means for us of realizing the more what He is for us: as the spies said of the gigantic enemies that Israel would be called to encounter in taking possession of the land that had been promised them, "they shall be bread to us": for faith is strengthened by those demands upon it which only expose the weakness and bankruptcy of unbelief.

We are to look at the assembly, then, according to the character which the word of God has given it, quite

unhindered by any reasonings derived from changed conditions of the time in which we live. And the assembly of which we are now to speak is not the Church of God at large, but the local assembly: which in God's thought, however, is that which represents it in the locality, being those who alone can actually assemble, the practical gathering together of the members of Christ as such.

These members, were they gathered all together, would show us the whole assembly as the body of Christ, and thus each assembly is the body of Christ in the place in which it is: a divinely-constructed organization, that is - the only organization God ever owns as of Him, and all-sufficient to give us as Christians all that can be rightly expected or desired in organization.

Of this, more presently: the first thing we have to notice now is the individual members, who are spoken of individually in such terms as the whole body is. That is to say, as the whole body is joined together and united to the Head by the one Spirit which pervades it all, and brings every member into living and practical relation with every other and with Christ,- so each individual also is in his own person a picture of the whole. Indwelt of the Holy Ghost, "he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit," with this effect, that "your bodies are the members of Christ" (i Cor. Vi. 15, 17): each and the whole of every individual belongs to Christ, and there is no one, and no part of any one, permitted to be secular or self-controlled. Thus not only is the white garment of practical righteousness to cover us completely, but the "ribband of blue," the heavenly colour, is to be seen upon the borders of it, just where it comes in contact with the earth.(Num. xv. 38).

If we are not thus, in the sincere intent and purpose of our hearts, recognizing our whole lives as to be lived for Him,- our every faculty of mind and body to be His - ourselves taken out of the world by sanctification to Himself, to be sent into it again as His representatives (John xvii. i6-i5),- then the moral basis of all right fellowship is lacking with us,- of fellowship with Himself, and necessarily with one another. In this case we do not and cannot fill our places in the assembly, however much we take part with the rest in the meetings of His people: for the place is essentially a spiritual one, and can only be spiritually filled. Let us remind ourselves that there is nothing that is merely negative in our lives and ways, but that our Lord's words are true in particular as in general, that "he that is not with Me is against Me." If in any one habit or practice of our lives we are not with Him, we are in that respect against Him. We are in the miserable condition thus of being divided against ourselves, and as a consequence shall find a loss of vigour and competency, a lack of ability to make progress in the things of God, and even to stand in the presence of the enemy. It is as to things that (abstractly considered) were lawful enough, that the apostle marks off things that were "not expedient"; and immediately he adds, as applying to these: "all things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any" (i Cor. vi. i2). Lawful things might thus develop a power to which even such an one as he might have cause to fear becoming captive.

Now here begins the question of fellowship with one another. Are we in true and whole-hearted fellowship with Christ ourselves? Have we no fence fencing Him off from certain portions of our lives? Has obedience with

us no secret limitations? Have we no division between mine and Thine with Him, but do we know the blessedness of realizing that to have all ours His, is the only way ourselves to enjoy it and find satisfying sweetness in it?

Thus indeed will our bodies be the members of Christ. Our hands will be for His work, our feet for His errands, our lips for His communications and His praise. Our entire lives will be the expression of communion.

Now, whatever shortcoming we may have to confess in actual attainment, this, and nothing less than this, must be our honest desire and aim, or how can there be a walk with God? for how can He consent to other terms than these? would it be for His glory or our good, that He should do so?

Think, then, of what is implied in the "body of Christ," where the Spirit of Christ links all together in harmonious subjection to the will of the Head, and so in a living unity of the members with one another. And this is plainly the practical "unity of the Spirit" which the apostle bids us to "endeavour to keep." It is certainly not the unity of the body simply that he means; but it is assuredly the unity of that which makes it in any proper sense the body - the body fitted to Christ the Head. And this is what is to be seen in the assembly of God, if this is to fulfill its proper character,- a living, speaking, working unity of obedience, inspired by devoted love. What a testimony to Him of "two or three" gathered together in this spirit! and it was thus at the beginning, when it could be said that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things that he possessed

was his own": the true spirit at all times, whatever may be the difference as to the manner of its expression. Where something like this is not, already men have "their own things" to seek, and "not the things of Jesus Christ"; the various interests lead in various ways, the wisdom of the world comes in to secure them, and the door is opened for every kind of departure. It is only the sense of what is ours in Christ, where all have all in common, and the joy is but increased by sharing it with others,- ours, where all abides and no room is left for the cares which make man a weary worker for himself, the hardest of masters: it is only here that the heart is fenced from the close-surrounding evil, and fenced in for flower and fruit for Him who looks to find in us "the travail of His soul."

