

# **The Gates of Jerusalem.**

**Russell Elliott**

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“The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.” (Lam 4:12).

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:29).

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Rev 3:19).

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## Preface to the third edition.

The omission of a few sentences, here and there, in this third edition has in no way altered the substance of the book, and it does not differ from its predecessors, except in being a little more concise.

Some notice, perhaps, should be taken of certain criticisms, though none of them has necessitated any alteration. The use of the word “ecclesiasticism” in the following pages has been misunderstood by a few. It refers, not to the *ecclesia* of God, but, generally, to all that human arrangement which is inimical to it—disfiguring its character and hindering its expression; though, in one or two places, it does refer to what the Apostle Paul was used to establish. Another has objected to the word “ideas,” and would have substituted “facts.” But the facts were always there, what believers had lost was all idea of them. People had always spoken of the church—the fact; but they had lost all idea of the fact. A further objection has been that while the book exposes the failure, it does not provide the remedy. We venture to think, however, that even this is not altogether lacking; and would refer the reader specially to pages 28-30, 36-7, 42, 45-59.

Since the first and second editions were issued, the last paragraph of the book (last but one in those editions) has become history. It runs: “Finally, the supreme question of the hour is whether we shall sink down ultimately into mere sectarianism, interested only in those who agree with *us*—a sectarianism of the worst kind because the narrowest, the most bigoted, and the most enslaved; or whether casting aside the trammels of a useless and mischievous ecclesiasticism—enlarged and free because owning only what the Spirit has formed by His presence, and Christ is the Head of—we shall be known as those whose one bond is Christ, and whose only law is love. ‘One is your Master, and all ye are brethren.’” Some have answered this question. They have publicly declared by their acts since, that they intend to cling to sectarianism, that they are interested only in those who agree with them—positively refusing all others; and instead of owning what the Spirit has formed and Christ is Head of, they declare themselves content with a mere circle of meetings, outside of which there is to be no recognition.

The writer, if he may here be allowed to make a personal statement, has pursued an opposite course. His own convictions, as well as circumstances, have led him outside all sectarian barriers. The freedom and joy he has found with the Lord in a path of true liberty is beyond expression. While he does not recognise, nor can he be bound by, any circle of meetings, he will gladly visit any where scriptural order is maintained; the Holy Ghost owned as the true source of worship and ministry; and the glory of the Lord sought in obedience to His Word; and

where he will be received simply as a servant of Christ and a member of His body, the Church. To other tests and limitations he dare not submit. Where in Scripture do we find a circle of meetings spoken of as defining our fellowship and our sphere of service? Where are we exhorted to belong to one such?

The effect of such exclusivism is to barricade the door against many a godly soul walking in communion with the Lord; while those inside are often on a lower platform spiritually and morally. A circle of meetings simply means the agreement of those who disagreed with others on some point not vital to Christianity. Who cannot see that this is wholly inadequate, and is not Church ground at all? Worst of all it puts all that should be kept supreme in a subordinate place. Christ is no longer *really* the link (or why are His faithful followers shut out?), but some meeting, or person, or aspect of truth. Membership of the one body of Christ becomes no longer sufficient, but there must be an additional membership. While communion as to some other matter takes the place of, or at least deprives of all its force the communion of the blood of Christ—the communion of the Holy Spirit—the communion one with another in the light as God is in the light. All this is grievous indeed, for it is nothing but a caricature of the Church, and there can be no real prosperity until it is forsaken. Thank God He is delivering many from such unchristian compacts. The restriction of fellowship to a certain member of recognised assemblies was always sectarian, though mistaken for “the unity of the Spirit.” It has now become positively ridiculous in the light of multiplying divisions. So much so that some at least begin to feel it, and no longer claim for their particular circle any divine basis peculiar to itself.

The saddest feature of all, perhaps, is the necessity that devolves upon each circle to blacken and discredit every other circle. Only in this way can each separate circle of meetings be maintained. For if there is nothing to be said against another circle why is the ring kept up? Brethren in the Lord, this terrible disgrace ought to cease. And it might cease, yet with everything maintained that is worth maintaining. It would not mean loss, but gain everywhere. In casting reproach upon our brethren it recoils with redoubled force upon those who do so. The stigma we seek to place upon them becomes in a deeper way branded upon ourselves. The only way of deliverance is to cease to make fellowship dependent upon meetings, and to make it dependent upon the work of God, and consistency therewith. If the Apostle Paul returned to earth, would he limit his service and fellowship to one circle of meetings, or one sect? “No,” he would say, “I am not going to limit the truth, or the work of God. I know only one Gospel, and it is for every creature. I know only one Church fellowship, and it embraces every saint” (Col 1:23-9; Eph 3:14-21). Think of the Apostle Paul not being received or allowed to preach until he had joined a particular circle of meetings. Yet, in principle, it is as bad to apply such tests to the least of Christ’s servants as to the greatest. Nothing is clearer from Mark 10:36-42 than that to refuse the least of those that belong to the Saviour is to refuse Him. How anyone dare do it passes one’s comprehension.

Do let us get rid of the conceit that looks upon the Church of God as if it were a private preserve; or a monopoly to be exploited for our own benefit. It is thought that circles of meetings are necessary in order to avoid contamination with other circles. This is the idea of the *fold* rather than the *flock*, and is therefore a denial of Christianity. The *fold* has been for ever done away. It is to revive it in its most specious form to insist upon Christians coming within our enclosure, before being allowed to break bread. It is to deny the very truth and purport of the movement with which we stand connected. When the Apostle spoke of “wolves”

entering in not sparing the flock, he never suggested safeguarding them by a fold. He suggested *feeding* the flock as the best safeguard, and the shepherds taking heed to themselves; commending them to “God and the word of His grace.”

Above are some of the reasons for rejecting exclusivism *as practised to-day*. The writer cannot help feeling it has altogether broken down. It cannot be mended, it must be ended. It is wrong in principle. The other day a friend with whom we were staying, who is a maker of machines, came into the house and told us he was covered with soap powder. He had been inspecting a machine for filling paper bags with this powder. “But it is a failure,” he said. “Cannot it be altered?” we asked. “No,” he replied, “it is wrong in principle, and a machine that is constructed on a wrong principle will never work properly whatever you may do to it. I am always trying to impress upon my workmen,” he concluded, “that there is such a thing as a *mechanical conscience*. And a machine refuses to work smoothly unless the principle upon which it is built is a true one.” This throws a flood of light upon the other principle we are considering. Has exclusivism worked smoothly? It has not. Why not? It is based upon a wrong principle. If there is such a thing as a “mechanical conscience,” there is certainly such a thing as a *Christian conscience*, which cries out against the deeds of this engine of destruction. It has done its best to destroy the movement inaugurated eighty years ago. It scatters where it ought to gather. It separates hearts and lives where it was intended to draw them closer together. It produces Pharisaic pride, and self righteous satisfaction. It nourishes often what is worst, and neglects what is best, calling good evil, and evil good. In short it has become the enemy of all that contributes to the peace and prosperity of the children of God.

In saying all this we are dealing only with a certain class of exclusivism well known to many who will read these lines. There is, however, such a thing as a *trite* exclusivism, and any just consideration of the fellowship of believers must take account of it. But this subject,—if a conclusion of any value is to be reached—must be regarded solely from the standpoint of scripture, and not from the point of view of the rival claims of so-called “exclusive” and “open” principles. The question is: Is there any true exclusivism, and if so, what is it?

Scripture reveals to us a right and a wrong exclusiveness. It was right when Adam was excluded from the Garden. The nature of the case demanded it. He had rebelled against God. And it may also have been for his own good, for the reason given is “lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.” It was right when Sarah said to Abraham, “cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.” The flesh has to be refused. It was right again when God said to Moses, “command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper... that they **DEFILE** not their camps *in the midst whereof I dwell*” (Num 5:2-3). Also in 1Cor 5 and 2 John, we have similar instances. The one a case of flagrant wickedness; the other of fundamental error.

But there is also a wrong exclusiveness. In John 9 we have the case of the blind man, whose sight had been restored, cast out. In their pride the Pharisees refused to be taught by him, and he had to go; not because of any wickedness, but because of the light he possessed. Again, in John 12:42, we read, “nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” And the same spirit early manifested itself in the church. We read in John’s third

epistle of Diotrephes: "neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbids them that would, and *casts them out of the church.*"

Is there any sadder sight under heaven than to see religious men, out of pure zeal for what they conceive to be right, acting in this way? The right exclusiveness of the second epistle of John, becomes the wrong exclusiveness of the third epistle. Is there no danger of that kind of thing being repeated to-day?

The Pharisees of our Lord's day present the worst possible type of the exclusive principle. If we wish to see the lengths to which it can be carried, and the evil results, we have only to look at them. Yet those who brought themselves under the most scathing rebukes ever uttered by Christ, were not always what He found them. At the beginning of their history, which commences soon after the return from Babylon, they bore a far different character. They were known as the Assidoeans, and they corresponded, in their aims and methods, very much with our English Puritans. They stood for separation from all that they conceived to be prejudicial to the religious life of the nation; and, no doubt, rightly so at first. But gradually there grew up on one side a lifeless formalism, and on the other a persecuting spirit, that would not tolerate anything outside its own narrow aims and conceptions, until at last we find them stereotyped as they are presented in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself did not escape their criticisms, or even censures. They went so far as to charge Him with *looseness*. "This man," they said, with disdain and contempt, "receives sinners and eats with them."

May our exclusiveness never be marked by such features. These enemies of truth and liberty set far too high a value upon the merely external. They were for ever saying this is unlawful, and the other is unlawful. They were intense separatists; untiring in their efforts to make proselytes; and the most perfect people of that day in their own estimation.

That this kind of exclusivism is not altogether dead the following instance will show. A Christian attended the funeral of his father-in-law, and spoke at the grave side. Because he was not in "fellowship," this was criticised by some, and resented. Yet what he said was quite in keeping with the truth, and some said it was the only thing worth hearing on the occasion. It is sad to think that it was not sufficient that the speaker was a Christian, and his words suitable and comforting. Against this was put the fact that he did not go to any of the meetings registered in a certain book. His own state of soul, his communion with the Lord, what he said, were all outweighed by this one fact. And that fact may, under certain conditions, stand for next to nothing.

Take another instance, and such could be multiplied over and over again. A lady, whose husband employed a good many hands on his estate and held meetings for the preaching of the gospel, was in the habit of playing the harmonium at the service. She saw no reason to refuse the simple request of her husband that she should do so. For this act she was declared out of fellowship by the Christians with whom she associated. It will add a little colour to the picture to mention that some who took part in this act of excision were employees of her husband. Here, again, everything was sacrificed to one thing. A matter about which even godly Christians differ was allowed to outweigh everything else.

