

Acts - Commentaries by George Vicesimus Wigram

J.G. Deck and New Zealand Letters, To the Christians in New Zealand Part 3 (11:26)

Greatly, beloved, do I long that all the Lord's people—especially that we in New Zealand—may learn and, be able to give account to ourselves and God, as to the objects and motives; which we are acting upon; and as to those, too, which led us, into our present positions. Many, I know, came hither before they were converted, and many came as children, and many were horn here. These things will affect the inquiry, with each one, I grant: but even then we do well to compare our objects in life, the motives, and habits, and desires, and ways, with God's standard, raised in the acts and epistles, of what the believers should be;—and to see how far we walk as the blessed Lord walked when he was on the earth (1 John 2:6). That is the measure for all saints to measure themselves withal. And wheresoever there have been changes for the which we are responsible, as from England to New Zealand, or to Australia or Tasmania, and thence hither; or from one province or part of a province to another, how far have human mind and will, how far has the thought of bettering ourselves in life and circumstances taken a place in the movement? And how far can we say: the Lord was first in the movement? He moved and we moved, consciously in obedience, after Him.

Unbending decision, or pusillanimous fickleness are of the flesh,—they live and act in the material world, and aim at self-exaltation, or self-preservation. Dependent obedience upon ' God, faith in Christ, and the guidance of the Spirit, give both humble firmness and meekness, like Christ's. These things lead heart and mind above, and forward to glory, in self-denying devotedness and in the patience of hope.

I have been much struck with the confessions of many in this hemisphere, when giving me the details of their past days and experience. Many have said that had they taken up their case soberly and earnestly before the Lord, ere they left the first spot, they would not have been where they are. Many, too, have confessed how on their arrival they did not seek the guidance of His eye, and so had to be held in with bit and bridle like the horse and the mule that have no understanding. (Psa. 32) To depart from God is seed of a bitter crop. It was mixed motives which led. Lot, and lead many now-a-days, into places of sorrow, and conflict, and chastening. It is the first step in any course which is the greatest mistake of all, and leads us on to all the rest. I doubt much whether we who are out here are living as dwellers in heaven, and in the vision of the gospel of the glory of Christ, as our common Lord desires us to be. The power of things material and present is what we have to contend with, and the battle of life is strong with many of us: but, if we abide in Christ, and walk in the Spirit, we shall find the power of spiritual things and things to come stronger still, and able to buoy us up and enable us always and at all times to abide under the banner of the Lord, where He is and when! His own are hidden and sheltered. Lot moved at first under, and according to, Abram's measure of faith; and with him left the old country. Abram's faith became clearer and clearer, for his trust was in Jehovah, and if in mind and desire he had renounced everything to trust in Jehovah alone, his faith grew: he left himself and circumstances to the Lord. Lot trusted for himself to Jehovah, but thought too habitually of himself bettering his circumstances. God's thought was to better Lot's self, and He used Lot's circumstances to show him the folly of planning for himself in his circumstances—he lost all but his own soul, even confidence in God. Abraham gave, up everything to trust in the Lord, and prospered: Lot sought his own and lost all. Poor Jacob was another instance; he, Jacob, planned how to help God to make good promises which He had given. What a scene that is at Jabbok! ere he lost the name of Jacob and became, as one praying, Israel. A prince with God and not a tripper up, or supplanter.

B. " I fear," (said one B. to me, V.); "you find us immigrants very self righteous."

V. " That did not strike me as the distinctive peculiarity. What has struck me with, surprise is—as a new comer among you, How little do these realize and present to my soul the spiritual perception and power of the presence of God. But I think I can account for it. If I had been wrecked coming out here, and but just escaped to shore, I suppose I should have felt and said Thank God.; if all else is lost, He is left to me (even the God. and Father of our Lord. Jesus Christ). But when it came to my having to face the difficulties of my new circumstances, the energy required might make me soon lost amid my material circumstances." Having food and raiment let us therewith be content.

If my energy is drawn from within myself, it will bring with it worldliness and selfishness, and leave the door ajar for Satan. Thus I (the creature) get a large place. If, on the other hand,

I draw energy from inside of Christ crucified and risen (as had Paul to do, 2 Cor. 12:8-10, and 1:8-10), then heaven and Christ and a Father's love fill me; but I know how very little I myself am: and I mind heavenly things and care for them alone.

