

Acts 17:11 (Christopher James Davis) 211510

Basics for Believers, Chapter 5: Help for Enquirers (17:11)

“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” (Acts 20:32).

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the SCRIPTURES daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

I have read these two Scriptures, beloved brethren—I address you who are brethren, saved ones, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, for only such can be really interested in what is now before us—I have read these Scriptures, which refer to God’s word and His authority, because I am sure that all who are godly must feel that there never was a time when the authority of the word of God had more need to be pressed on the hearts and consciences of His people than at the present. Disregard to it is given as one of the signs of the last times. Paul, speaking of the last days, says—“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

That is to say, one of the signs of the last days would be that Christians would have itching ears, and instead of accepting God’s teachers—for I shall show you presently that all real teachers are God’s gifts—instead of taking the teachers God gives, they, having itching ears, would heap to themselves teachers. Moreover, the Apostle says in this epistle, they would not endure SOUND DOCTRINE; that they would turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned to fables. What I want you to see is, that the standard for Christians is not fables—not men’s books, however able men may be—not catechisms, however ably they may be got up; but the standard is God’s truth—nothing more, nothing less. The Apostle speaks of the Bereans being more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, comparing all they heard therewith. By the law (that is the writings) and the testimony, they measured everything. If I read anything professing to be instruction for me, I examine it by the word, and thank God for it, if it stands the test, else to me it is so much waste paper. Now, brethren, if that were the case, if this rule were adhered to, the occasion of this meeting would never have been. I am persuaded if my brother, as I trust he is—I do not know the gentleman—had read the Scriptures, and had compared the (so-called) “brethren’s” books with them, he would never have produced this little book I hold in my hand.¹ I have never in my life seen anything pretending to teach which so fails of its object. The writer does not keep to the word of God, as I shall show you presently. But there is another thing I should like you to notice, namely, the solemnity of a meeting like this, because it is another evidence of the last days, that instead of Christians helping on each other, building each other up, and forwarding the work of God, they are found attacking what they know nothing about; not error, for this must be attacked, but truth. Brethren, this is a grievous matter. If tonight I had to stand up and speak against infidelity, against those who openly hate the truth, my path would be as clear and easy as possible. But I have to deal with those who love the Lord Jesus—with a child of God, as I trust the “Elder” is.

In attempting to criticize anything, there are two qualifications necessary to the critic: two principles which we should hold by. The first is—THAT THE TRUTH, WHICH IS THE STANDARD, should be fully known. The second is—THAT THE THING CRITICIZED, or the PERSONS JUDGED, should be equally well known. I hope to show you before I have done, that the “Elder” has neither of these qualifications. He neither knows the truth with which to compare—at least so far as the six subjects he touches are concerned, nor does he know what are the so-called errors that he pretends to warn against. I shall not only be able to show you that the little book is Absolutely untrue, but I hope to go farther, and show you something of what God’s word teaches on these points; and also show you, from five witnesses which I have brought here, that the people whom this dear brother has attacked, are not the people which he thinks they are.

First, then, as to

The Law and God’s Righteousness

This is a large subject, and therefore I can but give you just a hasty sketch of it. The charge against us is, that we say the Law is abrogated. Now it is very remarkable that, some years ago, a great discussion occurred in Glasgow between some of our brethren of the Scotch Church—Dr. Norman Macleod and some others led the discussion. Dr. Macleod, and not the so-called brethren, asserted that “the Law was buried in the sepulcher of Christ.” Others opposed Dr. Macleod, and went to the other extreme, saying that Christians are under the Law. It is remarkable that the only answer to these, that I am aware of, has been given by Mr. Darby.² So that, far from the brethren asserting that the Law is buried and abrogated, they stand up for it—they hold its authority. But what they say is, that through the death of Christ, whereby its authority was maintained, we are dead to it (Rom. 7:4). What does Paul say in this chapter? The pith of it is this—You cannot have two husbands; you must be subject to one husband, not to two. Not that the Law, he says, is dead, but “ye are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ.” The two husbands set before us are the Law on the one hand, and a risen Christ on the other. Now, says the Apostle, the Law is not dead, but you, by the body of Christ, are dead to that state to which the Law applies, that is, to man in his natural state, for the Law applies to man in the flesh to restrain the evil that is in him; but it only produces lust, by prohibiting that which the natural man lusts after, thus only showing what man in the flesh is. It manifests, like a plumb-line, the crookedness of your wall; but its province was never to straighten. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20).

It is holy, just, and good. It makes certain exactions; and if you do not come up to them, it condemns you. But through the body of Christ, believers are dead to it and married to another, even “to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” That is, in newness of life with Christ which every believer has, fruit to God is borne which could not be in the flesh under Law. That is the pith of the argument. Just as in the 6th chapter the Apostle says: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid, how shall we that are

dead to sin, live any longer therein?" {Rom. 6:1}.

Not that sin is dead; for sin would be very active indeed, if allowed; but you are dead to it, and no longer its servant. Once you served it; but now, being alive unto God in Christ Jesus, you are no longer under its dominion. [The proper rendering of Romans 6:11 is, "So also ye, reckon yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus."] And if the Apostle dismisses sin in Romans 6, with a bad character, he dismisses Law in Romans 7 with a good character. But he dismisses both; though they are NOT dead, you are become dead to them.

But someone will say, I quite admit that we are not under the Law for justification; but we are under it as a "rule of life." Well, not under the Law for justification—so far we agree. But we are under the Law as a rule of life, you say. What are we taught by the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? He puts in contrast what was given by Moses with the grace which He Himself now brings in. There have been attempts made to show that the Lord Jesus spiritualizes the Law in that discourse. On the contrary, in that sermon, He puts what Moses said in contrast with that which He Himself teaches. He says that it had been said of old—"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"—(Ex. 21:24)—"but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil ... and if any man will sue thee at the Law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" (Matt. 5:38, 40).

The Law says—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy." The Lord says "Love your enemies," "Bless them that curse you," etc., so that this sermon is not a spiritualizing of the Law, but a putting of the Lord's own standard in grace and truth in contrast with it. In other words, the standard of the Sermon on the Mount was very much higher than anything that Moses ever said. The Law was given to the Jews, and is a divine standard for men, as men, before God; but here, as was just, when the Son came, we have a standard immeasurably higher for those who are to be introduced, in the knowledge of the Father's name, into the kingdom He came to set up—the kingdom of heaven. The fact is, they have different motives, because they have different relationships.

Hitherto, God was not revealed as a Father; there is one God, and His name one was the burden of Old Testament teaching—"Jehovah our God is one Jehovah," in contrast with the idols of the heathen. But the presence of the Son revealed the Father, as it is said, "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18); and with this new privilege and relationship come new responsibilities and moral obligations. Therefore it is said in Matt. 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The child must be pitied which needs his Father's "Thou shalt not" which is applicable to the servant only. Hear the word of God in Gal. 4:1-9: "Now I say, That the heir as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"

As children with a father our relationships are different, and our "rule of life" is correspondingly higher; it is "to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6, and 1 Peter 2:21).