One more illustration of the working of this principle must suffice. It is an extract from an article

dealing with what the writer calls “links.” “A dear relative belonging to one of the many sects of Christendom dies, and often at the graveside may be seen those who profess to have left human organisations, and to be clear of what is called system, but who out of love and affection for the deceased relative, recognise what they once considered so contrary to the Spirit of God, thus showing more devotedness to relatives than to Christ. Whose Name they profess to honour on the Lord’s Day morning. This refers to marriages also.” This is a masterpiece. How, by standing at a graveside, where an act of *Christian* burial is taking place, anyone can be said to recognise what they once considered so contrary to the Spirit of God, passes comprehension. But exclusivism of this rabid type knows not how to draw any distinctions. Everything must be on one dead level, and according to one unalterable rule.

But enough. What has been said will serve to show that there is a right exclusiveness which refuses evil—evil which any believer of the least intelligence can recognise—and even refuses those who are wilfully in association with it; but does not refuse the children of God walking in His fear. And that there is a wrong exclusiveness which busies itself with trifles; which sacrifices everything to form; and while giving all its attention to what is external misses what is spiritual and essential. And in doing so often excludes the good and retains the evil by setting up an altogether false standard of truth.

In a world such as we are in, and in the midst of a corrupted Christianity, there must be exclusivism. But let it be of a right kind, in harmony with scripture, and commending itself to those who seek to live godly in Christ Jesus. In the following pages, amongst other things, the writer seeks to show what is the true exclusivism and where he thinks its limits have been exceeded.

*December, 1908.*

[In “UNITY” (ready shortly) the questions of fellowship and reception are further dealt with.]

## The Gates of Jerusalem.

It is a common saying that “the unexpected always happens.” In the days of Jerusalem’s prosperity no one expected that the City of the great King, the object of admiration, and the envy of the whole world, would one day be in the enemy’s power, and her glory laid in the dust. “The kings of the earth and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.” Yet, this is what happened, and there was a reason for it. There is always a reason even for the most *unexpected* things; and if we are only wise enough and observant enough, we shall not fail to discover it. The reason for it all was found in the people themselves. Things do not happen so arbitrarily in this world of ours, as sometimes we are inclined to suppose. They follow a fixed law. We may not always be able to trace its working, or mark with precision its developments, but there it is silently, inevitably, relentlessly pursuing its course.

Thus it was in Israel. *The heart of the nation became estranged from Jehovah.* He had chosen them to be a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. They preferred other gods, and ways that were not His. Why? Had He not been good to them? Yes, beyond all their conceptions. “Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord? “Had any of His promises failed? Not one. “There failed not ought of any good thing that the Lord had spoken, all came to pass.” Was His power inferior to these gods for which they

forsook Him? Not in the least. They could neither see, nor taste, nor smell. He was the Creator of all things, the Almighty of Whom it could be said He “rides upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky.” Why then did they forsake Him? The answer is, *He was too holy for them.*

He had said to them, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” This they disliked. He was ever seeking to keep them up to a certain moral standard, and it grew irksome. They were content to rest in the outward and visible, He was ever trying to teach them to “do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.” And it is easy to see in reading the prophets, and not least the minor prophets, that a continual controversy was going on between God and His people upon these very grounds. The first chapter of Isaiah will sum it all up for us, where, because of their ways Jehovah addresses them, as Sodom and Gomorrah, and says to them, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me ... bring no more vain oblations ... the calling of assemblies I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.” Then He tells them what He required. “Cease to do evil; learn to do well;” closing with the solemn admonition “if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword.”

They did refuse and rebel. They set at nought all His counsel and would none of His reproof, and the sad and solemn consequence is recorded for us in the words already quoted, “the adversary and the enemy entered into the gates of Jerusalem,” and what the kings of the earth and all the inhabitants of the world would not have believed came to pass.

Will the reader now transfer his mind to a period several centuries later? The scene is in an upper room in the streets of the same Jerusalem. In this room are assembled a number of the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are waiting for the fulfilment of His promise that the Father would give them another Comforter Who should abide with them for ever. The command was “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” On the day of Pentecost this promise was fulfilled, and upon the assembled company the Holy Ghost came with the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and sat upon each of them like cloven tongues as of fire.

What was the purpose in all this? Their Lord and Master before His ascension had told them that they were to be witnesses to Him, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” This Jerusalem—this favoured but guilty city—once so guilty that God had to permit the adversary and the enemy to come within its gates, and which now had intensified its guilt a hundredfold by the murder of the Son of God, was to be the scene where the first witness was to be borne to the resurrection of Christ, and where the first and worst sinners were to be saved. But their testimony is refused by Israel as a nation.

What will God do? He will bring out His eternal purpose concerning the Church. The earthly Jerusalem—once the centre of all God’s ways in connection with the earth—is set aside, and when Stephen is martyred, he is directed by the Holy Ghost to look up steadfastly into heaven, away from earth altogether. He sees in heaven the glory of God and Jesus. Here was the unfolding of the eternal counsel—a Man in the glory of God, and the church to be associated there with Him, and recognised as His body on the earth. Saul of Tarsus is converted, and becomes the chosen vessel to make known this mystery. Those gathered in the upper room,

augmented by others on the day of Pentecost, formed the nucleus of this company.

But there is another aspect of the church's calling. She is to be the witness before men of God's grace and God's character. In this respect she takes Israel's place, though the witness was of a higher and different kind. Will she do any better? Israel proved unfaithful and untrue. Will she be more faithful and more true?

Do not the words of the Apostle Paul quoted at the beginning of this paper supply the answer? "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Who would have believed it? Who that looked upon that early company in all the freshness of first love, and carried irresistibly forward on the tide of divine power, and so occupied with one another's good, would have believed it could become divided and scattered? Instead

of sacrificing everything for the welfare of the rest, the wolf was to appear, not sparing the flock; and instead of continuing stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and *fellowship*, men would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples *after them*. Thus it was "the adversary and the enemy entered into the gates of Jerusalem" once again.

All that has happened since the prophetic utterance of the Apostle bears witness to its truthfulness. As also to the words of Christ Himself. He likened the Kingdom of Heaven to a grain of mustard seed which became a great tree, and the birds of the air lodged in the branches thereof; and also to leaven hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened. The church became a vast ecclesiastical system where man displayed himself; and where false teaching tended to destroy the faith.

*As a Company* Christians ceased to be what God wanted. They denied both His character and His calling. Love to Christ waned. His sheep were neglected. The church grasped at temporal power. That holy separation and simplicity which marked her in the early days when "of the rest durst no man join himself unto them, but the people magnified them" soon became a thing of the past. She went to sleep, and while men slept the enemy sowed "tares." Thus the church ceased to bear the character of her Lord. For this reason she fell; and her downfall illustrates the same truth as is seen in the history of Israel. God will not countenance a denial of His character in those who occupy the place of testimony for Him here. "Holiness becomes Thine house, O Lord, for ever" had been written in connection with Israel, but when Christ came He said they had made it a den of thieves. "Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints," is the Apostolic description of the church, but she has long ceased to answer to it. That there are individuals everywhere devoted to the Lord and His service is fully recognised. This is not, however, the point. We speak of the church *as a whole* as an established witness for God on the earth, and viewing it in that light we can only repeat what has already been said of Israel, "the kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem." This is seen in the worldly methods of the church and its spiritual poverty.

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We now come to the point which is principally before us in penning these remarks, and must

again ask the reader to pass over a considerable interval and transfer his thoughts to a period at the beginning of the second quarter of the last century.

We have already been contemplating a gathering in an upper room in Jerusalem, we are now called to witness a not altogether dissimilar one in an auction room in Aungier Street, Dublin. A few christians are meeting together to partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him. And this without any reliance upon humanly ordained ministry. What they are chiefly concerned about is the realization of the Lord's presence, and the fact that they are one in Him. Eighteen centuries separate the two companies. Much has happened in the meantime. The Apostle Paul's prediction had come true, and the flock of God had been scattered as the result of "grievous wolves" entering in and men arising "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them."

At the time to which we now allude the true children of God were separated into numbers of different sects so that many never sat down together at the Lord's Supper, or even met publicly for worship. The children of God *as such* had no visible communion at all. It pleased God, however, to open the eyes of some of His people in different places and by different means, to see that this was not according to His mind, as it was far from meeting the desires of their hearts. They began to realize how closely they were united to Him as His children, and to one another as members of the same body of which Christ was Head, and this accounts for the meeting to which attention is being directed. A meeting of this description was first of all attempted in Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, about the year 1829. It appears to have continued thus until an accession to their number seemed to render it necessary to remove to another place, and accordingly the auction room already referred to was hired, and this seems to have been the first public meeting place.

There in that room, these warm-hearted, devoted followers of the Lord Jesus met apart from all sectarian barriers. They never knew at that time to what it would grow, but realizing in the Spirit their oneness in Christ, and desiring only to follow the word of God, they delighted to be found together every first day of the week; and no conditions of membership were made except membership of the "one body," accompanied by purity of doctrine, and holiness of walk. Could anything be more blessed after centuries of darkness, corruption and division than for these followers of the Lord to be brought into the light, and to discover it to be still true that there was "one body and one Spirit, even as they were called in one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

This is how one describes it. [We were] "led to take a large auction room in Aungier Street for our use on the Sundays, and oh! the blessed seasons with ... while removing the furniture aside, and laying the simple table with its bread and wine on Saturday evenings—seasons of joy never to be forgotten—for surely we had the Master's smile and sanction in the beginning of such a movement."

Yes, they had. Thousands can testify to this even at the present day. But there is, alas! another side to the picture. Who could have foretold all that would grow out of that early movement?

In a certain city, we are told, there are now *thirteen* meetings with no intercommunion. To

belong to any of them means being excluded from the rest. Yet all are the outcome of the original meeting above referred to. This fact needs to be deeply pondered. That a state of things has been produced diametrically opposite to what was intended furnishes at least food for reflection. The very movement that began with a view to surmount the barriers that separated Christians has reached the point of erecting barriers far more insurmountable. It began with a view to obliterate division and sectarianism, it has ended by emphasising and perpetuating these very evils. There was some amount of intercommunion between Christians of different sects before this movement commenced, there is none between the parties formed from it. What has led to a result so calamitous? The enquiry will surely point a moral if it does not adorn a tale. As we think of that early meeting with its hopes and aspirations, and look around us after the lapse of years, surely we may repeat again the words of Jeremiah: "the kings of the earth and all the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem."

Yet such has been the case, and it cannot be unprofitable to endeavour to explain why a movement which owed its inception to true spiritual longings, and to spiritual power, has produced results which every spiritual man must deplore.