I should not say as you do, "self righteousness": but too large development of creature (or of the first Adam) character; at the expense of Christ's having us, through resurrection-life, as. His witnesses in all self mistrust, gentleness, moderation, love, brotherly love and pity toward the world around us.

So far as to ourselves and difficulties from around arising man's things; a word now as to difficulties as to worship.

The first distinguishing feature of the Church of God is her oneness.

As one wrote lately: When I was bowed down (with the subject of the many churches now on earth), and distracted in mind—a truth (new to me, yet taught in Scripture) first burst, in upon my mind, viz. that " the Church of God is one and but one—in whatever place, at whatever time found, from Pentecost when she was formed, till her removal from the earth (to make way for the root and offspring of David's kingdom) the church is but one. The truth seemed full of light and glory."

This is, I suppose, what is meant by the old term "Catholic [that is, universal] Church." Another truth followed thereupon,—that God's Church is His House, (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Peter 4:17); His dwelling place, (John 14:17; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:17; 2 Tim. 1:14); His habitation (Eph. 2:22.) upon earth, from Pentecost, until she be removed by God to Heaven. God the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost to abide as the Paraclete (or Comforter) church (John 14:16-18) and He remains on earth—as we see (Rev. 22:17) when the Lord's voice says "I am the root and offspring of David,—the bright and morning star." Then, "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come." This is still future.

I am startled and often surprised to find how many therefore' who would admit and own that God, dwelling between the Cherubim, made the tabernacle in the wilderness-journey Israel to be a very holy place and to be greatly, honored; and how God, dwelling afterward in the temple, when Israel dwelt in the land, gave it, too, a peculiar sanctity—who yet think little of how God, dwelling among His people in the church, gives dignity, and should fill the soul with awe before Him when we are met in this His habitation. Alas! I must further add, How many of us are there of whom this is true, that we do recognize ourselves as His company, and therefore as those whose souls, (if not our hearts) are living, through faith, in the Lord Jesus up there on the throne of the Majesty in the highest; and through faith in the Spirit sent down from the Lord on high to among us, as those who are living with God and so to Jesus Christ? He is the living and true God, and we are in the light of His presence.

To return for a moment. I am not surprised at the delight produced in the soul of a believer by the first ray of light-of the oneness of God's church, the fullness or complement of that-body' of which. Christ is already the glorified head (Eph. 1:23) in heaven. Spoken of and first predicted by Christ in Matt. 16:18, and 18:17-20, it was formed first of all, brought into being by the coming down from heaven, on the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit, to make the disciples whom Jesus loved; and who in love to Him waited for the promise of the Father, His abode. In various aspects is it looked at in Scripture as—

1. "The habitation of God, through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:22.) A holy temple in the Lord (v. 21). See also the same truth referred to in connection with His indwelling in apostles and saints: John 14:17-He dwelleth with you and shall be in you; and Rom. 8:11-His Spirit that dwells in you, 9, 10, 14; and 1 Cor. 3:16-You are the temple of God, and the Spirit dwells in you; and 2 Tim. 1:14-Keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in you; 1 John 4:12-God dwells in us; and 16, and God in him; and 15, God dwelleth in him; Heb. 3:6-Whose house are we; so also John 14:16-Comforter; that he may abide with you forever; and 1 John 3:24-We, know that he abides in us, &c., &c.

2. It is spoken of as the body of Christ, 1 Cor. 6:18. Your body [i.e. of any believer as an individual] is the temple of the Holy spirit; and 12:12-27, as the [human] body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these, we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. See also Eph. 1:23: the church, which is His body; and 4:16: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love; and v. 23: For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body; and Col. 2:19: And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

3. As the family of the Father-wherein the Son is first-born among many [adopted] children of His Father-Heb. 2:10-14, the sanctifier and the sanctified are all [not one but] of one [the Spirit, or perhaps 'set,' i.e. sons]; note that they are not any where said to be children of the Lord Jesus, but of His Father, and so, through grace, His brethren. The gospel of John and the epistle look at us in the light of children rather than as the church. See John 17 and the three unities referred to in v. 11,21,22.