But as this is of fundamental importance, we will look a little more closely into it, and in point of fact the whole question will be found to turn on this—whether I am in Christ, or in the flesh. If in the flesh under law, I am condemned: if in Christ, then He is my righteousness, and my life, and my example. I have not lost my responsibility; but it is after a new order. For "law" is not identical with "responsibility." Law is a pressure on an unrighteous man (1 Tim. 1:9), to restrict lust: it is the perfect measure of what the creature ought to be; condemning him if he does not come up to the mark. Responsibility and moral obligation to God is the due relationship of the creature, man, in every condition to God as sovereign and supreme. Responsibility never ceases from Genesis 2 to Revelation 22. But the law is limited of necessity to the trial of fallen man (Gal. 3:9), and to man in his fallen state (1 Tim. 1:9). It was not in Eden, though responsibility to obedience was there: hence it is written, "The Lord God commanded the man" (Gen. 2:16). But this commandment was not a prohibition against what was in itself wrong, as "Thou shalt do no murder," but a simple test of obedience. It is commonly said he {Adam} was put under the law, and it is even tried to be shown how he broke all the commandments, but it is mere nonsense—the warping of the mind by tradition, to suppose, for example, that he could be told not to covet his neighbor's wife! He was under responsibility to obey God, and failed in it,—and with his sin got the knowledge of good and evil; and thus being turned out of the garden was without law (νόμος) (Rom. 2:12-15), and his posterity, though not without responsibility, having a knowledge of good and evil, and the work of the law {that is, conviction} written on their hearts, their consciences meanwhile accusing or excusing them.

The law itself was not given till Sinai to a particular people. It is said to have been given to the world; but how could it have been given to the Egyptians, seeing it begins with this address to Israel "I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt?" And in Psa. 147:20, we read: "He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for His judgments they have not known them." Cain was not under it, yet sin was there (Gen. 4:7). Nor do we read of it {the law} during the whole book of Genesis. Yet responsibility was there, and sin, and God's judgment.

When given to Israel, it was the perfect measure of God's requirements from man in the flesh, a rule of life to him suitable to God's holiness, justice, and goodness; but to man in the flesh this must necessarily be a "ministration of death and condemnation," even though mixed with such provisional mercy and grace as God reveals in Exodus 34:6-7, to which the Apostle refers in 2 Corinthians 3:7, 13.

And now when we come to Romans 3:19, we find the whole world guilty before God, after a resume of God's previous ways in government, on the ground of man's responsibility, ever since creation (Rom. 1:20), and none found righteous, good, nor holy (Rom. 3:10-18). Responsibility has not ceased, and for that reason man is guilty, and his mouth stopped before God; and of human righteousness there is none. But now, apart from law, as a principle of dealing with man in the flesh, God's righteousness—another kind of righteousness altogether—divine righteousness, is manifested through the blood of Jesus. Not that there was anything new in it, save its manifestation; for the principles on which God dealt with man must ever have been in accordance with His own nature, and by this I understand His righteousness, though the circumstances under which He dealt with man were different at different times. It was witnessed by the law and the prophets—that apart from all requirements at the hand of man, or the fulfillments of his responsibilities, God could be just, and yet justify, on the principle of faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).

Then in Abraham's case, when he had no righteousness, God could reckon his faith for righteousness—thereby without works, justifying the ungodly, and making sure the promise to him, before the law was introduced at all (Gal. 2:19). Nor did it change matters after it was introduced; for David, under it, has but to speak of the blessedness of the man to whom "the Lord imputeth righteousness without works." And as Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:9), so shall it be to us also, if we believe on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from among the dead, who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:24-25); so that being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, access into the grace, the true grace of God in which we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but, if reconciled when enemies, we shall now be saved, or preserved by this risen life of the Lord Jesus, for future glory (Rom. 5:1-10).

Have we then no responsibilities? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? In this chapter, we are taken back to Adam (Rom. 5:12, etc.) to unfold the state of our nature (i. e. sin), as up to this point Paul has treated of its fruits—our sins. What then are our responsibilities, and what moral obligations are we under to God? Responsibility and moral obligation exist independently of law. Angels have them and fulfill them (except fallen angels) in their own sphere. The Son of God owned them (not that He had them after the fashion of the creature), when "above," in heaven, He said (Heb. 10:8-9), "I come to do thy will, O God," and on earth, in answer to those who understood not His relationship to the Father, He said, "As My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father had not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (John. 8:27-29).

Adam had them {responsibilities} in the garden of Eden, and in breaking them, brought in sin, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. For until the law, sin was in the world, though not transgression³, which is the breaking of a given law (Rom. 4:15): But though existing {that is sin}, and equally hateful to God, it is not imputed (cp. 2 Cor. 5:19), where law is not—(that is, God was dealing graciously). Nevertheless it existed, as death—its awful judgment—proved, from Adam till Moses. But now as by one⁴ offence, death came upon all, so by one⁵ accomplished obedience of the Lord Jesus, the free gift came upon all unto justification of life, and, with this new life, our new responsibilities and moral obligations. For, as by one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners not in act, though after acts proved its truth but in fact, in condition, in state—so by the obedience of one shall the many be constituted righteous, not in act, though after acts will prove it, but in fact, in condition, in state.

What had the law to do with this? Nothing. "It came in by the way (παρεισήλθεν Rom. 5:20), that the offence might abound."

But where sin abounded, grace superabounded. Thus, where death hath reigned, its reign is over; now grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. And it is as possessing this "eternal life" that was with the Father, far above all law or creature rule, in its own absolute, perfect existence of light and love, that we find our relationship to God even the Father, and our consequent responsibilities and moral obligations. What relation then have we, as Christians, to law? Let the word of God say: "I through law am dead to law;" (not that I might be lawless, but) "that I might live to God. I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:19-20).

Therefore, the same apostle elsewhere says, "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:20). The question then is this: Am I a Jew in the flesh, under law, to live as a Jew, or, am I in Christ, and Christ in me, livingly operating by the Spirit of life which has set me free from the law of sin and death, to live Christ here below?

The law is just, and holy, and good, but by it is the knowledge of sin, and as many as are of its works are under the curse (Gal. 3:10). But "God is light" and "God is love," perfectly displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom salvation came; so that, as believers, sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). And we are delivered from under law by his death, that we might bring forth fruit to God (Rom. 7:4). The spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death; and sin has been condemned in His cross, that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh (to which law applies), but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4); and "if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are NOT UNDER LAW" (Gal. 5:18). May the Lord give you to know the new relationship we are brought into "in Christ," and the responsibilities flowing therefrom, and the power—namely, the Holy Spirit whereby these relationships are maintained intact.

We have then the following, namely:

1st. All alike being guilty—God's righteousness in the passing over of sins in former times; in this present time, in His being just and justifying the believer {believing in} in Jesus (Rom. 3).

2nd. Faith, counted for righteousness to the man who has no righteousness to boast of (Rom. 4).

3rd. Peace with God, access into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but salvation for that glory, in the risen life of the Lord Jesus Christ; and further, "justification of life through Him" (Rom. 5).

4th. Deliverance from the dominion of sin—having been crucified with Christ—and not being under law, but under grace (Rom. 6).

5th, Deliverance from under law, that married to Christ risen from the dead, as Christians, we should bring forth fruit to God (Rom. 7).

6th. The presence of the Holy Ghost, the power by which these relationships are maintained, so that we are no longer debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh; but after the Spirit (Rom. 8).

But does not David say, "Thy law is my delight" (Psa. 119:77)? Reference to a Hebrew concordance will show that there are six words translated law in the Hebrew. In Deuteronomy 33:2, where the "fiery law" is spoken of, the word *dāth* is used. But another word, *tōhr-āh*, is used 25 times in Psalm 119 (*dāth* not at all), and translated "doctrine" in the margin of Psalm 19:7.

The same word is used in Proverbs 6:20, "Forsake not the law," that is, doctrine, "of thy mother"; and in Isaiah 42:24, where if others were not obedient to His doctrine, He at least would magnify it, and make it honorable, though others might despise it. "Law" here embraces, no

doubt, the whole teaching of Jehovah to His people, whether contained in the Ten Commandments or elsewhere. For the Christian, he is in Christ, and he is “to walk as he walked.” That is the standard.