Thus we may again see why Philadelphians are emphasized as those that keep Christ's word. Communion can only exist where the heart is held by the revelations of God's grace; and the soul that is kept in communion is that which is sustained by the fresh manna, gathered every day.

The reading-meetings are thus a great test of the state of an assembly; for it is there, if things be right, that the knowledge gathered in whatever way is tested and made sure by that personal conference and comparison which help so largely in making it the realized possession of the soul. Here we may learn, too, if there be the freedom and candour of brotherly love, the needs to which the truth ministers, and the ability to use it for real edification. It is of immense value to test in this way how far we have got the truth, while by this means what has been learned by each is thrown into the common fund, to enrich the whole. Those who know least would be

surprised to realize how much the questions suggested by their own need may help in various ways the very people who answer them. And this is only one of the many modes in which the waterer is watered - the minister is ministered to.

The reading-meeting is never, therefore, made needless or of little value by whatever multiplicity there may be of more detailed and connected teaching. Nay, all this creates a special need for the reading-meeting, in order that the food laid before the whole may be individually digested and assimilated. Here, however, any lack of nearness to and confidence in one another will be surely felt as a hindrance, and need of another sort manifested to those who have eyes to see.

"The children of this world are" indeed "wiser in their generation than the children of light." Persons brought into the inheritance together of large worldly possessions would soon realize the necessity of becoming acquainted with what they had so much personal interest in. How few are there who, in the case of spiritual wealth which God has made their own, have boldness and earnestness to lay hold of what is theirs by any means available to them! When, over sixty years ago, the Spirit of God began to move freshly in the hearts of His people to recover them to one another and revive the almost lost idea of the assembly of God, the reading-meetings were a marked and prominent sign of the awakened interest in His word, and that the people of God as such were awaking to claim for themselves their portion in it. No class of men could be allowed, however gifted, however educated and sanctioned by the mass, to stand between their souls and the possession of what was needed alike by all and designed

of God for all. Now, alas, the decay of the reading-meeting means nothing else but the subsiding of that eager enthusiasm for the truth that then was, the lessened consciousness of the Spirit of God, in each and all His own, to give each for himself the power to acquire possession. The flood-tide is gone, and the diminished stream begins to confine itself to the old channels.

We need to proclaim again that God never designed "theology" to be for a class of theologians, but all the treasures of His word to be for all His people,- not a thing in it to be hidden, save from the eyes of the careless and indifferent, those who are willing to exchange their heavenly birthright for a mess of the world's pottage. We need once more to assert that teachers are only a pledge, on God's part, of His eagerness to have all to know,- not that He has restricted to these the possession of any kind of spiritual knowledge. Teachers are only to show that there, in the living fount from which they drew, is the living water for all, as free for others as for themselves. They are only the truth of God's word made to stand out in blazon before the eyes of those who have not yet found it there where He has put it for them, and with this for a motto of encouragement to those who have faith in a God that cannot lie "Every one that seeketh, findeth."

The success of teachers is shown by their ability to make others independent of them; when men say to them as the Samaritans to the woman of Sychar, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying"; and in proportion as the Church of God by their means is made to realize its ability for self-edification. As the apostle says that Christ has given gifts unto men,- "some, apostles; and some

prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the edification of the body of Christ, until we all come into 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 fullness of Christ" (Eph. iv. i i-13). That is, the "work of ministry" - and this is left open to the largest construction - is what the saints as a whole are to be perfected unto. Every saint is free to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (i Cor. xii. 3!), and responsible to use all the ability that he has, of whatever kind, to enrich others with it. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (verse 7); and if there are special evangelists, all are free and called upon, each in his measure, to evangelize; if there are special teachers, all are free and responsible to communicate to others what God has given them of His truth. Love to each other, love to souls, is to have liberty and be encouraged everywhere.