4. The espoused (2 Cor. 11:2) and the Bride (Rev. 22:17) and the Wife (v. 19:7) of the Lamb-until the Lord comes, and till all is finished and perfected, in glory, one and only one.

Thus the Father and the Son and the Spirit each, severally, has a special connection with it. And how wondrously glorious that time to come when instead of the mystery of Babylon, the great, the mother of Harlots, and city of iniquity down here"; filled by Satan for the world, with the lust of the flesh, the lust, of the eye, and the pride of life, the mystery the church will be the Bride the Lamb's wife and dwelling place of God and of the Lamb in heaven. When Abba's house shall have become the home of Abba's children; no voice but that of the beloved Son; regulating anything; no Spirit but that of the, Father and the Son pervading all. What unity in doctrine and in fellowship, in, action and in praise! Wonderful and signal the exceeding, riches of grace, and all these to the praise and the glory of it.

What a difference between all this and a modern "independent church!"

All this glory to come was part of the counsel and plan of the Father for the glory of the Son, who became a man and died; on Calvary, that the throne of God might become the mercy-seat and Himself, alive on it, be the fountain of eternal life and blessing to us through the Spirit. God makes it good to His own people. The light of it shined down at Pentecost, and was entrusted dispensationally to man as true that so, if man, believing, walked softly, and humbly laid hold of God's strength, there might be a feeble and imperfect, but not untrue, representation of it through faith and by the Spirit on earth before men down here. But man betrayed the trust, and failure set in.

Look through Scripture and you will find 1st, that it has ever been so with men; 2ndly, that God has never once restored Man to what he has failed in; 3rdly, He has been long-suffering and, patient; but one failure, and that as to which man failed in, is forfeited.

Observe, too, that at Pentecost there was such a perfect unity that there was but one rule and doctrine, and fellowship and practice and character—for there was but one Spirit, and He wrought through His own chosen vessels. In Jerusalem, the 5000 men, besides women and young people, may have met in twenty places; so in Judea and Samaria, when the work spread thither; and so among the Gentiles when they were visited and blessed. But the Ruler was one Spirit every where, and the relationship of Father and Son the same to each part blessed.

If any one was not in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, he was not a saved man, and the saved were all therein. Young men, youths, fathers, might know various measures of the truth; but the Truth was one, and the Spirit one. It might vary in its mode of approach in grace to a Jew, or to a Samaritan, or to a Gentile; but it was one and the same truth, though God only knew its full measure, and yet the feeblest mind might get a ray of it suited to its own littleness. It might look upon obedient children and rebellious children variously, and act differently, because it was guided by the Father, according to the glory of the Son and the mind of the Spirit, as to these children. Known unity with the mind of God and of Christ, through the Spirit came out in perfect purity in the New Scriptures.

At Corinth, when evil came in, there were four or five sects; but inside the one church; for there still was but one church, and one rule, and one body. Now, there are sects out of all number, each one thinking itself right and others wrong; but none of them (save Rome and the Irvingites) venturing to say "We are the Church of God, and the saved are all with us, and none any where else." This involves really the confession (by all save Rome and the Irvingites) of there being no one church displaying divine unity. How came this about?

Unity in principle and practice there was of a divine character at Pentecost. Unity in principle and practice there was to be of a Satanic worldly character—the Mystery Babylon, &c. At the Reformation, what was it which really took place? God, through grace and in His providence, gave back the Scriptures to men out of the hands of the priesthood, and gave, too, a certain action by His Spirit to some consciences. What was this but the Record and Standard of revealed truth—God's own written Word. "It is written" is a simple text and powerful (see, for instance, Matt. 4:7, 10) when rightly understood and rightly applied in spirit and purpose. Verse 6 shows that, if otherwise, it has no power, and can be used by Satan with a view to mislead. Man needs not the Bible only—that is, in itself, God's standard of truth (John 5:47), but also to be taught of God, (6:45) that he may understand God's mind and thoughts and ways as presented in it, and, purged in himself by it through faith, may see its applications to what went before, or is around him, or is to come.