But some say, that if the law is set aside, persons will do what is forbidden in it, and what state of things will that lead to? Persons? Whom do you mean? For if you mean the ungodly, they are disobedient, with or without the law. They are not subject to the law of God; neither, indeed, can be. Moreover, I did not say that the law is put aside. As to the world, God in His government restrains the passions of men, in a measure, by the laws of the country, governed by the Gentiles, to whom He has committed rule. But does any natural man accept and reach the standard of the law?

As regards the believer “subject to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21)⁶ is he lawless? No, brethren; on the contrary, he has the spirit of Christ and the nature of Him who was the obedient One, and he is sanctified unto the obedience of Christ (1 Peter 1:2), that is, in the spirit of a son, to obey as Christ obeyed. He has a much higher standard than “thou shalt,” or “thou shalt not,” as is distinctly taught in 1 John 2:6, where it says, “He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as HE walked.” That is the standard; But let me ask those who say they are still under the law, how is it that you break the law with such impunity?

The law tells you, for example, to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Suppose I allow that the Lord’s Day is the Sabbath. It is not, as I shall soon show: but say that it is.—Then, in Exodus 20, you are told, “In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”

Now, supposing that the Lord’s Day is the Sabbath, let me ask you—“Do you do any work on that day? Do your servants work? Do you take cold instead of hot food, so as to let the servants rest? Do you use the cattle or the stranger within your gates? Do you light a fire?” (Ex. 35:3). If so, you break the law, and if under it you should be stoned. Where is your conscience as to this? There was a man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath day, and the command was given to stone him (Num. 15:32, etc.). People say they are under the law, but they do not keep it. As a matter of fact you do not, and you could not keep it though you were to try. But Christ redeemed those under it, from the curse of it (Gal. 3:13). And for Christians, “sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are NOT under law, but under grace.” Is that the same as being lawless? Certainly not—they are to be subject to Christ in everything; and the law is not abrogated, but they are not under it.

I will now give you the following extract

“If I speak of moral law (which Scripture does not), I make it, by the very expression, a fatal thing to be delivered from it. Yet Paul says, the Christian is delivered from the law. If I make of the law a moral law, including therein the precepts of the New Testament, and all morality in heart and life—to say a Christian is delivered from it is nonsense, or utterly monstrous wickedness. Certainly it is not Christianity. Conformity to the divine will, and that, as obedience to commandments, is alike the joy and the duty of the renewed mind. I say obedience to commandments. Some are afraid of the word, as if it would weaken love and the idea of a new creation. Scripture is not. Obedience and keeping the commandments of one we love is the proof of that love, and the delight of the new nature.

Law has its own proper effect. This leads me to the text constantly quoted: “Yea, we establish the law.” And here I would pray you to weigh what I say. I declare, according to Scripture, that law must always have its effect as declared in the Word of God, always necessarily upon whoever is under it; but that that effect is always, according to Scripture, condemnation and death, and nothing else, upon a being who has in him a lust or a fault. That it knows no mercy, but that it pronounces a curse upon every one who does not continue in all things written in it; and that whosoever is of the works of the law is under a curse. Now, in fact, the Christian has sin in him as a human being, and, alas! fails; and if law applies to him, he is under the curse; for it brings a curse on everyone who sins. Do I enfeeble its authority? I maintain it, and establish it in the fullest way. I ask: Have you to say to the law? Then you are under a curse. No escaping, no exemption. Its authority and claim must be maintained—its righteous exactions made good. Have you failed? Yes, you have. You are under the curse. No, you say, but I am a Christian; the law is still binding upon me, but I am not under a curse. Has not the law pronounced a curse on one who fails? Yes. You are under it. You have failed, and are not cursed after all! Its authority is not maintained; for you are under it; it has cursed you, and you are not cursed. If you had said, I was under it and failed, and Christ died and bore its curse; and now, as redeemed, I am on another footing, and not under law, but under grace, its authority is maintained. But if you are put back again under law, after Christ has died and risen again, and you are in Christ, and you fail and come under no curse, its authority is destroyed; for it pronounces a curse, and you are not cursed at all. The man who puts a Christian under law destroys the authority of the law, or puts a Christian under the curse—for in many things we all offend. He fancies he establishes law. He destroys its authority. He only establishes the full immutable authority of law, who declares that a Christian is not under it at all; and therefore cannot be cursed by its just and holy curse.

No Christian supposes he is at liberty to kill or steal. That is not the question. But does he refrain from killing or stealing, because it is forbidden in the law? Every true Christian, I am persuaded, will answer, No; though he recognizes the prohibition as quite right. The man who refrained from killing, simply because it was forbidden in the law, would be no Christian at all. I have only to add, that the apostles do not refer to the law as the great standard, nor do all the duties they enjoin form part or parcel of it; for they enjoin duties which flow from grace. And grace is not law. We must not, then, confound the law with duties to God and our neighbor, imperfectly given in the law, and perfectly given in Christianity, along with the duties which the knowledge of God’s love in Christ added to the others, the duty to be an imitator of God as manifested in grace in Christ. Being under the law gave sin dominion over me. The grace of God—is that law?—hath appeared, and teaches me to live soberly and righteously and godly. But that is just the reason why I do not want law, because I am better taught by grace, which gives me power as well as rule. Under grace we are taught of God to love one another in the very nature and spirit we have. Hence, loving my neighbor as myself, I fulfill the law; not by having it, but by having love wrought in me by grace, and not being under law.”

But I have a yet happier aspect of the subject to touch on before I close: the positive side of it. What is the rule of life? I answer, Christ. Christ is our life, rule, pattern, example, and everything. The Spirit our living quickener, and power to follow Him. The Word of God, that in which we find Him revealed, and His mind unfolded in detail. But, while all Scripture, rightly divided, is our light as the inspired word of God, at least to those who have an unction from the Holy One, Christ and the Spirit are set before us as Pattern, Life, and Guide, in contrast with law; and Christ is exclusively everything. And power accompanies this (see 2 Cor. 3), we are “declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us; written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart ... But we all, with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

I ask, is not Christ here in contrast with law; and if this be not exactly what I am to be, an epistle of Christ; and if there be not power in looking at Christ to produce it, which cannot be in a law? So Galatians 2:20; 5:16, where, in contrast with law, Paul shows the Spirit to be the power of godliness; that if led of it, we are not under law, and that against the fruits it produces there is no law. So Romans 13:14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

It is an object governing the heart, which is life, and at the same time the object of life—One to whom we are promised to be conformed, and one to whom we are earnestly desirous of being as conformed as possible now—One who absorbs our attention, fixes it to the exclusion of all else. We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. My delight in Him is the spring of action and motive which governs me ["Law," J.N.D.].

The Sabbath and the Lord's Day

The next subject I come to is the Sabbath, and a very important subject it is. "An Elder," in this book tells us what the Plymouth Brethren say. Who are these "Plymouth Brethren"? I do not own the name. I am a brother of every believer in the Lord Jesus, and if I lived in Plymouth the Elder might call me a "Plymouth Brother";⁷ but I do not live there, hence I do not own the name. People say now that every Christian must have a distinctive name. This the Scriptures deny. What "distinctive name" had Paul, Philip, Lydia, etc.? "One is your Master, even Christ; and ALL ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:8). "Saints, Christians, believers, little children, brethren," etc., are the family names of ALL. For my own part, I refuse to marry to any of the made-up parties, and so take their names. Such as are given me in the Scriptures are enough.

So said George Whitfield. Once sects and parties had no existence. In heaven they cannot be. Here they are, and will be, till lapsing into open apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3) they will be spewed out of the mouth, as nauseous to the Lord (Rev. 3:16). Outside He stands knocking, with an offer to go in and sup with him that opens to HIM.