1. The source of much of the trouble is, undoubtedly, to be found in the fact that the movement became largely an *ecclesiastical* one. That the promoters of it ever intended this, or foresaw what was coming, is hardly likely. Still less is it likely that this was the divine intention. To guard against it, to maintain the true spiritual character of this divine impulse that was throbbing in the hearts of so many earnest ones, was the real problem. As numbers increased, and spirituality declined, it became ever more difficult. It is so easy to lose sight, and to lose hold, of a spiritual idea, and replace it with, because displacing it by, a visible organization. As someone has well said, and in doing so lays down a principle of universal application, *the idea creates the organization, the organization destroys the idea.*" This was never more amply illustrated than in the movement of which we speak. The original idea was unity—communion—the expansion of spiritual life—the breaking down of ecclesiastical barriers. This led to organization. The result of this has been disunion, separation, and contraction, and the raising of barriers higher than ever. Instead of hearts going out to all believers they became centred upon a few.

It is possible to put one's finger almost upon the exact moment when this organization began to appear. If any doubt there is an organization let them read carefully the following, written about 1838. "The question I refer to is, *how are meetings for communion of saints in these parts to be regulated?* Would it be for the glory of the Lord and the increase of testimony to have *one central meeting*, the common responsibility of all within reach, *and as many meetings subordinate to it* as grace might vouchsafe? Or to hold it better to allow *the meetings to grow up as they may without connexion, and dependent upon the energy of individuals only.*" Here we have the first buddings of ecclesiasticism. How much better to have trusted God, and the life He had given to manifest itself in a suitable way. We can look back and see how the idea was creating an organization—an organization that was to destroy the idea. That some even then felt the danger of it may be gathered from the following, written at the time, "I ever understood our principle of communion to be the possession of the common life of the family of God; these were our early thoughts, and are my most matured ones. The transition your little bodies have undergone, in no longer standing forth the witnesses for the

glorious simple truth, so much as standing forth witnesses against all they judge error, has lowered them in my apprehension from heaven to earth in their position of witnesses. The moment the witnessing for the common life as our *bond* gives place to our witnessing *against* errors by separation of persons and preaching ... every individual or society of individuals first comes before the mind as those who might need witnessing against, and all their conduct and principles have first to be examined and approved before they can be received, and the position which their occupying the seat of judgment will put you in will be this: The most narrow minded and bigoted will rule because his conscience cannot and will not give way, and therefore the more enlarged heart must yield." These words, especially the closing ones, were prophetic.

To make so many affiliated meetings a kind of substitute for the common blessings and the common life possessed by all believers, and which make all one, is to substitute what is artificial for what is living. For supposing people do belong to certain meetings and associate only with these, what guarantee is it that they are walking in the Spirit, and manifesting the divine life? It reveals its own inadequacy. A little reflection would surely convince anyone of the impossibility of attempting to embrace all the Children of God in any ecclesiastical system today. To attempt it, and fail only means to make another sect. God, Himself, has framed the organization which alone can embrace all His children, and we cannot substitute another.

The effect, too, upon those identified with the movement, and upon others outside of it, has been equally unfortunate. The inevitable effect in the one case was to produce self occupation, and the thought grew at last—"we are the people"; the Lord's Table is only with us; we only are gathered to the Lord's name. The moral effect of which is too apparent to need notice. While by the onlooker the movement at length came to be regarded as only another sect, and as divisions grew the most divided one in Christendom.

In having "thirteen meetings" in one place, none of which have any intercommunion, it is surely evident that however much the idea may have created the organization, the organization has destroyed the idea, for fresh barriers to communion were certainly not intended by those who met in Aungier Street in 1829. Had no ecclesiasticism been attempted, "thirteen meetings" would have been an impossibility. Were Christians then who saw what really united them not to meet together? This they were perfectly free to do. But this could have been done without taking such a definite ecclesiastical position as to call into existence an organization which tended to obscure the very ideas which gave it being. It was in assuming an ecclesiastical status *with powers of jurisdiction* and a definite recognition of a circle of meetings in lieu of the "one body," that the line was overstepped, and the door opened to all sorts of trouble. No doubt all that would follow such a course was not seen at the time, and there is no attempt here to attach blame. Consciousness of indebtedness to those who have gone before is more becoming and freely acknowledged. At the same time the "thirteen meetings" testify loudly to the actual result. Nor could any other issue have been expected. If an ecclesiastical system established by apostles under divine sanction has become tortured and twisted so as to become unrecognizable, it is hardly likely that hands that were not apostolic could fashion it anew. Success in such an undertaking seems impossible, and indeed has proved so. For would God countenance a revival of what had already broken down? The church had had its organization. The Apostle Paul had established assemblies in a multitude of places. He set everything in order. But for centuries his work in this connection had disappeared. He himself

knew that the break up of the external was coming, if it had not already begun before he passed off the scene. Does he say a word about resuscitation? In his directions which expressly bear upon the period in which we find ourselves does he give instructions on this head? Not any. The chief points in his Second Epistle to Timothy are: God's purpose and grace in Christ which nothing can touch; preparedness to suffer affliction; the moral state of the believer and *individual* separation from evil; and lastly, the preaching. He returns to this over and over again in the closing chapter.

Doubtless all this will be admitted. The strange part is we have not been true to our own theory. None has proclaimed more loudly the ruin of the church. None has acted less as if it were so. Not only has there been an attempt amid the ruins to carry out scripture to the letter, but scripture has often been left far behind. A system more stringent, more compelling, and more minute in its ramifications than anything scripture knows about has for many a long year past been in full force. Is it any wonder that the "ruins" have become more ruinous still?

We who live to-day to witness this result may perhaps fairly conclude that another ecclesiastical system was not what God wanted. We are equally forced to this conclusion if we look at it from another point of view. A servant of the Lord, to whom many who read these lines will feel they owe more than they can tell, said, almost with his latest breath, "let not John's writings be forgotten while insisting on Paul's." John's writings hold a very peculiar place. They are the last inspired records. Being so, undoubtedly, amongst other things, they are intended to make prominent what is of paramount importance during the church's lapse into ecclesiastical corruption. Does it surprise anyone to find that there is almost absolute silence upon everything ecclesiastical? On the other hand, how many passages seem especially written to warn us against form and tradition and all that is merely external. In chapter 2 it is expressly intimated that the visible temple was to be displaced. In chapter 4 "neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem" were the true worshippers to worship the Father. Such was to be henceforth in spirit and in truth. Anything more elastic could hardly be imagined. In chapters 5, 6 and 7 the various feasts of the Jews instead of finding their counterpart in Christianity, are simply doorways admitting to some spiritual truth, and then pass into disuse. In chapter 8 instead of national privileges, or even ecclesiastical, it is the truth that makes free. In chapter 9 it is the one thrust out of every ecclesiastical privilege and rejected by the hierarchy of that day whom the Lord consorts with, and leads to the full knowledge of Himself. In chapter 10, where the formation of a new company is the subject, the old order being set aside and where if anywhere, we should expect to find ecclesiastical regulations there is nothing of the kind, but the simplest of all ideas—one flock and one shepherd. And so on. Not only is there a complete absence of an ecclesiastical formula, but ordinances are not even mentioned. Neither Christian baptism, nor the Lord's Supper is once referred to in John's Gospel or Epistles.

All this is surely significant. Have we sufficiently noticed the bearing of it? If we have we shall not easily escape the conviction that in these writings there is special guidance for us in days when the administration committed to Paul, as regards what is external, has hopelessly broken down. We never read of the Apostle John founding an assembly. The Apostle Paul founded many. We have no epistles of the former to assemblies. We have many of the latter. John never refers to ordinances; Paul repeatedly. Why this marked difference? There must be a reason. Is it not found in the fact that Paul's work, *in so far as it was ecclesiastical*, was to

pass away. John only deals with what is abiding. In keeping with this we find Paul speaking frequently of his departure, and consequent disintegration in the church. With John it is the reverse. He is always present. As the Lord said of him: "if I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee" (Compare Acts 20:29-30, and 2Tim 4:6, with 2. John 12, and 3. John 14.) Even Paul, as we have seen, has no thought of building up anything ecclesiastical after the ruin had once set in. His final word to the Ephesian elders is: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to *build you up* and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." That is it. "Build *you up*." To have the soul built up is the supreme thing. And this is just what John comes in to do, and what, under divine teaching, he is so well able to do. If we possess what this inspired writer can give—if the glories of his first chapter occupy us; if we know our place in that invisible temple, where every whit of it utters the glory of God, of which mention is made in his second chapter; if we have within us the well of living water springing up of which he speaks in John 4; and the more abundant life of John 10; with a great deal more beside, we may be very well content to leave ecclesiastical architecture to those who have nothing better.<sup>1</sup>

The question may be asked: "If an ecclesiastical system exists what is to be done?" Insist upon all that to which special prominence is given in the writings of John and each for himself keep as free in spirit as possible from everything that savours of an ecclesiastical organization. Remembering as one has said that "all religious societies live by reason of the spirit of life that is in them. They die in proportion as they are manipulated with a high and arbitrary hand. For arbitrary manipulation is the death of the spirit. It is the ultimate blasphemy which assumes that we are wiser than God." Of one thing we may be quite sure. Sooner or later every ecclesiastical system will become a hindrance to the work of God."

2. In considering what has caused the unhappy developments in connection with the movement here spoken of, we come, secondly, to

## **The divisions which have taken place.**

These have resulted from, and are directly connected with, the fact of the movement having assumed an ecclesiastical form. There have been five of them within the last five-and-twenty years.<sup>2</sup> That is a world-wide division once every five years. When we consider what these divisions mean—the sorrow and perplexity, and separation, with all its attendant bitterness, and with no hope of reconciliation—the thought of it is simply overpowering. This is sufficiently appalling, but this is not all. Those who are acquainted with these episodes know what an amount of thought and time they occupy. For these questions are not settled in a day. They spread themselves over weeks, and months, and even years. The correspondence they entail is prodigious. The pamphlets issued (and which believers all over the world were called upon to read) in connection with only one of them would fill a volume. If all this is taken into consideration it seems as though we had hardly been doing anything else for a quarter of a century than divide. And what about the effect of such controversies on the flock of God?

It seems sometimes as if the gravity of these divisions had never been sufficiently taken into account, and that the reason of them is twofold. They partly result from an ecclesiasticism

which was unnecessary and unwarranted; and partly from failing to see that something less drastic than entire separation would have met the case.

It is not necessary to enter into any details. Principles are of far more importance. Scripture alone can furnish us with these. In dealing with evil (for as long as the present state of things exists evil is sure to manifest itself in the church), we are not left without guidance. On what ground have we the right to refuse fellowship to any professing to be Christians? Scripture furnishes at least two examples. In the Second Epistle of John we read: "Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. ... If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Here then is a clear case of one who denied the very fundamental truth of Christianity. There is to be no fellowship with him. In 1Cor 5 we have a different case. It is not doctrine here, but moral conduct. Evil has been perpetuated of a very gross character, and how is it to be met? The Apostle says: "put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Here again we cannot help calling attention to the difference between Paul and John. John presents the matter from an individual point of view, and we should hardly know there was such a thing as a church at all (for the church you must understand had become a place *out of which people were being cast*—not bad people either—see 3 John), and the instruction as to the evil person is "receive him not into your house." That is, *keep him out*. Whereas Paul recognises an assembly *out of which* the wicked person is to be put.