Man might say, in reading it, What a beautiful thing the Church was under Peter and Paul, and how was it the very contrast of that which we called the church down here on earth, in Rome and in Greece, and have sought to escape from. If any one who had got so far, sought further, he would have found that man was to blame for all the change, and that he had to eat of the fruit of man's doings, and of God's judgments on the quenching of the Spirit and dishonor done to Christ therein. Each one might have said, how blind have we been and are we, and how incompetent we on whom the judgment has come, to make that which is crooked straight (Ecc. 1:15), or to bring a clean thing out of an unclean. To own the failure and be ashamed of it, and of our connection with it, to admire what had been, was all right, and is all right now. But when the word is studied further, I find that the word of God has a word for me in these circumstances as to God. He will not restore man in ruin by human instrumentality to what divine power and goodness did set up; but He gives it all over to His Son, that He will bring those who, amid the failure, trust in God and obey His word addressed to them in these circumstances, into something far better, even the fulfillment of the antitype when the type has melted away. I do not, then, on the one hand despair as to God and His grace, because all has failed in myself and in man; nor do I go on in wickedness as though there were no hope.

If I was bankrupt in intelligence, affection, and purpose, as to God and His word; the mind, too, pre-occupied with human thoughts and desires as to what should be; I had been born and nurtured in the pit (Eph. 2:1-3). But God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have known no ruin, no change in them. I hid to venture all upon them and them alone.

Others might say, the church which was at Pentecost we have set up again. I could only say: "I trust I have a mark as one that sighs and that cries for all the abominations that are done in the Lord's name, and among those that profess to be His" (Ezek. 9:4, read the chapter and the sixth of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel). But when I looked, I found the forms they had set up were without power. And they that had pretended to have authority and power had lifeless forms. They had taken it for granted that they were to do something, and were authorized and able to do it, and God would do the rest and restore what was life. But for this they can show no word. Nonconformity has piously multiplied forms of so-called churches out of all number. The sheep have been called to choose shepherds, and the uninstructed flocks to appoint elders to rule over them, and deacons to do other work. Who required this at their hands? Not God, whose word said He would not set up again what had fallen down since Pentecost, but pass it on to judgment, and yet care for His own whose faith and hope were in Himself. And not only said that of this fallen thing (see Rom. 11), but shown in His word that such has ever been His way, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, neither our ways His ways (Isa. 55:8). Occupied with forms and practically acting as if they were possessed of power [a thing the imitation of which is sure to recoil with disgrace upon the imitator], the churches (so called) have let slip the truth of the one holy catholic church of Pentecost, and know not what they are about. That God may bless the preaching of the gospel, and build up souls into Christ by means of many so placed, is true; and I pray that it may be so. But as to communion of saints, may God graciously help them.

What, then, are we to do? The written word says: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20.)

Again, "The Lord knoweth them that are His—[being His; their walk] and, Let every one that names the name of the Lord, depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

Again, "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (v. 22).

And again, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26).

At Corinth, there were no pastors or elders, that is, when Paul wrote, only simple disciples.

And again, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23, and 21 and 24).

So again as to holiness in doctrine, morality, and walk, &c. Give me intelligence, directions, authority, and power by the Holy Ghost, and I can, through grace, obey the word either as to my own individual self, or as to saints round about me.

How ought you to judge and act (it may be asked) when a condition of things, plainly set forth in the word of God, no longer exists?

My answer is, Listen to Scripture and follow its instructions out, as they apply to such a state of declension and failure as you are in. If any child of Adam tried to create anew his primitive state of innocency, or (as Jew or Gentile), tried to be perfectly obedient to the law of Moses, neither of them would know how to meet God's mind. The both of them pretend to an intelligence and power which they possess not. Let them confess and be humbled before God for the state they are in, and trust and hope in God, and walk before Him in obedience. Just so as to the believer now, amid the failure round about us. Reader, if my address No. 1 ought to humble the soul of every believer, as an individual, ought not No. 2 and 3 to humble us as members of Christ's body and of His church, to wean us from man and strengthen us in God?