Well, the "Elder" says that these brethren hold "that every day is a Sabbath, and every day is to be held alike as a holy day." He does not tell you what the teachings are, but simply says we hold every day alike holy. It is well to observe that the "Elder" did not quote one accredited author among the Brethren. The pith of his statements is, that we refuse to admit the distinctive place of the Lord's Day. I shall endeavor to show you the difference between the "Sabbath" and the "Lord's Day"; for ignorance respecting these two very distinct days, has led to much confusion in Britain and other places. The Sabbath is a divine institution, as mentioned in the second chapter of Genesis. You read that after the work of six days, God rested on the seventh day, and sanctified it. Carefully note that it was God's rest, not man's. God rested after He had finished His work. It was not that He rested from labor, as man needs to do, for none of us would say that; but "He rested on the seventh day" with a certain measure of complacency no doubt, in what He had done, from all His work, "which He had made" (Gen. 2:2). It is not said God rested in His work, as He assuredly will, one day, in divine complacency, founded on the atoning value of the work of Christ in redemption (cp. Zeph. 3:17; Heb. 4; Rev. 21). But it is expressly stated. "He rested on the seventh day from all His work," etc. That which was capable of being spoilt could neither be a sufficient satisfaction to God, nor a permanent blessing to man. It served as a sign of a rest that remains, and in which man, through redemption, will participate with Him (Heb. 4). And this was the meaning of the Sabbath in Exodus 16, founded on a redemption typically accomplished (Ex. 12-15); the shadow and earnest of better things to come, as we are told in Colossians 2:17; though as Christians, we have now, for faith, the body or substance in Christ.

And into this scene of goodness and rest Adam was introduced;⁸ as it is written: "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Sin had not yet entered to disturb the scene of rest; nor had the curse—that sentenced it to bring forth thorns and thistles—yet been passed upon the ground so that henceforth, in labor and toil, in the sweat of his face, man must eat bread. The same word that before bid it bring forth every tree pleasant to the sight, and good for food—the tree of life also, and the tree of responsibility—and put Adam to enjoy all this goodness, in dressing and keeping it, in a manner we can have no experimental conception of, because the whole scene has long since passed away (Gen. 2)—bid it now (Gen. 3), because of Adam's sin, bring forth thorns and thistles, and fixed on Adam the sentence we are all familiar with, in the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread. That is to say, labor and toil began with sin—the keeping and dressing of the garden was neither labor nor toil, in the language of Scripture—and that, so far as we read anything to the contrary, upon the first Sabbath that dawned upon the world (cp. Eccl. 2:22, etc.). That is why we find God, who in Genesis 2:2 had rested, here in Genesis 3:21 again at work to make coats of skin for Adam and his wife, who had found out their nakedness by their sin. Similarly the Lord said, in John 5:17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." That is to say, the introduction of sin had broken in on God's rest. Nor could He rest again, until sin was put out. The types and shadows of the law could not do this, but the Son of God came and did it (1 John 3:8);

But the Sabbath was God's rest, not man's. Passing over a lapse of 2500 years, we find the Sabbath again mentioned in Exodus 16; and that after redemption was symbolically accomplished. In the 20th chapter the commandment is given to keep it holy, with the word "remember" prefixed to the commandment to keep it holy, referring to their having before got it in chapter 16, where we also read that it was broken the first time it came round. He now recalls it to their remembrance, with a fresh injunction to keep it holy, to which was attached a curse in case of disobedience (Num. 15:35). But the people did not keep the covenant, and in Ezekiel (20:12, etc.), we read that they were sent into Babylon, because, among other things, they did not keep the Sabbath. God gave the Sabbath to Israel after the Exodus; mark that. For in the book of Genesis no mention is made of the Sabbath having been given to man, even to Abraham. The first mention of it, as given to man, is in Exodus 16, where God gives it as a sign between Him and an earthly people. That Sabbath they broke. And do not forget, that God never yet entrusted any mercy to man, that man has not abused. Even at the present time man abuses the grace of God. The children of Israel broke the Sabbath, and were sent into Babylon.

Coming to Luke 6:10, we find the disciples going into the corn fields on the Sabbath day, and plucking the ears of corn. The Pharisees contended that the disciples broke the Sabbath. What said the Lord Jesus? He, in plain terms, told them they were simply hypocrites, for they only adhered to the outward sign without keeping the thing in its integrity. But, more than that, He showed them that One was present, who was superior to the Sabbath. He said the Son of Man was Lord also of the Sabbath. What does that mean? Why, the authority of the Son of Man, the Lord of the Sabbath, over the Sabbath itself; and with Him, though now the rejected One, the introduction of a new principle—grace—which, acting above the limits of the Law, would give rest and blessing to those who believe on Him, in contrast with the curse that attached to Israel as under the law and having broken it. And what do you find in John 19-20? That the Son of Man spent the

Sabbath in the grave. It was a solemn teaching to the Jew, who could go on with shadows, to the refusal of Him, who was the substance! Do you wish to side with blind Pharisaism against our rejected Lord? Beware! But, practically, they do, who refuse the plain teaching from the two Scriptures (Luke 6, John 19) that I refer to: for the fact that the Lord was in the grave on the Sabbath day is, of all others, the clearest evidence that the old order of things had now come to a close, with His rejection and death; and “the first day of the week” (John 20:11) begins, with His resurrection, a new era. What is the fact? That which had been given by God to man, as a sign between Him and His people, HE sets aside for a while until they will be restored to their land (Isa. 66:23, and Ezek. 46:1). He is in the grave on the Sabbath day. The Lord Jesus showed that the sign had failed, and He gave it up with that nation for the present (cp. Rom. 11).

In the 17th of Matthew we find Moses introduced, as the type of the raised-up dead, and Elijah as the type of those who shall not taste death at all. The Lord Jesus is represented as “coming in His kingdom” (2 Peter 1:16, etc.). But besides this we learn something else. Till that vision has its fulfilment, Moses passes off from the scene, and Elijah, too, withdraws, and a voice is now heard saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye HIM.” We are no longer subject to Moses the law-giver, nor to Elijah, the reformer, but to the Lord Jesus who is Lord also of the Sabbath. I suppose all will agree in this; but this is the question raised—Did not the Lord Jesus change the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first? Let John 19 and 20 answer it. The seventh day was passed by the Lord Jesus in the grave, and on the first day of the week, he rose. Compare also Matthew 28:1—“In the end of the Sabbath as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene,” etc. Now, if ever, was the time to change the day; but not a word is found to that effect. “The seventh day is the Sabbath.” The first day of the week is another matter. As a matter of history, we know that the early disciples never confounded the two days.

The Sabbath and the First Day were distinct, and were always kept separate. The Seventh day was kept by the Jews; on the first, the Christians met to break bread, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. The early fathers, Cyprian, Justin Martyr, and others, and the historian Josephus show that, until the third century, the Christians kept the two days as distinct as possible. The Sabbath was not observed by the Christians who adhered to the Word of God, neither did the Jews observe the Lord’s Day. I remember reading, when at school, of a correspondence between Trajan and Pliny. In it, Christians as separate from Jews and from Romans, were reported as specially observing the Lord’s Day—first day of the week—in meeting to break bread. This shocked all outside the church at that time; but the godly Christians were unmoved. One of them said to his persecutor—“Christianus sum; intermittere non possum.” The Jews on the other hand, hated the Christians because they would not observe the Seventh day—which, I repeat, is the Sabbath.