How blessed would be an assembly of saints in this condition ! Every one realizing that the fullness of all spiritual knowledge was open to him to enjoy, - the best gifts were his to covet,- that he was, by the simple wondrous fact of his endowment with the Spirit, the ordained minister of Christ to the world, the ordained servant and helper of his brethren How intolerable is the thought of class restrictions to limit and hinder the grace of God in His people! Yet, alas, into which, sensibly or insensibly, they so readily sink down! The development of all gift is necessarily hindered by it; and this is largely the reason why so few among us are going forth to labour in the ample fields on every side, and why the gatherings develop so little strength and

stability. We need not talk about a "laity," to have one. Let God's people sink down into indolent acquiescence in their inability for their spiritual privileges, and little gift of any kind is likely to develop among them. Those that can be fed only with the spoon are infants or invalids. On the other hand, where spiritual life is strongest we shall be most fully conscious of our need of one another. For spiritual feebleness means always a strong world-element, and occupations, aims, pleasures, in which as children of God, we can have no fellowship - can be no help to one another. Our spiritual links become proportionately theoretical, formal, sentimental. But where life is practical and earnest, its needs will be felt and the grace realized which has united us together. Life is, wherever we find it in nature, in conflict with death; and organization, which is its constant accompaniment, is the embattlement of its forces against this. Nor is organization a sacrifice of individuality: every part of the body is distinct from the rest, has its own work and responsibility; and only by maintaining this individuality can the welfare of the whole be maintained. Every one has a place to fill that no other can fill: every one is necessary. Good it is to remember this, as to ourselves and as to every other. If we forget it, we cannot by this escape from the consequences.

The Church of God is therefore an organization, the body of Christ,- the body on earth of an unseen Head in heaven. The body is always looked at as upon earth, just as the Head is in heaven; and thus, as governed by that Head, one with Him as joined by the uniting Spirit, it is His representative in the world, to be the expression of His mind, His will, His nature. This every individual is,

of course; but that is not enough: it has pleased Him to link these individuals together: and thus even individual duty is not performed, if one's place is not filled in the body, of which we are part. There is to be an "epistle of Christ," (not "epistles," as it is practically often, sometimes actually, read) which, the apostle says to the Corinthians, "ye are." (2 Cor. iii. 3)

If then we are livingly linked together in such a manner, and for such a purpose, how necessary it must be that, as gathered together, we should habitually seek His mind, learn what He would have us do as yoke-fellows together, how we are to sustain and supplement each other in His service. The value of organization in this way seems, strangely enough perhaps, least appreciated by those who should know it best - by those who have had recovered to them by the grace of God the knowledge of His own perfect organization for such work as His, which demands the very utmost of our united energies!

"Organization "is every where appreciated among Christian workers in the various bodies of Christendom today: nothing can be done without organization. So abundant is the manufacture of them now, that they are in danger of becoming parasitical growths upon the bodies themselves from which they sprang, and of over - burdening at last what they were designed to buttress and support. There are in fact some very serious reasons for the distrust we have (some of us) learned to entertain of them. They are too loose and large in some ways - undisciplined and destroyers of discipline: all distinctive faith is in danger of being swamped, by many of them, through their loose association of the most contradictory elements, - converted and unconverted,

Christians with the deniers of Christ, in an "unequal yoke" forbidden by God Himself under the severest penalties. (2 Cor. vi. 14-18.)

And then on the other hand, by their mere human artificial rules, they oppress the conscience almost equally, and substitute the will of the majority, or officialism, for the guidance of the Spirit of God. With all this we have learned so to link the very thought of organization, as to look upon every suggestion of it with more than suspicion as necessarily unspirital and evil,- at least, outside of and so against Scripture.

But what then shall we do with the thought of the "body of Christ," which is most surely that of an organization, as it is also scriptural and divine? That common relationship which we have to one another binds us to "consider one another to provoke to love and to good works" (Heb. x. 24); with which the apostle conjoins the "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another." Do not such words imply the opportunity given for more "consideration" of individual needs, and more occupation with the Lord's work among us, and that in our "assembling together," than is almost any where found among us? more than "open meetings" or reading meetings or prayer-meetings, as these exist among us, can unitedly supply?

Must not fellowship with one another be sadly limited in its range, if there is not fellowship in the Lord's work among us and around us? if there be no gatherings to consider this? and such not exceptional, casual, something supererogatory, as it were, but earnestly and

heartily entered into as essential to our corporate duties, and thus to our right spiritual health itself?