As to Gifts, we are built upon the foundation of New Testament apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. So that I have the full benefit (so far as to-day admits of it,) of the Scriptures of the New Testament prophets, and of the service, and conduct, and ensample of the apostles in planting and ruling. Besides these, evangelists, and pastors and teachers are spoken of (Eph. 4:11) as persons given to the church. That there may be such given now-a-days I have often prayed, and earnestly, of God. I am sure we much want the service of such. But I confess I am stumbled at the way many think of themselves, and speak of themselves, and of others, as being such gifts given. It would be more humble and lowly, methinks, for them to work more, and to put forward their thoughts about themselves less: and to let others find out that they are gifts given, if so they really are. Any child of God may care for his Father's children; and may, so far as he has learned the truth, teach it; and persecution scattered abroad the first who went every where preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4). Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak: I do not deny that consciousness of power ought to lay the conscience under a sense of responsibility. But those who work most, and by whom God has wrought most these last forty years, are those who think and speak least of their being or having gifts.

I am sometimes astonished, too, I confess it, at the questions about what gift each one of us has-by those in whom I can see none. Many of them possessed, truly, of eternal life and the Holy Spirit, and a place in the body of Christ, and serving, too, through grace in faith and love and hope; yet thinking nothing' of that or of the Spirit indwelling, or of their place in the body of Christ, in comparison of some gift or gifts they are anxious to discover in themselves. A few, too, have thoughts about offices and duties, (and would like to be recognized in them,) of which the New Testament says nothing.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians-the church is presented as God's Portion for Christ,-in, of and for Himself. The gifts are of persons, (evangelists, pastors, teachers. c. 4:11) and of functionaries in the life of the body (v. 16).

In the first to the Corinthians, the church is looked at as being God's witness for Himself versus false religions which were of Satan (12 and 14). And what sign gifts has the Witness, which has failed through Unfaithfulness, retained for herself now?

Apostles and prophets (v. 11)-were the foundation (c. 2: 20).

I would close with suggesting to my brethren a few considerations.

In man's world-church all is ruled and regulated by man: and, not believing that the church is the place in which the Spirit abides and acts, man had had and has to arrange everything. "If the meetings for worship and for breaking of bread are Consciously and conscientiously held under the eye and in the presence of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit being present, we may look for deep reverence and a certain spiritual awe being over the assembly—which will make us swifter to hear than to speak. A large measure of self-judgment, too, is supposed to be in us (1 Cor. 11:27-34). As to pre-arrangement there can be none. Though, in honor, we may prefer others to ourselves. All I have asked, and I do ask it again, is that the manifested presence of the Father and the Son may be brought by each of us to the table (see John 14:21, 23); and that the Spirit may make what is referred to (1 Cor. 14:21, 25) manifest—" he is convinced of" all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart manifest; and so falling down on his face he [that comes in] will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."

The Lord's Supper we observe as His bidden guests; and if the company were wholly made up of those so completely of different parts of the earth as that no two of them understood the same language, it might happily be kept and the primary object of it be answered. Over and beyond that, whatever else takes place, is for the intelligent and intelligible edification- of those that are guests. This necessarily calls the mind of each that may take a part from the liberty they assuredly have, and from the inclination they may feel-to speak-to the question of building up those present:- We have power over ourselves (so Paul says); and " Let all things be done unto edifying " (1 Cor. 14:26, an Eph. 4:12, 15, 16). I know, nothing happier than an evening spent in singing hymns, and prayers, and reading chapters. But that is hardly "unto edifying" at a worship meeting or at the table of the Lord, when the assembly is met together. Certain gravity and sobriety and collectedness of manner, and the more aged of the place and not the younger bearing any responsibility which may arise, would surely be worthy of God, as not the God of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. But nature teaches these things

(11:14), and I do not speak of them now. Reverence before God present in Spirit with us, and from the objects of faith and hope then before us,—past, present, and to come; self-girdedness in that presence of each one all and building up of the souls before the Lord in all that is done, are the three desire of my heart and my prayer for the Saints.

G. V. W.

P.S.-For myself, seeing that the Church of God, originally was the assembly, or company, of all the believers upon earth, who were walking by the Spirit in the faith, I do not give the name to any company anywhere now that this has ceased to be the case. To use it is to pretend to be more than we are; we have no warrant from the word to do so. "We are of the Church," if really acting upon what those principles were when the unity existed. This is as far as I can admit to be correct.