But let the question be asked—Do you hold the Lord’s Day equal with the others? and we answer, Certainly not. The Lord’s Day is to Christians—those who know it—the most blessed of all the days of the week. It is asserted that we would do any work on the Lord’s Day; but the very contrary is the case. Let those who know us point to our practice. We pretend to no infallibility; by grace we stand. We do not labor—except in the word—on the Lord’s Day. And conduct of an opposite kind, if known, would assuredly meet with the censure it deserves. The accusation is false, and Christians should know better than to lend themselves to such slander.

I will now give you an extract from Lectures on the Book of Revelation, by William Kelly, pp. 30-31:

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” The Lord’s Day is not at all the same thing as “the day of the Lord.” The same expression (κυριακος) was used with regard to the Lord’s Supper, because it was not a common meal, but a holy and divinely-instituted memorial of the Lord. So the Lord’s Day is not a common day, but one specially set apart, not as a command, but as the expression of the highest privilege, for the worship of the Lord. The Sabbath was the last day which Jehovah claimed out of man’s week; the Lord’s Day is the first day of God’s week, and, in a sense, we may say, of His eternity.

The Christian begins with the Lord’s Day that this may, as it were, give a character to all the days of the week. In spirit the Christian is risen, and every day belongs to the Lord. Therefore is he to bring up the standard of each day that follows in the week to that blessed beginning, the Lord’s Day. To bring down the Lord’s Day to the level of another day, only shows how gladly the heart drinks in anything that takes away somewhat from Christ. The man who only obeys Christ because he must do so has not got the spirit of obedience at all. We are sanctified, not only to the blood of sprinkling, but to the obedience of Jesus Christ—to the obedience of sons under grace—not that of mere servants under law. The lawlessness that despises the Lord’s Day is hateful; but that is no reason why Christians should destroy its character by confounding the Lord’s Day, the new creation day, with the Sabbath of nature or of the law.

Read also the following from Notes on Luke, chapter 6, by J.N.D., and say whether we give, or not, due place to the Lord’s Day:

The Sabbath, in any real sense, man had entirely lost; indeed, he had never entered into God’s thoughts of rest. It was His rest, and had not sin spoiled all, man should have enjoyed that which was the result, not of his own, but of God’s labor. This is the proper character of that rest which belongs to man distinctively; but sin having come in, the necessity has arisen that God should work afresh, if man is ever to share the rest of God (see Heb. 4). Meanwhile, Christ has appeared and finished the work which God gave Him to do. Hence, we who believe, find rest in Christ, as does God Himself. In Him, by virtue of the accomplished and accepted work of redemption, we have our Sabbath spiritually.

This is the reason why Christians keep the first day of the week, and not the seventh or the Sabbath day. The rest was acquired by the power of Christ’s redemption, and the first day, when He arose from the dead, was that which proclaimed it to faith, spite of man’s guilt and ruin. The seventh day will be the rest of man on earth; the first day celebrates Christ’s taking us in Him to heaven. Then was life from the dead, life more abundantly, liberty from the law and every consequence of sin—in a word, the victory of grace. The Christian, therefore, has the first day distinctively, because it belongs to and witnesses of the perfected work of Christ, and consequently introduces heavenly rest. The first day is in contrast with the seventh, which appertained to the round of man’s labor in nature, and of the Jews under the law, in which Adam and Israel utterly broke down. It is the Lord’s Day emphatically, and thus testifies of the triumph of Christ’s word and the glory of His person not the day which guilty unbelief would have perverted into the proof and means of His inferiority. It is positive direct blessing to Him who owns and honors it—not because it is the close of legal toil, but the commencement of Christian hope—the resurrection-day when we begin our spiritual life; and look on for what will crown so precious a pledge.

Sanctification

The next point is sanctification. The Elder tells us in this little book, that the brethren teach some “dangerous error” as to the question of sanctification. Unfortunately, he does not tell us what sanctification is; but states that “it is a great and dangerous error to say that the believer has his sanctification in Christ, precisely as he has justification.” He confounds “sanctification in Christ” {positional sanctification} which is complete, with sanctification through the application of the word of God, by the Spirit, which is progressive; a very common but ruinous mistake.

Now, what is sanctification?

In 1 Corinthians 1:30, we read, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and SANCTIFICATION, and redemption.” With Christ we get everything—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—the chest with all the contained jewels.

But born of the Holy Spirit, I have a new nature—a divine nature (2 Peter 2:4), and I read in Rom. 6:11, “reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God in (ευ) Christ Jesus.”

That is, death, and not the improvement of the old nature, is the door of escape from the old state I was in—namely, sin, into the new state I am in, namely, “alive unto God in Christ Jesus.” If tempted to sin, I resist by the power of the Holy Spirit within me. That is the power by which I mortify the deeds of the body. But, improve the old nature? Impossible!

So then the doctrine about man’s nature becoming sanctified will not stand the test of the word of God. It is false. But what is the teaching in the word of God? That as a believer in Christ, I am thereby, irrespective of time, there and then fit for Heaven. In Colossians 1:12, you read—“Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” and again in Acts 26:18, where Paul was sent to the Gentiles, “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me.”

To give you an example: The thief on the cross, the moment he believed on the Lord Jesus, was meet for Heaven—“Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” Yet if he had lived, there would have been room for progress in holiness and conformity more and more to the spirit of Christ.

That is what the Apostle says in Philippians {3:10}: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.”

He is aiming to be made more and more in his walk like unto Christ. Hence there is progress. I do not say “progressive meetness,” for all that would impeach the meetness of Colossians 1. If in 1869 I become a believer in the Lord Jesus, there are many things that I may go on with; but, as I grow and learn, I give up this, that, and the other thing, which I see not to be such as the Lord approves of. You may find many believers meet for Heaven going to concerts, etc., thinking nothing wrong about it. But as they see more and more what it is to be “set apart” from such things, and to walk with One who sanctified—separated Himself; in heavenly glory, from such things for their sakes, that they might be sanctified in truth (John 17:19)—they give them up. As far as standing in Christ is concerned, the believer is perfect; as to his moral state and condition, he has to grow in grace (not into grace) and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). As to the flesh, it is and always will be bad. But the believer seeks day by day to “grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head.” In this sense the Scriptures teach progressive sanctification.⁹ For it, the Apostle prayed for the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:23); and the same burden lies upon the heart of every godly Christian. I will now give you a short extract from a tract on Sanctification, by C. H. M.:

It is of the utmost importance to apprehend, with clearness, the distinction between a truth and the practical application and result of a truth. This distinction is ever maintained in the word of God. “Ye are sanctified.” Here is the absolute truth as to the believer, as viewed in Christ, and as the fruit of an eternally perfect work. “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it” (Eph. 5:25-26). “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (1 Thess. 5:23). Here we have the practical application of the truth to the believer, and its results in the believer.

But how is this application made, and this result reached? By the Holy Ghost, through the written word. Hence we read, “Sanctify them through Thy truth” (John 17). And again, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). So, also, in Peter: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:2). The Holy Ghost carries on the believer’s practical sanctification on the ground of Christ’s accomplished work; and the mode in which He does so is by applying to the heart and conscience the truth as it is in Jesus. He unfolds the truth as to our perfect standing before God in Christ, and, by energizing the new man in us, He enables us to put away everything incompatible with that perfect standing. A man who is washed, sanctified, and justified ought not to indulge in any unhallowed temper, lust, or passion. He should “cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.” It is his holy and happy privilege to breathe after the very loftiest heights of personal sanctity.