Right and left of us, in all the denominations round, Christians come together to consider the Lord's work, and express their interest in and identify themselves with it. Is it a necessity laid upon us any where as two or three gathered to the Lord's name, that we should be cut off so largely as we are from all gathering together for such purposes? I cannot but believe that wherever such lack exists, it is a most serious one. It tends to make our interest in one another partial and exceptional; to deprive us of much of the good that should come of the differences that are among us which make mutual help so necessary, and in its ministry so serviceable in binding us together; it tends to make our Christian activities more desultory and feebler; to deprive us of many doors that would be found open to us; and to expose us to the reproach of being (as a whole) out of the way of usefulness. Why is it that those who have the gospel, it must be allowed, in a simplicity at least as great as anywhere, should be even capable of being assailed with just such reproaches? Why, in fact, have we been left so much behind in the evangelization of the world by others with much less light, but zealous in their cooperation with one another for such a purpose? Have we been too heavily freighted by the truth we carried? If it were dead truth, probably, but not if it were living Truth, that is known in the power of it, is "such a weight as wings are to a bird, and had we gone in the same zeal after the same class that these have sought, no ecclesiastical prejudice could have robbed us of the blessing. The hindrance, of whatever nature, has been something else than this. But again, has there not

developed among us a dangerous tendency, on slight occasion, to break up?

Is it out of place to remind ourselves, that Philadelphia must be that - a "brotherhood"? Have we not failed in cultivating that spirit of brotherly fellowship of which the hand to hand occupation in the Lord's work is certainly a very important part? We have, no doubt, left room for the development of gift, and been unfeignedly thankful to see evangelists, teachers, and others raised up among us; but have we not lacked in seeking, in the way stated, to make the work of the Lord a matter of common responsibility and widest fellowship?

"Business meetings," even "brothers' meetings," will not fill this gap. We need something wide enough to take in all the Lord's interests on earth, free enough to give every one place in it, practical enough to concern itself mainly with home duties and responsibilities that lie upon us in connection with the places in which we live and the spheres in which we move day by day. We want something which will bring us continually into remembrance of our individual duties as the Lord's workers, be suggestive, encouraging, and helpful as to our fulfillment of them, fit us more together as really co-members of the body of Christ, make us realize His mind for us as a whole, and form it in us, give us practical wisdom for the days in which we live, that we may be like the men of Issachar who came to Hebron, to make David king, "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (i Chron. xii. 32), - something that may develop all the truth we have into practical expression. I am persuaded that if the Church of God be, as it plainly is, an organization, we have yet to use it for all the purposes of an organization, and that

charged with the responsibility of representing Christ, and being the practical expression of His mind on earth. And if we be but "two or three" in each place, instead of thousands, while acknowledging sadly, as we must, the broken condition of things, we are just as much responsible to show forth in our measure what the Church of God should be:- a living, united, working, cooperating membership; a body, moving in unison with the mind of the unseen Head, in the energy of the Spirit, which has formed and which inspires it. No one suggests that we can all read our Bibles at home, and that there is no need of our coming together for this purpose. Nor that we can pray in our houses and our families and have no need of prayer-meetings in the assembly. Why should the work-meeting, the means of communion in practice, be the only thing thought unnecessary.

Yet for lack of this, the prayer-meetings become vague, general, with little definite application to needs that are not known, and to service which is merely personal, private, or shared by few, with which communion is not sought, and little possible. Our reading meetings lack similarly the point of personal application, the freshness of interest which is supplied by the incidents of service unknown save to individuals. We are in fact, largely, individuals, touching each other at a few points, hidden from each other in most; save as personal friendships join us here and there, and which, without the larger interests to steady them, tend to form us into parties, and in times of pressure break us up into them.

How little do we "consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works"! how pointless, from lack of knowledge, do exhortations of this kind fall! How little in general are we near enough to each in our inner lives to

encourage or give opportunity to make them! Yet as children of God and members of Christ, we are in a relationship to one another nearer and more abiding than any other can be!

We need to draw nearer together as Christians practically, not merely theoretically. In the stress of the world upon us we need to take each other by the hand, and strengthen each other's hands in God. In the presence of evil we need to show, not a broken, but an embattled front. In a world away from God but over which His mercies linger, we need a more practical fellowship with the gospel, and encouragement to every one to take earnest part in ministering it. In all that concerns the Church of God we must have that which will give us better opportunity to know that we are "members one of another." And we need, as partakers of the mind of Christ, to give this more united practical expression.