Christchurch, 26th May, 1874.

But, beloved reader, while I would challenge my soul and yours by the questions (to be answered as individuals in God's presence), of how far we are, indeed, as those standing fast in, and practically consistent with-1st, the mercies brought out at Pentecost, together with its blessings and company; and 2ndly, with that mystery first revealed to and exhibited by Paul, as a model man, and his company at Ephesus; and 3rdly, with the hope of 1 Thess. 4:13-17; and 4thly, with the light which now shines down from heavens opened upon us, as in the heavenly calling and in the mystery-stop here I cannot.

Besides these things revealing God to man, permanent and abiding and eternal blessing to any individual souls that receive them and walk in them,-harbingers too of better things to come,-they have been let slip by man and rejected even by the company to whom they were entrusted.

The doctrine of Christ as preached at Pentecost, and that of the mystery-that is, the company of believers, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and Christ the Head of His body the church, have been forgotten-sinned against.

This new light was entrusted to men, and men have again (as alas! ever) failed; and failed past all restoration, as to the blessing lost; though God will keep his own chosen ones and let none perish who, receiving the word of His grace as individuals and trusting Him, act upon it in the obedience of faith, in spite of all failure.

" While men slept an enemy came and sowed tares " (Matthew 13:25-30). The wheat field was spoiled as such, though both were allowed to grow together until the harvest. They that have failed are not the ones who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, or make that which is crooked straight. Paul foresaw and forewarned the Ephesians of their own coming failure in Acts 20:28-32.

But, far more than this. Compare Paul's testimony as to Israel and the Gentiles in his day, when looked at as the olive tree-that is, channel of testimony of grace and truth; depositary of the scriptures.

Rom. 3 as to the Jew, then about to be set aside, as a people, (and fall, 11:12) and become cast away (v. 15); and those (in that day) broken off (v. 17) because of unbelief (v. 20), not spared (v. 21), on them which feel severity [or severing, i.e., cutting off].

1. "What advantage (superiority), then has the Jew? Or what profit is there of the circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

Read carefully Rom. 11:11-36 and note how Paul gives the Gentiles a very secondary place throughout as v. 11-22, and then goes on, " Be not high, minded but fear; (v. 21), for if God spared not, the natural branches, lest he also spare not thee. (v. 22), Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity (Cutting off) of God: on them which fell, cutting off (severing); but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in goodness otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. [Protestants can hardly say that, from Pentecost to the Reformation, the Church continued in its goodness,-or why did they leave it? but if it did not—the only alternative is "to be cut off."]

And v. 25: For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own deceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. (v. 26) And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

Study also 2 Timothy; and Rev. 17 and 18. But Rev. 2 and 3 give the proof of failure in the local churches parts of the whole-and the prophecy of how things will go from bad to worse, until the Lord comes in to set up His kingdom and to put all His foes beneath His feet; also 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Peter 2 and 3 and Jude and 1 John 2:18, 19 and 4:1-6. The epistles of Peter, John and Jude were not addressed to any in particular, but to all believers.

One consequence of this is very striking (2 Tim. 2:21) it is the man only who purges himself from "the vessels" which are "to dishonor," who shall be "a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work." And (v. 22) Timothy was to follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." Such words could not have been said at Pentecost, any more than Peter could have then said (3:5) of any in the church, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof"-“from such turn away," nor could they have been said by Paul, when he wrote to the Ephesians.

Now we, beloved, not only have lost the good, so far as it was committed merely to man's keeping,-but also are in the midst of the evils of "the last perilous [lit. difficult] times" (ver. 1). What was to come, has come, and we are in it. (See 2 Timothy in; 2 Peter 2 and 3; and Jude.) If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant; but he that has the will to make out that things are bettering orgy day and will become better, is in imbecile dotage, or deluded in his own heart as to what he says.-" For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall "not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3.). The delusion which is spread abroad over men now is not, in some respects, worse perhaps than what was spread over the minds of men from A.D. 250 to 1520. ONLY then it was darkness (that might be felt, truly); but the Word of God was a closed book, wrapped up in a napkin and kept by the priests from the people whom they trod under foot..Now, on the contrary, the bible is multiplied and to be found every where;-knowledge too is increased. But; amid all this, men are full of-what? The development of man and his powers and his coming glory, and deny the truths written in God's word, as though they had learned from the bible at least how to sin and walk in the very ways of evil of the last days, as predicted in scriptures. Among the mass of nominal Christians, Satan works as an angel of light. May the Lord awaken His own people to the evil□ all around them and to their own selves being mixed up with it. (Rev. 22:11, 12.)