His heart and his habits should be brought and held under the power of that grand truth that he is perfectly washed, sanctified, and justified. This is true practical sanctification. It is not any attempt at the improvement of our old nature. It is not a vain effort to reconstruct an irretrievable ruin. No; it is simply the Holy Ghost, by the powerful application of the truth, enabling the new man to live, move, have his being in the sphere to which he belongs. Here, there will undoubtedly be progress. There will be growth in the moral power of this precious truth—growth in spiritual ability to subdue and keep under all that pertains to nature—a growing power of separation from the evil around us—a growing capacity for the enjoyment of holy exercises. All this there will be, through the gracious ministry of the Holy Ghost, who uses the word of God to unfold to our souls the truth as to our standing in Christ, and as to the walk which comports with that standing. But let it be clearly understood that the work of the Holy Ghost, in practical sanctification day by day, is founded upon the fact that believers are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once (Heb. 10:14). The object of the Holy Ghost is to lead us into the knowledge, the experience, and the practical exhibition of that which was true of us in Christ, the very moment we believed. As regards this, there is progress, but our standing in Christ is eternally complete.

“Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). And again—“The very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (1 Thess. 5:23). In these passages we have the grand practical side of this question. Here we see sanctification presented, not merely as something absolutely and eternally true of us in Christ, but also as wrought out in us, daily and hourly by the Holy Ghost, through the Word. Looked at from this point of view, sanctification is obviously a progressive thing. I should be more advanced in personal holiness in the year 1861 than I was in the year 1860. I should, through grace, be advancing day by day in practical holiness. But what, let me ask, is this? What, but the working out in me, of that which was true of me in Christ, the very moment I believed? The basis on which the Holy Ghost carries on the subjective work in the believer is the objective truth of his eternal completeness in Christ.

Confession of Sins

This dear brother {the “Elder”} says we deny the truth about confession of sins. Some of the thousands of persons who have heard the preaching here during the last six months, could have told that dear man otherwise, if he had taken the trouble to inquire. And, brethren, let us have up other feeling than that of thorough shame, that God’s children should be found thus speaking of one another. It is my shame, it is your shame, it is his shame! We should be found loving one another, speaking well of one another. To accuse our brethren should be no act of rashness. The greatest soberness and careful examination of every statement should be exercised, specially so, when others are guided by our judgment, as I learn is the case with my brother, the Elder. Now, if “An Elder” had asked those who have heard me, they could have told him that there is scarcely one address during the last six months, which I have delivered, in which I have not brought out in some way the truth about confession of sins. Those of you who have heard me know that it is so. You see now how unsafe it is to decide upon mere hearsay evidence, or upon the judgment of prejudiced persons.

The sum and substance of what I have taught is this: In the 1st Epistle of John you read—“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But, if we confess our sins (to God) He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Who here confess sins? God’s children—we. And those of us who know what confession is, know what a relief it is. If I have anything lying on my conscience, I cannot have joy in my soul; and you that are believers, all know, that you cannot have rest, until you go and unburden yourselves to God. Like a child that has got a clean apron soiled with ink; if it has any sense of cleanliness about it, it will be greatly troubled till it gets the soil removed. So with the child of God; he cannot keep the soil on his conscience. He confesses his sins, and gets forgiveness and cleansing: and thus his communion with God is restored.

But it must be kept clearly in view that the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing (1 John 1:9), with which the Father ever greets the confession of His child, are quite distinct from that forgiveness once granted, and for that reason never to be repeated, which is spoken of in Colossians 2:13—“You being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you ALL trespasses.”

Here we learn our present connection with Christ risen from the dead, in the new standing into which we are introduced, as quickened together with Him, from out of that state of alienation and enmity by wicked works, in which we were in the flesh. And this is of necessity connected with a plenary pardon of ALL trespasses attaching to that state, out of which the Christian is delivered by the death and resurrection of Christ, because connected with Christ, who has left behind Him on the cross the sin and the judgment attaching thereto. Compare also Ephesians 1:7, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

The confounding of these two things is the real question at issue and that they are so confounded is evident from the burden of such a form of prayer as “Accept us in Christ, and forgive us our sins”—thereby, so far as words go, giving up Christ and Christianity. “Acceptance in Christ and forgiveness of sins,” as in Ephesians and Colossians, is the present portion and privilege of every true Christian: “forgiveness of sins and cleansing”, as in 1 John 1:9, is the needed provision for every child of God during his sojourn here below. And it was in view of this necessity, that our Lord taught His disciples to pray, “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” And 1 John 1:9 assures us that “if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Another point in connection with this is—confession of sins a thing for the public congregation? I admit that a public transgression may demand a public confession. But we are dealing here with individual sins—such, perhaps, as are known to God only; and I ask you—Is the public assembly the place for such a confession? It is not. It is a question between my soul and God; and if I have sinned in thought, word, or deed, I am to confess that sin to God of which I am conscious, and His word assures me that He is faithful and just to forgive me. God wishes me to confide in Him, and when I sin, I confess my sins to Him, having the judgment of it according to the light against which I sinned in my soul: not as to One who hates me, but as to One who loves me—not to One who is against me, but to One who is for me—not to One who is a stranger, but to One who is my Father. The Scriptures then are very distinct as to the confession of sins being the duty of every believer, as a personal question between him and the Lord, before he can go on again in the sunshine of God’s favor, desiring and striving to live to Him, and to please Him. Of course, if it is a question between man and man, we must “confess (our) faults one to another” (James 5:16).

But “An Elder” might say to me, “Ah, but I do not say you do not hold confession of sins. What I do say is, that ‘it is a sad perversion of the truth to say that it is not necessary.’” Well, though he does not say that we do not hold it, I know that is what he means in his tract; and I say we do hold it. His insinuation thereof is false.

The following is an extract from the April number for 1869, of A Voice to the Faithful—

In the case of the saint, confession is at once the most gracious provision and most blessed exercise to meet his need down here ... Who that knows anything of his own heart, and of the defiling influences around, does not also know the relief and rest in which a true spirit of confession maintains his soul. But the confession of a saint must be true. Self-judgment and confession must be something more than skin-deep, if we are to dwell in fellowship with Him in whom is no darkness at all, for He knows just where we are in our souls, and what He looks for is truth in our inward parts ... There is a wide difference between confession in order to obtain forgiveness and the evasion of punishment, which is really Popery; and confession in view to the restoration of communion with the Father, in whose love our hearts have learned to find their only rest. We have hitherto spoken only of confession towards God, but it has also its bearing towards men ... Wherein it

has touched our standing and relationship towards God, it will be first judged; but wherein it has also touched our relations to men, it will not be neglected; and this latter point demands the deepest exercise and self-examination, and self-emptiness also, on our part, for the tendency of our heart is to evade, if possible, that which may lower us in the eyes of our fellows, whether men as men, or our fellow-Christians. How commonly do we hear one who has failed, and in a way has owned it too, saying, I have confessed to God, and there is no need to confess to man... "Confess your faults one to another" is the pith and marrow of much that is detailed at length under the law. The necessity for restitution, and for the acknowledgment of wrong done, both natural conscience and law most plainly teach; and does the gospel teach a lesson of less self-denial? Surely not, but rather a deeper one, as in it we learn how self is judged and mortified, and Christ alone to live and act in us ... May the Lord teach us self-emptiness, and so enable us always to maintain a good conscience before God and before man. We ought to walk before men as before God, always able to look each one in the face with the confidence that we are keeping back nothing which is their due, that we are hiding nothing even in our hearts, which in confession we ought to make known.

The Lord's Prayer¹⁰

As to this I have no quarrel with any. I leave every one perfectly free to use it or not to use it. There is no Christian in his senses, but thinks that whatever the Lord did or said was absolutely perfect in its place. The question is, What is the place He gave it?

The argument against its use, drawn by some, from asking forgiveness is weak. But for all that, the demand of it is generally a proof that true forgiveness is not known (Col. 2:13); but this is a question of spiritual perception and judgment.