The two cases mentioned above are the only two instances where absolute refusal of the parties implicated is obligatory; and it is only on such like grounds we can refuse fellowship to any. Yet the subject of world-wide division is hardly covered by either. In the one case it is individual action, in the other the act of a local assembly. The fact is scripture does not furnish an instance of such a thing taking place. It does mention a conference whereby a world-wide controversy was closed, and a possible division averted (see Acts 15). But will it surprise anyone to learn that the scriptures offer no suggestion whatever as to the kind of division to which some who read these lines have become accustomed? As regards such a matter they are absolutely silent. Inferences that we may have drawn scripture has not drawn for us.<sup>3</sup>

An analysis of the passages which refer to the manifestation of evil calling for discipline will confirm what has just been stated. The passages are as follows:—Mt 18:15-17; Rom 16:17; 1Cor 5; 1Thess 5:14; 2Thess 3:6, 14; 1Tim 1:19-20. 5:20, 6:5; 2Tim 2:19-26; 3; 5; Titus 1:9-13, 3:10; 2. John 9-10.

First we have a case of personal trespass. If the trespasser remained obdurate after all entreaty and expostulation, the admonition is "let him be unto *thee* as an heathen man and a publican." How often this has been taken to mean let him be so unto the *church*. And on this assumption persons have not infrequently been put outside the Christian circle altogether (as far as that is practicable in a day like this). Yet it does not involve the church at all. It is simply "let him be unto *thee*." Though the church is to take its part in seeking a reconciliation. Not, apparently, however, in anything further.

Second, the case of those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the teaching. The instruction of the Apostle is—avoid them.

3rd. The case of flagrant moral evil—"Put away."

- 4th. The disorderly—Warn.
- 5th. The disorderly—Withdraw from.
- 6th. Disobedience to Apostolic injunction—Have no company with him.
- 7th. Blasphemers—Delivered to Satan by the Apostle.
- 8th. Them that sin—"Rebuke."
- 9th. Perverse disputings—"Withdraw from."
- 10th. Vessels to dishonour—"Purge himself."
- 11th. Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof—"Turn away."
- 12th. Unruly and vain talkers and deceivers—"Whose mouths must be stopped."
- 13th. A heretic—"Refuse" (or avoid).
- 14th. Abides not in the doctrine of Christ—"Receive him not into your house."

These are all the cases mentioned in scripture where some form of discipline is enjoined. Broadly speaking there seem to be five kinds. Absolute rejection—delivery unto Satan—avoiding (with this are classed "withdrawing," "having no company with," "purging himself from," and "turning away")—warning—rebuking. It will be observed that by far the most frequent is that form which comes under the head of "avoiding," etc. Yet this is undoubtedly the form least in vogue to-day. Is it because the easiest method of getting rid of trouble is to get rid of the troubler altogether? Yet as far as this kind of *assembly* action goes, there is only one instance out of the whole fourteen cases above enumerated. Nor ought another fact to be overlooked. There is a tendency now to make everything a question of the breaking of bread. In the above cases, while it would be clearly involved in the case at Corinth, and doubtless would in the case of the blasphemers and those who brought not the doctrine of Christ, yet in the others *the breaking of bread is not even so much as once named*.

The fact is, and it cannot be stated too clearly, if the fellowship of the Church of God in those early days had been liable to be broken in upon over matters which have been allowed to hinder it to-day, it would have been put out of existence long ago. Such a system of discipline would have proved self-destructive. The world would have voted it, at all events, not a blessing, but an intolerable nuisance, and have got rid of it, just as the Japanese did in their own country because the Christians there could not agree amongst themselves. The assembly of the living God, however, was never intended to rest upon a basis so insecure, or be laid open to such numberless causes of disintegration. It was to represent the character of God before men, and therefore division was never contemplated except over matters vital to its very existence.

"But," says someone, "does it not say 'there must be also sects among you that they which are approved may be made manifest among you?' Does not this text lead us to expect division, and seem to approve it?" It does certainly imply that the state of things here described would arise, only the sects referred to in this passage were *within*, and not of the same character as we are contemplating. It was not one party claiming alone to be right, and refusing to break bread with any who did not belong to it. The quotation is 1Cor 11:19, and if the previous verse be read, it becomes clear that the schisms were within. It reads: "For first of all, *when ye come together in the church*, I hear that there be schisms among you." This was bad enough, but not so bad as a complete severance. We do not come together in the church with those divided from, and therefore our divisions must be very different to those contemplated here. Yet how often this passage has been quoted as a justification for the

former? It will be seen that it lends no support whatever to division in the sense of ceasing to break bread.

That there have been world-wide divisions in the church during a history of more than eighteen hundred years is true. Enemies of the truth and evil workers have arisen which made it a necessity; and faithful men have not been wanting to uphold the standard at all cost. Who can forget the daring exclamation of Athanasius "Athanasius against the world"; and his unremitting opposition to the Arians. But in all such cases most vital questions were involved, such as the true deity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the very essence of the gospel. It was so at the time of the Reformation. And moreover, they were questions which appealed to every believer, and directly concerned his own individual faith. Can this be said of questions to-day which have been allowed to raise veritable storms of controversy, and part Christians asunder for the rest of their days? Alas! no. They have been matters of no concern to ordinary Christians, even devout ones, and into the refinements of which they could not enter.

Someone has well said we ought to distinguish between the *essence* of the gospel and the *perfection* of the gospel. It is possible for a servant to present the one, and yet fall short of the other. But is he to be branded as a heretic for that reason, and excluded from all fellowship and all service, except with and among those who follow him into his exile? Who, it might very well be asked, can present the truth in all its perfection? The effect of controversy over such points is only to bewilder the simple, and do infinitely more harm than if the supposed offender were allowed to go his way in peace. The vast majority of Christians are incapable of judging such points, and they are not called upon to judge them. One outstanding feature of most of the divisions has been an absolute want of clearness as to the issue. And this for the simple reason that no great matter was at stake. There has been no broad well-defined principle of vital moment involved. And the consequence has been bewilderment, and a confused noise. Had it been otherwise godly men holding the same truth as to the Lord's person and work, and all that is fundamental; and agreeing on church truth, would not have been found in opposite camps. Nor would there to-day be thirteen meetings in one city with no intercommunion. How little did those who met for the first time in Aungier Street, Dublin, ever dream that ecclesiastical discipline would be the rock upon which the movement would split; or that the day would ever come when the privilege they claimed for themselves to meet together to break bread would be denied to others. Is it not true, "the idea creates the organization, the organization destroys the idea"?

The foregoing remarks will surely not be interpreted as wishing to cover up evil, or make light of it. Nothing is further from the intention of the writer. All he attempts is to show:—

1. That an ecclesiastical movement was not desirable—was out of keeping with the ruin of the church, and out of harmony with the line expressly marked out for the last times by the Spirit through the Apostle John. Further, that the movement having taken that form the very truths embodied and expressed in its original inception have become less distinct, if not altogether effaced. For it is evident that the truth of the "one body" could find expression only along moral and spiritual lines.
2. This ecclesiastical system fostered and accentuated divisions which, from a scriptural standpoint, were unnecessary. They invariably took the form of excision, while scripture makes it the exception, usually enjoining warning, rebuking, or withdrawal (*i.e.*, having

no company with), but not ceasing to break bread.

It is necessary to add just a word as to the *method* of these divisions.

It is remarkable that in those passages of scripture which specially warn us against encroaching evil, and the inroads of the apostacy, there is no mention of special action on the part of the church in putting it down or casting it out. Both in Peter's Second Epistle, and in Jude the judgment of such seems entirely left to the Lord. It is not otherwise when we come to the addresses to the seven churches. The whole church is first addressed and warned, and then the individual is exhorted to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, and to overcome. In every instance the Lord passes from the "angel," *i.e.*, the representative of the whole local assembly, to the individual. This becomes accentuated in the last four addresses. Even in Philadelphia it is a question of overcoming. What does all this show? Why in all these passages—passages in which we should most of all expect to find ecclesiastical discipline enlarged upon if this were the remedy—is there absolute silence upon that very point? Except to teach us that *overcoming is not an ecclesiastical act but a moral state*. Not only so, but before corruption set in, when an assembly had power to purge out, excision was not the only thing to be thought of, or even the first, though the case in point was one of flagrant wrong doing. To the Corinthians Paul writes: "and ye are puffed up, and have not rather *mourned* that he that has done this deed might be *taken away from among you*" (1Cor 5:2). If this means anything it means that they ought to have looked to the Lord to rid them of the evil doer. Have we understood what all these scriptures combine with one voice to teach us? Is it not, that when evil manifests itself it is first of all an occasion for *mourning*, and then for waiting upon the Lord to manifest delivering power? Instead of which the weapon of excision is seized, and mere fleshly energy brought into exercise. Oh! how much of the Lord's delivering goodness has been missed, how many opportunities to overcome have been lost, and what confusion and loss have resulted from such a course.

Are not many convinced that if more room had been left for the Lord to come in, and there had been more waiting upon Him, with less activity, we should not have so much to mourn over to-day? If only the mourning had been done beforehand and persisted in there would be little occasion for it now.

But from whence did we get our ideas of discipline and ecclesiastical excision? And where in scripture do we find either precept or example for the course so often pursued? Never do we hear of one assembly coming to a judgment for all others on a matter *outside its own jurisdiction* (and this is the point), nor do we read of one being told to do so. Each assembly was qualified to settle its own matters, and no other assembly would think of disputing that right. But for one to take up a matter outside its own boundary, and come to a judgment which was to bind everybody without consulting those who were to be bound, does not satisfy the requirements of scripture, common sense, or charity. It is this which accounts for so much which we have to deplore. The justification of it seems to be that a letter of commendation being presented to an assembly it is bound to take notice of the matter under dispute, that very act bringing it within its jurisdiction. But this is a purely human hypothesis after all. It is as gratuitous a means of causing trouble and dissension as was ever invented. Is God its author? Let the reader carefully consider what answer he will make to that question. Scripture will hardly help him to answer it in the affirmative. It is absolutely silent on the matter. If we are not

mistaken it rests upon the foregone conclusion that the breaking of bread is an inevitable committal—however great the mental reservation, or however little such a theory is intended—an inevitable committal to everything which in the remotest manner concerns those who sit down together for that purpose. This however may possibly come up for consideration later on. Let us ask now, if, supposing a letter of commendation be presented, there is any course open beside accepting it as a challenge to judge a question. To refuse would, on the one hand, deprive a fellow Christian of his privilege, and on the other hand might be taken as a definite judgment of the case. Two courses are open beside this. If not known the individual might be received on the ground of the letter, it being distinctly stated that this did not prejudice any case pending settlement. If known the letter of commendation might be dropped out, and the bearer received simply as a Christian. Either of these courses would tend to peace and order, nor would any divine principle be violated. Unfortunately, as things are, there would be one fatal objection. That is, the person has presented himself on purpose to bring the matter to a crisis and obtain a decision. We are now face to face with the real question. Is such a practice divinely certified?