Membership in the body of Christ means service: every part of a "body" is in necessary relationship with the whole, and there is no independency any where; each needs and serves and is served by the whole. God has acted upon this principle throughout nature; and nowhere more fully than among men. If "it is not good that man should be alone," God makes for him as a helper, not the repetition, but the complement of himself. He unites the weaker to the stronger, that even by this weakness his strength may be better served. She is given him to be ministered to, that by this she may minister to him also, drawing him out of himself, developing his heart,- a blessing which all he gives cannot repay. The needs and inequalities of men similarly have built up society by division of labour; and

even the regions of the earth are thus helpful by the difference of their productions in binding together the nations of the earth. The city is the highest development of this principle; and if man departed from God built the first, yet God has prepared for His people the final one: a "city which hath foundations," and will abide.

Thus ministry is God's law of nature, as it is the expression of the nature of God Himself, which is love. "Love seeketh not her own;" "by love" we "serve one another." Love is freedom, happiness, the opposite of all legality, the spirit of heaven, conferring and reflecting blessing. And that fullest description of love which we find in Corinthians is enshrined in that of the "body of Christ" as its proper home and the means of its expression. Here the necessity of all parts to one another is just what provides for and makes necessary the constant out-going of love to one another. There are some small animal half-organisms that grow by division; but the higher the organism the more its unity is enforced by the abhorance of this. A part lost is not supplied again: the creature is maimed, and goes mourning for its loss, refusing substitution.

Such is the body of Christ then - the highest pattern of such fitting together that can be: and if but two or three can practically be together, this does not free them from the obligation to all the members. Love would abhor the thought of this as freedom. and it is only at peril to ourselves that we can act upon it. Love would indeed hold fast therefore the local expression of the greater thing, not set it aside for the unpractical and impossible; yet would it see that this did not in fact degenerate into merely partial, and thus sectarian, display. It would still look out and beyond, as partaking of the divine love

towards all, and unforgetfulness of the tie existing. It would look out over the whole field of Christ's interests and identify itself in heart with all; seeking ever to widen the outlook and extend the sphere of practical sympathy. Prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, would become ever with it more definite, while yet larger in scope, and more according to the apostolic, sadly forgotten rule, "for all men."

But more: did such a spirit animate us, we should come to see, perhaps, that there were other "divine movements" among Christians elsewhere; not less to be recognized as such because, mixed up with what was of the Spirit of God, there were elements too purely human, and that the enemy was striving to adulterate them with various evil. We should learn too that God had lessons for us, most practical and profitable, from all around, if we were only humble enough to learn from all sorts of teach-ers, and wise enough to be able to "take forth the precious from the vile," the imperative condition for our being "as God's mouth" (Jer. xv. 19). Doubtless we should find very frequently our own rebuke in it, and this would test us much: it would show whether we desired to believe that all wisdom was with us, and outside was only darkness; whether, like Gideon's fleece, the dew of the Spirit was with us wholly, and all the ground around were dry.

Not that it is meant by this to encourage a tendency to run hither and thither, which is in general but the expression of restlessness and want of proper occupation with our own things. Our feet are to be kept in a known path, and not allowed in doubtful ones. It is the heart that is to be enlarged, and not the path, which must ever be a narrow one. The spirit of the wanderer is

one too little heedful of the way with God to be able to guide another into it. "Let him that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" is a word which, followed in the spirit of it, will keep one from every doubtful thing (which may, therefore, be evil) as well as from what is known as such; and from that also in which I may see the working of the Spirit of God, so long as it is yet mixed with that which I have to judge as contrary to His mind.

I would press upon my own soul what I press upon others, speaking from convictions which have been now a good while with me, and only increase with the lapse of time, that while we rightly gather together as worshipers, and hearers of God's word, we have nowhere perhaps, except fitfully and exceptionally, gatherings of the whole as workers under the Lord our Head, and to possess ourselves as such of His mind, wherever, however expressed, in all the largeness which we must recognize His mind to have. I believe such meetings to be necessary for the maintenance of true Christian fellowship in its full reality, with each other and the Lord alike; and to help to make the assemblies a living, intelligent representation, however feeble, of the "body of Christ."

I had purposed saying more, but have perhaps reached the limit of what the Lord would have at this time. Merely fragmentary and suggestive, these papers must not be supposed to ignore what else in the address to Philadelphia has been unnoticed. If He should be pleased to use them to bring the consciences of His people more into exercise as to what is surely a special word from Himself for the present day, the object will be attained.