And may the time soon come when " I am the bright and morning star " will be heard, and then " the Spirit and the Bride, [Where is she now?] saying, Come," (Rev. 22:16, 17.) and assuming the position in which she should be found.

Beloved of the Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Son for His Father's sake (John 17:9, 10), to you who are accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6), through faith, and by the Holy Spirit: Greeting.

I want you, beloved, to place yourselves with me, by faith, among the company of three thousand souls, described in Acts 2:41-47-the early believers on the day of Pentecost and, again, in that of the five thousand men described in Acts 4:32-37; and to consider how far we are practically what they were-so full of the Holy Spirit, and each heart so gone after the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, so conscious of Himself there, on the throne (Himself our own and our blessing); as that selfishness laid aside by us, we are living down here as to Christ, alone and for His people. If we have the same objects of faith, and the same Holy Spirit as they, and yet are not like them in practice, should we not be ashamed and humble ourselves before, God? If in any measure we are selfish, or earthly minded; on lying under the power of the god of this world, does not confession become us?

Come again with me to the faithful assembly at Ephesus, as it was when Paul wrote his letter to it. Can you, can I, so drop into all the blessedness of the one Spirit and one body, brought out in the mystery as they held it (it is our own as, well as theirs), " quickened together with Christ," " raised up together," and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (as Paul and they saw it), and not say. But then, how short, how very short is our walk, are our lives, of what Paul (A man of like passions with ourselves) describes in Phil. 1:19-21 as his state in most trying circumstances; and again in chapter 3:8-16? Alas, how few, now-a-days, " hold the Head." The freshness and beauty of Paul's life, even to the end, ever brings " the Head " before me; the poor Ephesians afterward," left their first love " (Rev. 2:4); shine as they still might and did in their duties as being a candlestick.

And is my life and yours, in body, Body and spirit, such now, down here, as that if 1 Thess. 4:13-17 were to take place to-day, none of us would have a regret to, be found as we are? Should we each say, " Oh, the grace that has prepared me individually for this, and that enables me now to say, "I am awaiting Thee, my Lord, and am ready?" To find nothing about oneself (save a mortal body), which cannot at once find its place in the light! How blessed he of whom this is true!

But further: If I place myself with you in the presence of the Christ now in heaven upon the throne (Eternal Lover of my soul, as one given to Him before the foundation of the world)-of that Anointed Man that died, for me on Calvary (the only One who ever laid down His life for me, and He the Man that is Jehovah's Fellow)-of Him who above patiently watches over me and is coming again to receive me and us to Himself, that where He is there may we be also-can I, can you, in the light brightly down-shining, say, "Lord, Thou knowest that I reckon my old self to be dead to sin and self-willed independence of God, and myself to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6) as having been crucified together with Him (v. 6), having died together with Him (v. 2, 8, 5, 8), and been buried together with Him (v. 4), sin has not dominion over me; I live to God and God alone; all my members are devoted to Him and His service alone?" And yet the power of the new nature goes far beyond this, and I am to live as one Spirit with, and a member in particular of, that body, the glorified Head of which is on God's throne in heaven (Eph. 2). Nothing to do down here save to serve the living and true God.

Brethren, myself a partaker of the benefit, I may well write to you thus; and you, through grace, co-partners of these things, may well read anything calculated to help you to understand better the humble, unselfish path of lowly dependence and obedience here below, which becomes those who are in Christ Jesus' partakers of the exceeding riches of God's grace by the Spirit. What were we in the first Adam, and what our prospect then! And the flesh is in us still, and the world around us and Satan (God's enemy and ours) watching against us hourly! And have I, have you, overcome all these things, and are we practically representing Christ down here, as He represents us up there, anchor and fore-runner fixed within the veil? If not, what deep repentance and humiliation individually become us.

clickbible.org