The truth is, that Brethren, though often assailed on the point, have never given any judgment, or prescribed any rule whatsoever about it. Individuals may have done so. Its habitual use has dropped out, as it has amongst many other Christians, just as we never find it in the prayers of the New Testament, after Pentecost, because the Holy Ghost led saints on each occasion according to the particular wants of the moment,—all surely consistent with the summary so beautifully given in this prayer, but in the freedom given by the Spirit to express every want as it arose.¹¹

There are three important features in the nature of this prayer which have been overlooked by many

1st. It was intended for believers, but for whom redemption was yet prospective, and for whom the way into the holiest was not yet opened by the blood of Jesus.

2nd. The Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father (see Luke 24:49; John 7:39; Acts 2:33) had not yet been given. Contrasted with this, we have our position unfolded in Eph. 2:18, "For through Him we both have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father." (Cp. also Eph. 6:18; Jude 20, etc.).

3rd. This prayer was not, and could not then be, in Christ's name. The Lord's own statement is distinct on this point, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name" (John 16:24). Now that Christ has accomplished redemption, and gone up on high as the Saviour, who has finished His work, our great High Priest, the essential character of true prayer is, that it is in Christ's name; the Lord's Prayer, as decidedly was not.

That it contains moral principles of essential value to believers, now as well as then, every Christian will own; yet the habitual use of it argues that the spiritual intelligence of those who use it is not beyond that of the disciples to whom it was given before the accomplishment of redemption; and hence they are doing unconscious disrespect to the will of God the Father, to the finished work of Christ, and to the present witness of the Holy Spirit (cp. Heb. 10). Sympathize as we may with those who continue to use the Lord's Prayer now as a formula, we and they also ought to understand His word and will, besides having upright intentions. And manifestly, the redemption of Christ and the gift of the Holy Ghost have wrought a total revolution as to the conscience, communion, worship, and walk of the saint. They have brought us out of bondage into liberty, and consequently put our prayers on a different footing from what would have been right and comely before our deliverance. This is a question of great importance for those who desire to know their full standing in Christ, since the Holy Ghost has been given. I need scarcely add, that we all believe that the Lord's Prayer was divinely suited to the (then) actual state of the disciples; hence it could not fully express their subsequent relations, nor the outgoing of affection proper to them afterwards. [See Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer, W. Kelly.]

Faith and Repentance

These subjects being of great importance, I would take this opportunity of referring to them, as there are various errors afloat concerning them, and I cannot do better than give a few extracts from the published writings of well-known Brethren. I trust they may serve to clear the minds of any who have been troubled on these points, either as to what they are in themselves, or as to what Brethren have taught on them.

True faith is the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul, revealing the object of faith in divine power; so that the heart receives it on divine testimony, as divine truth, and a divine fact ... It is really identical with the communication of a new life by the power of the Holy Ghost, through the word. Hence, we are said to be the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; to be born of the Spirit, and to be begotten by the word of truth. Faith is the divinely-given perception of things not seen, wrought through the word of God by the Spirit ... If the word reveals a divine person in grace, He becomes the object of trust; if a work, its efficacy becomes the ground of confidence. But the trust and the confidence is not the faith. Faith is then the real vivid perception of what cannot be known by sight—God—Christ—anything revealed of God—being the object. If there is merely a mental conclusion, as in the end of John 2, or assent to a proposition, it is worthless. If it is the revelation of the object of faith to the soul, by the Holy Ghost, it is real and living; and this only is true faith. Further, though all rightly preached together, we must not confound faith in the person, and faith in the work of Christ. The latter alone can give peace to the conscience (unless the direct revelation of God as by Nathan to David, or Christ to the woman that was a sinner); but the former is always held out as the first proper object of faith; while Scripture declares, that whosoever believes on Him, is under the benefit of His work. Faith in Him is quickening and saving. Peace of conscience according to God's declaration, belongs to those who do believe in virtue of His work. The difference connects itself with the question of repentance ... All who know what grace is believe that faith precedes repentance, and everything else that is good and right in man. Otherwise he would have what is good, before he believed the truth at all; he would have it without God. And as to repentance, substantially, the whole moral change, the essence and substance of his return to God would have been effected without any truth at all. For if he repents through the truth, he must believe the truth in order to repent. I judge repentance to be a

much deeper thing than is thought. It is the judgment of the new man in divine light and grace, on all that he who repents has been, or done in flesh ... Hence, repentance will in one sense deepen all one's life, as the knowledge of God grows. [Further Remarks upon Righteousness and Law, pp. 39-45. J. N. D.]

There is that which is an invariable accompaniment of the new birth, which troubles many an earnest soul who is looking for peace. I speak of repentance ... There is never a real effectual work of God in the soul apart from true repentance ... In all scripture where the work of repentance is spoken of as a doctrine, or the fruits of it spoken of in a soul, it invariably follows faith. I do not say but that it has gone before peace. Peace with God may not be known for many a day, but the work of repentance has always followed faith and consequently accompanied the new birth in every instance. Many have thought that repentance is sorrow for sin, and that a certain amount of it is necessary before the reception of the gospel. Others have got into the other extreme, and have thought that it is a change of mind about God. Now, these thoughts are both wrong ... Repentance is the true judgment I form of myself, and all in myself, in view of what God has revealed and testified to me, whatever may have been the subject He has used ... When a soul is born again, and has thereby a new nature which it had not before, it begins to discover the workings of the old. Sometimes the work is very deep and long, and often the most wretched experiences are gone through, ere the soul learns peace with God ... All this terrible experience is but learning what your old nature is in God's sight; it is a true work of repentance in a soul [The New Birth, by F. G. P., in pp. 13-20].

I now proceed to the consideration of

The Church

What is the church? for the "Elder" does not know what the church is. In the first place, he talks about there being in it "the dead" and the "living." Such a thing as a dead member being in God's church, is not contemplated in Scripture, for of the members of the church, which is the body of Christ, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all, the Holy Spirit says, "You hath he quickened (or caused to live) who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). And in verse 5, "Even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ."

The members of the body are members of Christ, and livingly secured in Him. [There is another aspect in which the church is viewed in Scripture, namely, as God's responsible witness on earth, and as such, committed to the responsibility of man; and in that character it has failed—become like a great house full of vessels of honor and dishonor, and, as an unfaithful witness, will be spewed out of Christ's mouth as nauseous—Revelation 3:16—similarly to His manner of dealing with Israel of old, as we learn from Hosea 11, and elsewhere.]

The church of God, which is the Body of Christ, is composed of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile, blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, children {sons} by adoption {son-placement}, being accepted in the Beloved, their sins forgiven, admitted into the knowledge of God's counsels, sealed by the Holy Spirit individually, and baptized by the Holy Spirit collectively, into one Body {1 Cor. 12:13}, of which Christ is the Head, they the members, united by the Holy Spirit to Him, and by the same uniting bond to one another; it being emphatically stated that they are co-quickened with the Christ, who were once dead in trespasses and sins; co-raised and co-seated in the heavenlies in Jesus Christ—being saved by grace through faith—and that they are God's workmanship (and His work can never fail, being independent of man's responsibility), created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 1; 2:1-10). Thus it is composed of living members of Christ, united to Him by the power of God, and the effectual presence of the Holy Spirit, sent down from heaven, while He is sitting at the right hand of God; and they are sitting in Him.

Of the different names in Scripture by which the church is called, I will now give you a brief sketch, that you may the better understand the matter.

The church is called "the Body of Christ." By this name it is called in 1 Corinthians 12, and I beg you will search the Scriptures to which I shall refer you. In that chapter the Holy Ghost develops the church as "the Body," and hence the word "members" is there used over and over again. The members of the body are spoken of as the eye, the ear, hands, feet, and so on. We read (1 Cor. 12:13): "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 all been made to drink into one Spirit. For THE BODY is not one member but many."