As before indicated, scripture does not lay down any law in support of such a method of procedure. Difficulties did arise in the early church, world-wide difficulties, striking at the very roots of Christianity, but we never read of their settlement on the above lines. We do read of a *conference* at Jerusalem (see Acts 15) over a matter that was causing considerable unrest among the churches, and the settlement of which was absolutely essential to their peace and prosperity. And the method of this conference is clearly indicated. We read “that Paul and Barnabas *and certain other of them* should go up to Jerusalem *unto the apostles and elders* about this question.” So that they did not go up to the church as such, but to the apostles and elders; nor did they make it a question of breaking of bread; nor was it only one who went, but quite a number. That it was not made an assembly matter first of all is made additionally clear by another statement. It says: “the *apostles and elders* came together for to consider of this matter.” The *apostles and elders* having considered the matter, the whole church is brought in when the final declaration is made, but only then (see v. 22). Here then we have a record of how a great difficulty was satisfactorily settled. It is the one outstanding instance in scripture, and, as we see, it all proceeded on very different lines to what we are accustomed to to-day. Men well known, men qualified to consider such matters came together, and everything was done in the open. The result was all that could be desired. It was so in spite of the admittedly difficult and delicate nature of the negotiations. Can as much be said of the settlements during the past five-and-twenty years with which we stand connected? Have they not resulted in disaffection and loss? Is it not because we have neglected to make the conference at Jerusalem our model?

It will at once be objected by some that apostles and elders do not exist to-day. If this objection is to hold then every matter, to be consistent, affecting the welfare of the saints is to take care of itself. Everyone knows this principle is not acted on. Apostles do not exist, but there are those who make the spiritual welfare of God’s people their special care. Without having duly appointed elders there are those who do their work. The objection therefore that there is a lack of apostles and elders does not hold. There are those, in spite of our poverty, who are well able to perform for the flock of God to-day, when difficulties arise, the very service which the apostles and elders performed in the early church. But to leave to chance the decision of grave matters affecting the happiness of saints all over the world—the chance

of a letter of commendation being presented to some assembly, which assembly may not contain within itself those competent to judge, is a method the likeliest of all to lead to disaster. This has been demonstrated over and over again. Nor have we been consistent with our own principles. A judgment has sometimes been arrived at by an assembly, and because the decision was not popular, repudiated.

Then again, it is surely a principle of first importance that those who are to be bound by a judgment ought to have some voice, either representatively, or otherwise, in determining that judgment. This certainly was the case in Acts 15. But for one local assembly to arrive at a decision affecting everyone within its fellowship without the least consultation, and then to present it at the point of the bayonet for acceptance, and to make it a test of fellowship for all time is to say the least beneath the dignity of the church of God, and contrary to all precedent. The consequence of this has been that divisions have taken place without parallel in the history of the church. Brethren in the Lord have been divided over matters which never ought to have divided them. In coming together at the first what divisions did those who met in Aungier Street have to investigate before they could partake of the Lord's supper? Only those which had taken place on the very broadest basis, and which will last for all time. Each one was quite convinced as far as he knew that every other was sound in the doctrines of grace, and as to the Person of the Lord, and the Trinity. But what a legacy has now been left to Christians who come after us. If the five divisions in twenty-five years were worth anything; if they were not only accomplished on earth, but ratified in heaven, then all these have henceforth to be taken into account in determining fellowship as long as the church remains on earth!

Strange to say, this discipline which has resulted in so much disunion, and disintegration, is supposed to derive its sanction from the truth of the "one body." The church being one, all discipline must take effect everywhere, and be equally binding everywhere. And this not only in the case of local matters, but matters that are not local are taken up and settled by one meeting; and if settled by one, settled for all. And this is founded upon the truth of the one body. Strange indeed that a system can be deduced from the truth of the one body that has become the most effectual means of dismembering that body. So that according to this plan the truth of the body contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. For if we go on at the rate of five divisions in twenty-five years—and there is no reason why the rate should not even be increased if we remain as we are—what will be left fifty years hence? And what would be the condition of the church of God *as a whole* if these methods obtained everywhere?

Is such discipline as we speak of connected anywhere in the scriptures with the truth of the one body? Is not the very reverse true? After all the term "body" is only a figure of speech, and cannot be made to do duty for every idea we may choose to connect with it. What ideas does scripture associate with it but those of unity; co-hesion; being "perfectly joined together"; "comforted"; "members having the same *care* one for another"; "if one member suffers all suffer"? Are not these ideas the very antithesis of division? The very thought of division and discipline is utterly foreign to the idea of "the body." Moreover, in many cases where discipline and separation have taken place the right of being considered still in the "body" would not be denied to those who are refused all rights of fellowship. What an anomaly! In the body, yet refused in every place where the members of that body meet. A child of God, yet unrecognized by any of the children of God. The fact is, the sin which demands such discipline

must—if scripture is at all to guide us—be of such a character that the perpetrator can no longer be recognized as a Christian at all until he repents. The Apostle John declares: “He that commits sin is of the devil.” Again, “whosoever is born of God does not practise sin.” And the Apostle Paul in giving instructions to the Corinthians says “put away from among yourselves that *wicked person*” (1Cor 5:13). Not put away that *brother*. Whereas in less grave cases, calling for a milder form of discipline, he does say “yet count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a *brother*” (2Thess 3:15). Is it not clear then that if anyone is to be put out it is only because he can no longer be recognized as a “brother,” or a “member?”

The truth of the “one body” therefore, far from warranting universal excision, forbids it *in toto*, unless the case demanding discipline disqualifies for membership in every sense of the word. Further, the truth of the “one body” instead of encouraging, forbids the thought of a local assembly determining matters affecting the whole body. How can it when it is not the whole body? The most it could do would be, if the case came within its purview, to collect information that would lead saints everywhere to an enlightened judgment. This would be a real service. Instead of which circulars are sent out demanding the acceptance of a certain judgment as a condition of fellowship without even stating the reasons for that judgment. Supposing it to be accepted of what moral worth is it to accept, without knowing why, a mere *ipse dixit*? The way things have been looked at is *the whole body must accept the decisions of any one gathering*. The *truth* is the other way about—*the one gathering has no mandate to decide matters which equally affect all*.

## The breaking of bread.

3. With those who met in Aungier Street, Dublin, the breaking of bread was the rallying point. Having been drawn to the Lord, and to one another, it became at once the occasion for showing forth His death—the basis of all their blessings; of remembering according to His own desire Him Who had thus loved them; and also the expression of their oneness in Him. They never dreamed probably that this simple feast would become the pivot of an ecclesiastical system, and a means of discipline the effect of which would ultimately destroy the very purpose they had in view. Yet such has been the case. Many years ago someone wrote “Truly it is grievous to see such instances as have occurred of the greatest excesses committed by the rash, the forward, and the inexperienced, in the way of invasion of the peace of gatherings, ... and the table of the Lord, that sweet memorial of love—love strong as death—turned almost everywhere by brethren into

**The rod of their administration.”**

This surely could never have been but for the ecclesiastical tendency already noticed; and certain misconceptions in regard to fellowship, and what the breaking of bread involves. There are some who seem to think that in breaking bread we somehow identify ourselves with everything with which those who break bread with us are connected. So that breaking bread is made almost, if not quite, the same thing as *putting our hands* upon people. Not only so, but anything done by any single member commits everybody else. So that it was actually said of a brother who went to hear an evangelist not reckoned as “in fellowship” that he had “taken the whole meeting with him.” That is, he had committed everybody else by doing what he, as an individual, with a conscience of his own, felt perfectly free to do. Surely no scriptures can be quoted in support of such extravagant notions. Yet such views are held to greater or less

extent, and are accountable for very much of the friction and disturbance that occur.

If we could divest the breaking of bread of all that has been tacked on to it we should get rid of a great many sources of trouble. It must surely be obvious that in breaking bread we are (as to one aspect of it) expressing our fellowship simply *as Christians*. In fact, that it is *Christian fellowship*. We did not make it and we cannot alter it. It was there before ever we were, and no new grounds of fellowship can be laid. It is expressed in the words "the cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." Our fellowship, as set forth here, is not on the ground of our all doing the same thing, or having the same opinions when we are apart as individuals; it is on the ground of the death of Christ. That death has removed all distinctions after the flesh in order that we may be one. It has also given us a common share in the blessings of Christianity. This is the fellowship, and we must not bring in matters of individual responsibility.

Ample room for liberty of conscience as to our own individual walk, even to going to a feast with unbelievers, if so disposed, or eating meat sacrificed to idols, is insisted on in the very same chapter in which the truth of the Lord's Table is presented. Consideration for others, however, is to have due place with us. "Let no man seek his own but every man another's wealth." All this helps to make the points insisted on clear that breaking bread does not commit me to everything that another may think right. It is the expression of CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, not with all that Christians may do. Otherwise there would be no room for the exercise of individual conscience, and each would be ruling everybody else.

It may be a great relief to some to learn that breaking bread does not commit them to everything that is done by those they break bread with. The proof of this, from scripture, is to be found in such passages as Mt 18:17, and 2Thess 3:14-15. Here we have in the first instance the case of one who had so behaved toward a fellow believer, and remained so impervious to all appeal, that he has to be considered by the party sinned against as a heathen man and a publican. But we are not told that this affects the man's church relationship. The church is to be informed, and intervene in the way of reconciliation, but beyond that it is not to go. And here surely we can see infinite wisdom in limiting such matters to the individuals primarily concerned. The assembly was established for other purposes than settling private quarrels. It was to be a testimony for God in the world, and if the whole communion of that assembly were to be affected publicly by the differences amongst individuals that testimony would soon have been brought into disrepute. Therefore breaking bread with an individual who is treated by one member as a heathen man and a publican did not associate anybody with his acts.<sup>4</sup> The same applies to the disorderly persons referred to in Thessalonians. The breaking of bread is not so much as once raised.

The contrary thought must however be in the minds of many, or why, when any difference arises amongst us, do we allow it to interfere with the breaking of bread? Has the Lord no claim to be remembered? Have saints because they cannot agree ceased to be members of His body? Has the broad ground of Christian fellowship ceased to exist because certain Christians have ceased to see eye to eye? The fellowship of the Lord's table (1Cor 10) is certainly not based upon identity of judgment, or like-mindedness, nor is the one body referred to there *a mutual agreement association*. If it had been so then breaking of bread had ceased

long before at Corinth. But did it? They were split into sects, and calling themselves by different names; Paul has to write to them about their contentions, and beseech them to be of the same mind and the same judgment, but he does not rest the breaking of bread upon their being so, or tell them to discontinue because they were not.

Nothing can surely be more clear, if scripture is to be our guide, than that breaking of bread expresses in the broadest possible way our fellowship *as Christians*. Moreover, there is only one Christian fellowship. It has been in existence over eighteen centuries. It goes on from age to age as successive generations of believers pass off the scene. No one can form another. Some seem as if they thought they could. They would like to gather into one company just those, and only those, who are in perfect agreement with them, and share all their predilections and preferences. They may do it. But they have left the ground of the church of God; and their fellowship has ceased to be true *Christian* fellowship. It is their own. There is a great danger in little communities of those who view truth from a certain standpoint being drawn together and forming a sort of inner circle which becomes of all importance to them. This is damaging to all, but most to those who participate in it. It contracts the affections and the outlook; and instead of *the truth*, it becomes only a question of our view of it. No meeting, nor any number of believers can make terms of communion for the rest. The terms are already laid down, and cannot be revised or altered without departure from Christian ground. It is not how narrow I can be, but how broad. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye but not to judge his doubtful thoughts." If only we would leave what is doubtful alone, "judging nothing before the time until the Lord come," how well it would be for all.

The objection will be made that this opens the door to all kinds of evil. "If," someone will say, "in breaking bread I am not committed to what others do, and say, and think; then an individual might participate who had committed some flagrant sin, or held some pernicious doctrine." This does not follow, however. In the matter of actual sin the case is altogether different. Known and recognized evil strikes at the very root of Christianity itself. It is destructive therefore of the very fellowship expressed in the breaking of bread; and if allowed the fellowship is annulled. It is no longer the table of the Lord then, but the table of demons. We cannot have fellowship with both. And as there is nothing between, there ought not to be very great difficulty in determining who ought to be admitted and who refused. And as already pointed out, two leading cases are recorded in scripture for our guidance; the one a case of moral wickedness, the other a case of error in belief which sapped the very foundations of the faith.

One other point needs to be discussed before leaving this subject, viz.: the injunctions given in 2. Timothy 2:19-26. This is a most important passage. Let us see what it really says and really means. In trying to understand it we need to observe what it does not say, as well as pay strict attention to what it does say. Clearly the apostle is preparing Timothy for the presence of evil in the very house of God. Just as God's house at Jerusalem, which should have been a house of prayer, became a den of thieves and a house of merchandise (used for man's gain instead of God's glory), so this present house would, as a vessel of testimony, become equally corrupt. Will the reader mark well that no new house is hinted at, no fresh beginning, *and no clearing of the house itself*. If these three points are grasped to commence with, the true bearing of the passage will be more easily understood. The next thing to be noticed is how intensely individual and moral everything is. It is "if a man purge himself"—not purge the

house, or purge the people—but “himself.” *He is not told to leave the house.* What he has to purge himself from is evident. It has a moral character. In verse eighteen Paul speaks of those “who concerning *the truth* have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some.” So that there were false teachers inside actually overthrowing the faith of others inside.

This is the kind of iniquity that it was incumbent on all owning the Lord to depart from. But it does not say to another house, or another ecclesiastical system—on the contrary, it goes on to describe the mixed character of the great professing body—some vessels to honour, and some to dishonour, and that a man is to see, not that these vessels are cast out, but that he, himself, is not identified with them, or contaminated by them. Then again, to show the intensely moral bearing of the whole, the apostle adds “flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” It is a company marked by *moral* traits, not ecclesiastical rules and regulations.<sup>5</sup> *Not a company, necessarily, which can be recognized by outward separation;* this company must be drawn together not by what is outward, but by what is inward. Not by edicts, or decrees, or judgments, but by *moral and spiritual affinity*. All else is useless if the pure heart is wanting. But if the pure heart is there—the heart that sees God and therefore maintains an inward separation from what is not according to Him, and that judges what is *really* evil just because it does see Him, and in order that it may see Him more and more—such a heart will inevitably find its own company with hearts that correspond. This will be fellowship indeed. All else is but as the chaff to the wheat. “Without holiness shall no man see the Lord.” It is only as each judges the evil in himself—all hatred, arrogance, pride and impurity—that fellowship is possible. And if any man would like to know how pure his heart is let him test himself by what follows in the chapter we are considering. “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be *gentle* unto all men, *apt to teach, patient, in meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves.” Gentleness, meekness, patience! These are pre-eminently the characteristics of the new man, and in the midst of a corrupt profession these and such like qualities are alone of any account with God.

## The real question.

The point arrived at in the preceding paragraph brings us face to face with the real question. What is it God looks for in His people? What does He require? If much time has been occupied in diagnosing the disease, and pointing out the evil results of ecclesiasticism, it has surely not been unnecessary in view of all the sorrow and unrest caused thereby. Surely, at least, some lessons have been learned, and no one can desire to perpetuate a state of things so fraught with mischief. But we would now turn to the more positive aspects. What then is that good thing which should be sought? What is the supreme good? Or in other words: What does God most of all require of me? The answer lies on the surface of those divine communications God has given us, as well as deep down in the very heart of them. Do we not at every turn find that God requires that His people should be like Himself? That His nature should be formed in them, and that they should bear His character? That they should seek to possess the qualities He values most? Consequently such injunctions as the following meet us everywhere both in the Old and New Testaments: “He has showed thee, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” We are told to “follow holiness”; to “ever follow that which is good”; “follow after

love.” In one word, the supreme good is GODLINESS—which simply means *Godlikeness*.

It is this correspondence to Himself God requires, and He will accept no substitute. He demanded this from His people of old; He demands it still. “For I know Him” said Jehovah of Abraham, “that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, *to do justice and judgment*, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him.” And why is that deferred? Why, to-day, are his descendants scattered and forsaken? Just because they failed at this very point. They were not like Abraham in their faith or their works. If the prophets—the greater and the minor—are studied, it will be found that their ministry was always to this end. It was to bring the people morally into conformity with God. For want of this the time came when even their sacrifices and feasts were simply an abomination. However correctly they might seek to carry out the temple worship God would not accept it. These are the terrible words from the lips of Isaiah, “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates.” Then he tells them what Jehovah requires; “seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” Again, “Is not this the fast which I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke, etc., etc.” (Isa 1 and 58).

The same appeal forms the burden of all the messages of the prophets. When David is addressing God with respect to the building of the temple, and asking God’s acceptance of all the store he had prepared, even though he is offering untold wealth, yet his conscience tells him that is not enough, there must be something else behind or it will all be in vain, and he seems to break off abruptly, and says “I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness” (1Chr 29:17). Yes, God judges everything by the state of heart. There must be moral fitness. This is very conspicuous in the Psalms. The King God will set upon His holy hill of Zion, as mentioned in Ps 2, has his character described in Ps. 1. The first Psalm precedes the second in moral, as well as numerical order. In Ps 15 the man that shall abide in God’s tabernacle and dwell in His holy hill is “he that walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth *in his heart*.” And if Ps 15 gives us a delineation of the righteous man, the next psalm gives us an equally faithful portraiture of the godly man. And these two characteristics have invariably marked God’s chosen men. They are specially mentioned of Simeon, who was privileged to take the child Jesus up in his arms; and of Cornelius, the first Gentile to be publicly admitted into the Kingdom. Nor must it be thought that this principle applied only under law. When we come to the New Testament, and the dispensation of grace, it is if anything more strongly emphasized. If God’s command to Israel was “be ye holy, for I am holy” if “holiness to the Lord” was to be on the forefront of Aaron’s mitre; we find that our Lord in praying to the Father about a new company, brought into even closer relationship, addresses Him as “Holy Father” and “Righteous Father.” And we are told “the new man is after God created in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph 4:24).

This may indeed be said to be the apex to which we are conducted in every epistle, and thus the point to which God would lead His people is clearly made manifest. If in Romans we are first of all told how a man becomes righteous before God, apart from works; yet, the works by which a man becomes practically righteous are equally insisted on at the close. Who can forget the chapter on love in the first epistle to the Corinthians; and yet how often it seems forgotten; and “the more excellent way,” consequently not so much frequented as it might be.

In the second epistle it is the life of Jesus that is to be manifested; and “having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” In Galatians the Apostle insists that “in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision; but faith, which works by love.” Bringing under our observation, too, the blessed fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, etc., and showing that the really spiritual is he who can restore an erring brother in the spirit of meekness. In all this indicating the true character of that “new creation” in Christ Jesus which alone avails. In Ephesians we learn that God has chosen us to this very end that we should be holy and without blame before Him—sonship our place and portion with all the privileges of His house—and then flowing from this what a marvellous and rich unfolding of all that is in keeping with it. “Created in Christ Jesus unto good works”; “to walk worthy of our vocation ... with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” While the truth as it is in Jesus is to mark us: “let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you”; concluding with “be ye therefore *imitators* of God as dear children.” In Philippians all this seems to reach its highest development. “For me to live is Christ” says the apostle. While he prays as well as exhorts that they may be “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ” “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” and “shine as lights in the world holding forth the word of life.” Without going further into the other epistles surely enough has been said in answer to the question raised. The above summary shows conclusively what God’s supreme desire for His people is, and how we ought to walk and to please Him.

It is just here that Israel failed, and where the church has failed. Is it not where every movement fails? But God never lowers His standard. If Israel broke down, yet the word to the remnant is “that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in *holiness and righteousness* before Him, all the days of our life.” And to Nathanael—one surely typical of Israel in the future—Christ says “behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” Yes, God not only never lowers His standard, but He is ever seeking to bring His people back to it, and in the end He will do so. At last with Israel God will achieve His purpose, for “a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it ... but the redeemed shall walk there.” It is the same to-day. If the church fails, if it joins with the world, if it becomes polluted, the word at the end is the same as at the beginning; “these things says He that is *holy*, He that is *true*.” As if He said “You must answer to Me, if you want to please Me.”

In the face of this undeviating testimony of scripture may we not well challenge our own state? Have we ever seriously enquired what it is God wants of us? What does He actually find? Is there not party spirit, and as a consequence more or less coldness and distance towards those we think not of our party? Have we not our views of truth, and preference for those we consider in sympathy with us? Have we not respect of persons preferring one above another; although scripture tells us to do nothing by partiality? And have not these things caused internal dissension until the words of the apostle might be fitly applied to us? “Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” Have not views of truth been made a basis of fellowship until the question has almost to be asked again was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? Have we not

emblazoned upon our walls the motto “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” while within peace is a stranger and unity a fiction? And if this is so (and who can deny it?) can it cause surprise that the world, and a worldly church look on with wonder, and some degree of scorn at a company where the necessity for unity and the blessedness of the truth of the one body are insisted on, and yet where the barriers of ecclesiasticism are more firmly rooted than anywhere else?

The question will be raised—ought we not to stand for the truth? But *how* ought we to stand for it? The *how* has often been considered a very minor point indeed. But the *how* is almost everything in God’s account. If the truth is not maintained in a becoming manner it is not maintained at all. It becomes instead a lying against the truth. “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not and lie not *against the truth*.” (James 3:14.) No! the truth is only upheld in one way. We neither hold it nor maintain it except in *love* (Eph 4:15). A mere intellectual apprehension of it is not enough. The truth indeed ought to be maintained, and the assembly is said to be the pillar and stay of it. But how? In the passage in the first epistle to Timothy, from which this statement is taken, it is preceded by the words “how thou oughtest to *behave thyself*,” and followed by “great is the mystery of *godliness*.” This leaves us in no doubt that the assembly is the pillar and stay of the truth just in so far as the individual members of it are characterized by proper behaviour and by godliness. Who for instance would listen to the most eloquent and orthodox setting forth of the truth from the lips of an ungodly man? The truth would fall to the ground for lack of the support of a life agreeable thereto. It is so everywhere and always. If a man stands up and reads some exquisite passage about love and begins to dilate thereon, his words fall upon deaf ears if it is known his life stands in direct contrast therewith. Christ upheld the truth, and He shows us the only way in which we can uphold it. When He said to the Jews “because I tell you the truth ye believe Me not,” He could also immediately add “which of you convinces Me of sin”? And when challenged as to who He was, He replies, “Altogether that which I say unto you.” His deeds corresponded with His words. The truth He uttered was but the expression of what He was. “I do always those things that please Him” (the Father), He said.

O beloved brethren, how must we regard some of our contentions for the truth (so-called), and our consequent divisions in the light of these divine utterances? Is there not convincing proof that the only real way of holding the truth is in love, and the only way of maintaining it in any positive sense is in godliness—“holding forth the word of life”? And all this is in perfect keeping with the one great abiding testimony before men as delivered to us to maintain by our Lord Himself “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another.” Is it too late to begin again on these lines? Here we shall find peace, joy, strength, blessing, and above all the Lord’s approval. The gospel reveals the wonderful fact that God loves. But we are called to express it, and continue it. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us.” All through the ministry of our Lord, and the writings of His apostles, we are being led on to this point, for it is in this alone fulness of blessing can be found. How often in that last discourse as recorded in John—and particularly in John 15, where it is a question of our representing Him before the world—He presses upon the attention of His disciples His one command: “this is My commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you.”

Has not enough been said to show the state God requires, and that in scripture everything is made of what we are. And if anyone should ask “How am I to become all this”?—answering to God’s mind, characterized by godliness, and walking in love—scripture furnishes an answer. It is only by practice. “My mother and My brethren,” said Christ, “are they which hear the word of God and *do it*.” It is not sufficient to know. We may know all the doctrines in the Bible, and all the precepts too, and be very little affected. The Lord did not say “happy are ye if ye know these things,” but “if ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them.” A Chinese convert wrote to a missionary the other day saying “we are reading the Bible *and practising it*.” If this is their method it is no wonder a missionary stated that the best pulpit any preacher could have was the doorstep of a Chinese Christian’s house. “Because,” he said, “you may be quite sure the one inside is *practising* all that you preach about.”

It is said of Francis of Assisi that he had invited a young monk to preach with him in some town. They had walked to the town, and back again. “Father, when shall we begin to preach?” said the young man. “My son, we have been preaching—we were preaching when we were talking. We have been seen, looked at, and watched, so we have delivered our sermon. Ah: my son, it is no use that we walk anywhere to preach unless we preach as we walk.”

This principle of practice is laid down in Romans 6:19. Just as a wicked person by practising iniquity becomes more wicked—“iniquity unto iniquity”—he says: so a good man if he practises righteousness arrives at holiness. The process is universally recognized. Understanding the theory of music does not in itself constitute a person a brilliant pianist. Only constant and long continued practice will bring the master touch which no one can mistake. Reading the rules of cricket and understanding precisely how all the different strokes are to be made will not in itself enable a batsman to make a hundred runs in a first-class match. He can only achieve such results by practice. So it is true that just as a man becomes an adept in wickedness by practice, a man likewise becomes adorned with every Christian virtue in the same way. For the simple reason, as someone has said, “our acts re-act upon ourselves.” Only in this way can the new man within us be developed. An athlete puts on muscle by exercise. By exercise of another kind a Christian puts on “kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness,” etc.

Has there not been a sad lack of teaching of a practical character? And might not this account in some measure for the frequent lapses of a very serious nature calling for the exercise of discipline? There is imminent danger of our sometimes becoming mere *doctrinaires*.

While all this is said, at the same time glad testimony is borne to the fact that there are not wanting conspicuous examples of devotedness and Christlikeness. May the Lord increase in us all that which He most of all delights in.

It has been said (as already quoted) “the idea creates the organization; the organization destroys the idea.” If there is a danger of seeing this realized, does not the all important enquiry become, what were the ideas which originally created the organization? No one can doubt the existence of the organization. The effects of its presence are visible on every hand. But what about the “ideas” well-nigh lost in the confusion the organization has created? If these can be rescued; if they can be placed once more in the foreground; if they can be enthroned in the hearts and minds of the saints as they used to be; we may still hope, in spite

of all that has happened, for days of peace and prosperity.

It is only briefly, and very imperfectly, we can indicate some of the ideas the Spirit of God inspired anew in the minds of those responsible for the movement here under discussion. This movement “as an ecclesiastical experiment,” someone has said, “must fall unregretted; but let us spare no effort to preserve the elements of spiritual strength and beauty that it unquestionably enshrined.” This is a word fitly spoken, therefore it will certainly not be waste of time to attempt a summary, however inadequate, of elements so worthy of preservation.

1. Perhaps the outstanding idea, and the one which seized hold of the minds of the early brethren most powerfully, was that the church—though intermixed with—really existed apart from, and independently of, the various ecclesiastical organizations around them. They saw, or came to see, that all that was vital in the church was already organized; because the one body existed consequent upon Christ—the Head—being in heaven and the Holy Ghost on earth. That behind, as it were, all the outward organization of churches there was a living organization. It had been formed by divine power without human intervention of any kind. Here was a living organism due solely to the fact, that the Holy Spirit indwelt every member, thus uniting each to all—and all to one Head. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” And “from Whom (Christ) the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (1Cor 12 and Eph 4).
2. The foregoing truth having come to some like a fresh revelation, it soon became evident to such that a human organization had sprung up in Christendom which obscured this. Membership of an established church, or of some dissenting body, had become the prominent idea. Membership of the “one body” was largely lost sight of. When the latter idea, however, became somewhat restored to its original place in the thoughts of believers, there seemed to be no reason why the members of this one body should not meet together *as such*. Thus a second idea took effect, viz., the coming together for the breaking of bread. They all owed their blessing as Christians to one thing—Christ’s death. That death had put away all that divided, and formed the basis of a new and divinely given fellowship. They all owned one Lord. They were all members of one body. Did not the breaking of bread connect itself with all this? “This do in remembrance of Me” was the simple command of their Lord, handed on by the Apostle of the Gentiles. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come” was the sequel. “For we being many are one bread, one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread”; expressed their union and communion. Did any one dream of establishing other grounds of communion, or ecclesiastical tests? We trow not. Seeing they had come together on common ground where all had equal rights the question might well have been asked—“who will be the first to begin”? They found the ground and the fellowship based upon it waiting ready to hand. They could neither add to it nor take from it.
3. A third idea was, that, not only did the presence of the Holy Spirit constitute them one body, but, He was also the alone power from which worship and ministry must flow. Were not both the necessary, and natural outcome of life in the power of the Spirit, spoken of in the fourth and seventh chapters of John’s gospel? And did they not read

in 1Cor 12 that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost”? That, the same Spirit had bestowed diversities of gifts; and that “the manifestation of the Spirit was given to every man to profit withal”? And they learned that all this was subject, not to man’s control, but to the Lord’s. In this way worship became once more the spontaneous gift of hearts touched by the grace of God, and ministry flowed forth.

4. In connection with all this another great idea became prominent. That of being gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. What other Name could believers own? Did not Mt 18:20 furnish a sufficient charter? “For where two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst of them.” If the Name alone were owned, and trusted, was not the presence guaranteed? If so, what more could be wanted? It was not for them to claim any exclusive right to it. But acting in faith upon such a statement prove its power and blessedness. Upon this they ventured and not in vain.
5. Concurrently with these ideas—all found in scripture, though long obscured, but brought to light by the energy of the Holy Spirit—there was a remarkable revival of the truth as a whole. No exhaustive catalogue is attempted. But to show the range and variety of truths embraced in this spiritual *renaissance* it is only necessary to mention the recovery of the true idea of the church as the house of God—not a material structure, but spiritual. The true calling of the church and the proper hope of it for all believers—“called in one hope of your calling”; the distinction between the Lord’s coming for His saints and with them; as well as between the judgment seat of Christ before which believers will appear and the judgments of the twenty-fifth of Matthew, and the twentieth of Revelation. No clear views on these topics had existed in the church for many a century and along with the recovery of them, and the preaching of a clearer gospel, multitudes of believers came to know what it meant to have peace with God; to be accepted in the Beloved; and to cry by an indwelling Spirit, Abba, Father. This led to a clearer apprehension of the priesthood of all believers, and possession of title and privilege to draw nigh to God in the holiest.

The foregoing summary, brief and imperfect as it is, will serve at least to indicate the wonderful and blessed character of the testimony committed to those whose minds became filled with these ideas, and whose ways were formed by them. To bear witness before the church and the world to the existence of the most marvellous organization conceivable—“hid from ages and from generations but now made manifest”—the body of Christ; to bear witness to a divine fellowship existing amongst the members of that body based upon the death of Christ, and finding its visible expression in the breaking of bread; to have revived the thought also of the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, and as flowing from this of true worship and ministry; and to gather simply in the Name of Christ as a witness against all that divides Christendom—was surely a privilege and responsibility of the highest order.

Beloved brethren, what has been the result? If anyone looks around him to-day he may well pause before attempting a reply. Perhaps it might be well if we each and all carried that question into the Lord’s presence, and in the silence of our chambers, and, perhaps, the grief of our hearts endeavoured to answer it to Him. For shall we ever render back to Him a due return for what we have received?

No one can forget, no one surely would forget, that much has been done. To lose sight of the faithful labours of many a servant gone to his rest, or still living, as well as the devoted lives that have borne witness to the power of the truths specified, and to say that these have borne

no fruit would be nothing short of blind ingratitude, not to say unpardonable pessimism. But the question is not merely what has been done, but what might have been. While fully grateful for the former, how can we think and how can we speak of the latter? Thirteen meetings in one city with no intercommunion tells a tale the point of which it is impossible to evade. Nor is this confined to one city. This state of things is spread over the land. The ruin of the church has been talked of. Is it nothing to have added to it?

Will it be thought unkind to indicate what it is that has led to these deplorable results? For a strange and startling anomaly presents itself. A movement which set out disdaining every sect is in danger of becoming the most sectarian of all; which began by the recognition of all who formed the body of Christ is in imminent peril of refusing every member of that body except a particular clique—the fraction of a fraction. By what process has such an anti-climax been so nearly reached? This is an enquiry we cannot and ought not to evade. If we appear to traverse some ground already trodden, it is only very briefly.

1. Ecclesiasticism, as already indicated, has played a large part in it. The truth of the one body, which in scripture is always connected with such thoughts as “having nourishment ministered”; being “perfectly joined together”; having “the same care one for another”; and “that there be no schism in the body,” has been made an engine of discipline so that decrees of excision have been carried into effect to the remotest corners of the earth. A few have legislated for the many, and on the ground that the body is one insisted on all accepting the decision as a condition of fellowship. It might be thought that if the truth of the “one body” taught anything it taught that one member could not act so as to compromise the whole body, but that all ought to act in unison. In the early centuries of the church’s history these things were understood better than they are now, for when any difficulty arose likely to affect the whole assembly of the faithful they called a council, and representatives came from all parts. This helped to secure justice, and keep mere party tactics out of the field. But apart from all this can anyone show that discipline is ever in scripture even remotely connected with the thought of the “one body”? If it is not, and it has been made along with the breaking of bread a means of giving effect to ecclesiastical edicts need we wonder that disruption has been the consequence?
2. Another frequent cause of trouble has been *a morbid dread of evil*. No one can speak lightly on this subject, or say a word which would make evil appear less so. But yet there is a very real danger in being too timid of it, and the consequences of this state of mind have been at times disastrous. God, our Father, is not standing over us with a whip insisting that we should do hardly anything else than watch and see if evil pops its head above the ground in order to smite it instantaneously, or failing to do so bear the penalty. If the parable of the wheat and the tares does not primarily apply to the church as such, yet it surely contains a lesson for the church. “Let both grow.” In rooting up evil prematurely how often the good has been rooted up likewise. Just as in the early stages of growth wheat can hardly be distinguished from tares, so if evil is judged before it is ripe many hardly discern that it is evil. The silver trumpets and their use have an appropriate lesson here. They were not always to be used for sounding an alarm. Sometimes they were used to gather the whole assembly together, and at other times only the *princes and heads of thousands*. This latter use seems to have been entirely overlooked. If an alarm is needed, by all means sound it, but to do so unnecessarily may produce a panic. If we smite about wildly at the supposed presence of an enemy we may

smite friend as well as foe, and brother may be at war with brother, when really as to all essentials they are in agreement, and loyally serving under the same banner. A farmer in Canada was returning home from market the other night when he was conscious of being followed by some animal. A few days before he had bought a prize ram for which he had given £100. Winter however had set in earlier than usual that year, and owing to a forest fire, and the rigorous state of the weather, wild animals had been coming into the farmsteads, doing considerable mischief, and the farmer imagined he was being followed by a bear. For an hour he stood between it and his sheep, with a lantern in his hand, while he sent off to the nearest village for some crack shots to come. They came and riddled the supposed bear with bullets; and when they had done so they discovered they had shot the prize ram. Such is the effect of panic. The morbid dread of a bear made the farmer think his own ram was one. This incident is not without its counterpart in the church. Never do we need to keep our heads so cool, or our hearts so warm as when we judge evil. Otherwise instead of killing the wolf we only scatter the sheep.

3. The measures employed to repress evil have often been too severe. Is the only cure for headache decapitation? We are to be valiant for the truth, but this does not necessarily involve separation. Paul withstood Peter to the face. But Paul did not excommunicate him, nor try to get others to do it. Paul and Barnabas were driven apart by the heat of their controversy, but the question of the breaking of bread was never so much as raised as far as we know. What we do know is that many years after Paul wrote of Barnabas to a certain company "if he come unto you receive him." And let us be quite sure it is the truth we contend for and not our view of it. If our only aim and desire is to be in a company where everybody thinks exactly as we do, it is but turning the church of God into a club. If it had been remembered that there are other cures for a wounded limb beside amputation, perhaps many would have been walking together to-day who are now far apart. Let us "strive together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil 1:27). But let it be "the faith," not some biased view of it. And let it be "together," not against one another.
4. Making fellowship a matter of caprice has been another cause of the sad break-up. Instead of seeing that fellowship is not a thing I have any right to withhold except with the gravest reasons, it has been declined often on the most trivial ground, and sometimes without any reason being given at all. The fact is it gives some people a little importance and status to say "we are not free to extend you our fellowship." And thus one of the most blessed privileges on earth, "fellowship one with another," is turned into a means of sorrow, and reaches sometimes even the point of tyranny. Let it be said again so that there shall be no fear of mistaking it: *fellowship is bound to be accorded unless definite and weighty reasons can be given for withholding it.* Personal feelings and predilections are to have no place whatever.
5. Has not another stumbling block been the thought that power and authority vested in the saints at the beginning, when all was in order, can be exercised precisely in the same way when circumstances have altogether changed? After centuries of disorder in the house of God, a disorder which still exists, does anyone suppose it can be completely ignored, and the original order re-established in every particular? Yet this has been attempted, and the failure we mourn over is not a little due to the effort. Had due regard been had to the character of John's writings, as already pointed out it would never have been made. Where there is life in the power of the Spirit it will *find* a way to manifest itself. Instead of this everything has been systematized and moulded to a certain pattern with the consequence that formality and uniformity are more conspicuous than the power

and fruitfulness which are alone of vital worth.

6. A misunderstanding and misapplication of the words “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” have tended not a little to paralyze the movement of which we speak. There is one person who never can forget being present at a reading many years ago with well instructed brethren, when this verse was the sole topic of conversation. He left about as wise as he came; for the simple reason, he believes, that the view of the speakers did not go beyond the organized system of meetings with which all present were connected. Another unity was really in their minds all the time they were discussing the unity of the Spirit. They connected it with something that could be seen and organized instead of with that which existed because of the death of Christ and the presence of the Holy Ghost, and which depends upon a moral state and not upon observance of ordinances, or outward methods. The unity is there. We are to keep it. It is maintained in peace. Yet how often that peace has been broken with a view to keep the unity. Surely an unaccountable proceeding to throw away the bond in order to keep that which it binds. As strange as to break up a casket to preserve the jewel it contains. Brethren, have we understood the value of *peace* and what secures it, walking worthy of our vocation “with all lowliness and meekness with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love”?

The ideas which first brought Christians together and formed the movement here spoken of are so great, that it is felt no apology is needed for having pointed out what has proved a hindrance to their growth. The resuscitation of these ideas is the need of the hour, and the getting rid of all useless excrescences. *Only let us be occupied with these ideas and unity is assured. It is because small differences are magnified and allowed to obliterate all that unites that division and internal dissension have become so rife.* Yet the former are a mere vanishing point compared with the latter. Members of one body—the body of Christ—partakers of a fellowship founded upon nothing less than His death, and characterized by what He is, for it is the fellowship of God’s Son—indwelt by one Spirit and that Spirit, God, the Holy Ghost—gathered to one Name, the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ; are not these links great enough? Can we substitute anything in their place, or act as if they were non-existent, without tremendous loss? There is one thing and only one thing that is needed to give as much effect to them to-day as ever—and that is LOVE. For many a month there has sounded in one person’s ears, at times like a solemn knell, the words “IF YE BITE AND DEVOUR ONE ANOTHER, TAKE HEED THAT YE BE NOT CONSUMED ONE OF ANOTHER.” But love heals all; and difficulties become easy of solution in its presence. Without it we are nothing; with it we are, and have, everything. It is greater than all; it is the bond of perfectness; it never fails. The Corinthians had shining gifts, and splendid church organization, notwithstanding Paul says to them “yet show I unto you a more excellent way.” And having done so he beseeches them to follow it. If only we would follow this advice and give ourselves up to love’s supreme influence for six months, judging every rising in our hearts contrary to it, what a change would be wrought.

*This is our only hope, and in urging it upon the reader we close.* We have seen how ecclesiasticism has marred the testimony which otherwise might have been borne to the great and distinguishing truths of this dispensation, and well-nigh destroyed the enjoyment as well as the expression of that fellowship which has been divinely formed. It has been our effort to show that what God always looks for in His people is a character answering to His own, and

that He, consequently, did not require an ecclesiastical movement but a moral one. What a witness such a movement would have been, and was, so far as these conditions were realized. Is not such a movement still possible? Thank God it is, and without starting anything fresh. But it can only be as the ideas that originally took effect take effect again. God has nothing new. He cannot go beyond Himself. If He calls us to be imitators of Him He has said His last word. That is the only possible testimony in these days—the testimony to what He is, and what He has effected—a testimony which in its simplest element resolves itself back into the one word we have been considering, the word which expresses what God is. Nothing lower will do, and there can be nothing higher. And the soul that will seek this, or the company that will seek it—earnestly, consistently, perseveringly, shall find a fulness of joy, of blessing, and of power that shall leave nothing to be desired.

Shall we not seek this, and in doing so shall we not find Christ enough for us? Is He not great enough—great enough still to unite His people? Do we not need to get back to the one commanding truth of Matthew 16 connected by our Lord Himself with the very building of His church; and in getting back to that get back to the centre of all? “Whom say ye that I am?” “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It is upon this the church is built, and all who honestly and with all their hearts make this confession, ought to be as near to each other as possible, and not as far away. As each gets back to this in simplicity and faith, shall we not get back to one another. *In proportion as we allow other things to separate and divide we are committing the terrible and mischievous mistake of making those things more important than Christ.*

High up in the Andes, in a lonely spot, stands a monument with the inscription *Christus Pacificator*. It commemorates the reconciliation of two South American States. Cannot such a monument be erected to-day among *some* of the Lord’s people at least, and upon which those two powerful words *Christus Pacificator* shall be truthfully inscribed? Words which the whole church and the world may come and read, and in reading learn again the reality of Christ’s coming into the world, and His power still to unite all who own Him. In accordance with this He prayed: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; *that they all may be one*, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (John 17:20-21).

Finally, the supreme question of the hour is whether we shall sink down ultimately into mere sectarianism, interested only in those who agree with *us*—a sectarianism of the worst kind because the narrowest, the most bigoted, and the most enslaved; or whether, casting aside the trammels of a useless and mischievous ecclesiasticism—enlarged and free because owning only what the Spirit has formed by His presence, and Christ is the Head of—we shall be known as those whose one bond is Christ, and whose only law is love. “One is your Master, and all ye are brethren.”

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*The gates of Jerusalem.* (Third edition, revised, with new preface.) Leeds, R.Elliott, (1908). 1991

## Footnotes

[1] In saying this we are not casting any slight upon Paul's *teaching*, much less displacing it as some have supposed. A careful reading would have avoided such a misconception.

[2] Since the above was written, twelve months ago, another has been consummated.

[3] That world-wide division may be necessary is quite admitted, we only call attention to certain facts.

[4] If that individual had been put outside the Church, as some suppose, there surely would have been no need to say specially "let him be unto THEE."

[5] Yet it is not so much a company we are to look for, or be occupied with, as to be intent ourselves on following righteousness, faith, etc., with all who have a like pursuit.