It is again referred to in Ephesians 4:4—"There is ONE BODY;" not many bodies. I lay stress upon this, because people speak about "different bodies of Christians," and persons talk of "my church," and "I belong to Mr. So-and-So's church," with no sense of the dishonor and shame, in God's sight, thereto attaching. Let me tell you that the Holy Ghost countenances no such thing as bodies, sects, etc. When He alludes to them, it is only to condemn them (1 Cor. 1:10, 13). There is one BODY absolutely, and ONE BODY only. There is one church, and one church only; and, as I said before, this church gets the name of the BODY. Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ east, west, north, south—man, woman, or child, saved by grace and sealed by the Holy Spirit, is a member of this one BODY. Blessed union!

Again, in Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus brings out most blessed teaching respecting the church. There you will find the first intimation of it by the Lord Himself. I shall not dwell upon it; but there are one or two thoughts I must suggest to you in reading that chapter. The Lord did not speak about building His church until He was rejected by Israel. Hence it was, after people had said, Thou art John the Baptist, or Elias, or Jeremias, or one of the Prophets, that the Lord asked his disciples whom they said He was. Peter, taught of the Father owned—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus then said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock"—the Son of God Himself—"I will build my church." The first thought, then, is that the Lord Himself is the builder—"I will build;" the second, that He is going to build something that had not existed before. "I will build." Israel was not it—it had not been before. It was a future thing He was to build—"I will build my church."

There is one text in Scripture which men have made a good deal of, fancying that this church existed during the Old Testament times. That Scripture is in Acts 7:38—"He who was in the church in the wilderness." It is not the simple hearts that are troubled by that; it is the clever people, and it is very curious that clever men who know Greek, do not observe that the word used is ἐκκλησία, which means an assembly, a congregation, or a gathering. [The word translated "church" would better be "assembly." The town clerk dismissed the assembly (ἐκκλησία). Here it is not the church, yet it is the same word precisely (Acts 19:41). The expression "church (assembly) of God" and the church (the assembly), which is "His body" (Eph. 1:22-23), defines THE assembly or church of which we speak. The "assembly in the wilderness" was of Israel; while the assembly of Acts 19:41 was an Ephesian mob. The church of God is, moreover, called the "House of God," "Bride of Christ,"

“The Lamb’s wife,” etc., applying to it, and to nothing else. Lastly, in 1 Corinthians 10:32 we read of “the Jews, the Gentiles, AND the church of God.” Here it is evident that the assembly (church) of God was not the Jewish assembly in the wilderness (Acts 7), nor the Ephesian or Gentile mob (Acts 19:41); but is the “Body of Christ,” a perfectly new and distinct thing since the cross—gathered out of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2): composed of both, distinct from each, and occupying a position before God of blessedness in Christ, which could not have been known till Christ had died, risen and ascended to, and the Holy Spirit had come down from, heaven, as the witness of Christ’s exaltation on the one hand, and the bond that unites believers to Him there, on the other.] It is very simple therefore—“He who was in the congregation in the wilderness”—that is of Israel. But Scripture does not confound Israel with the church.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32, three classes of persons are mentioned: “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the CHURCH of GOD.”

These are very distinct. The Jews were not the church the Gentiles were not the church; it was a distinct thing, composed, I say, of believers from both Jews and Gentiles. In Ephesians 2:11-12, Paul speaks of those who were in time past Gentiles in the flesh, “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” And in verse 14, etc., “Christ is our peace, who hath made both one;” that is, Jew and Gentile, “and hath broken down the middle wall of partition” that parted them asunder, “having abolished in his flesh the enmity” between them, that is, “the law of commandments in ordinances; for to make in himself of the twain {of the two}, one new man—that is, a new kind of man, Himself the pattern—“So making peace” between them, who were before at enmity with one another. And not only that, but “that He might reconcile both unto God,” with whom they were both at enmity, “in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”

The Church, Then—the Body of Christ—Did Not Exist Before Pentecost

In Matthew 16 it is said expressly to be built by Christ, on the foundation of Peter’s confession, that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God”—and having been at this time rejected by the Jews, was in contrast with His being presented to them as their Messiah, on the ground of their own promises in the Old Testament, as the seed of David according to the flesh. Now, it was not till His resurrection, that He was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4), and accordingly, after this announcement of His intention to build His church, He goes on to speak of the necessity of death and resurrection—a thing that Peter did not understand the need of at the time (Matt. 16:22).

But, while the Lord Himself speaks as the builder—and what He builds, the gates of Hades will not prevail against—there is also another thing in Scripture—men are builders too—and the assembly is formed on earth, under the responsibility and by the activity of man. Paul himself was a wise master builder as we read in 1 Corinthians 3:9—“For we are laborers together with God; ye are God’s husbandry; ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; but, he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

In this case men are the builders, and are responsible for their work. I shall not dwell upon this, but give you three thoughts.

(1) When such builders build correct materials, gold, silver, precious stones, these will stand the test of the scrutinizing eye of Him, who, in the judgment shall say to them, “Well done!”

(2) There are others that build wood, hay, stubble, which cannot stand the same test.

(3) There are others who defile or destroy God’s temple, and God will destroy them.

Now, brethren, this is a solemn thing. Look round on Christendom today. I exclude no sect. I take in all—Established Church, Wesleyans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc.—I take them all, and the question asked of each is—What are you building? You say you have got a church.

Then, of what is it composed? Have you got gold, silver, precious stones there, such as will stand the test at the judgment seat? Or, on the other hand, have you not got some who are not believers at all to build up your “cause,” to carry it on, to keep up your numbers? Beloved, this is a solemn question. Now, such are wood, hay, stubble, which cannot stand the test; that is man building, but he is building with wrong materials.

Thus the church of God is looked at as a building; Christ the builder in the one case, and His work can never fail; nothing can touch his “living stones”; on the other hand, men are the builders; some, building gold, silver, precious stones, and are thus co-workers with Him; others, wood, hay, stubble, to be burnt; others, again, defiling God’s temple—they will be destroyed.

Further, the church of God in another aspect is called the “House of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” It is the house of God pure and holy, and nothing should defile it. This is His estimate of His own. Let me say, that the first Epistle to Timothy is written with a view of maintaining the church in its primitive beauty and order; when we get to the second Epistle, it supposes it is in a state of ruin; the first love is left, and hence what is called the “House of God” in the first, gets another title altogether. Evil had got in, and it is now compared to “a great house,” full of vessels of honor and dishonor. In 2 Timothy 2:20, the Apostle says, “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor.”

Now, I have shown you what the church, the body of Christ is, in God’s sight—a perfect thing, composed of living indefectible members—true believers; these the Lord Jesus will come to take to be with Himself, when His voice shall be heard in the air shouting for His saints. I have

also shown you that which looks like it, but is not it; and which shall be left behind, when the saints are taken away.

There is what the Lord Jesus builds, and also what they build, who build according to His mind—living stones (1 Peter 2:5). There is also what man, away from God's mind, builds, with which God cannot be satisfied. That which God builds, though often invisible now, was never designed to be invisible. It is our shame that it is so: for, in John 17, the Lord, referring to the principle of the oneness and separateness here spoken of, desires it, "that the world might believe," etc. The other, that which man builds, we can look upon. It is the professing mass; but its testimony is not for the truth. The saints are in it, but mixed up with unbelievers, so that as a witness for God, it is a ruin; to our common shame, for we are all guilty in this matter.

I know that missionary reports boast of the "numerous sects in the Christian world"; but such "glory in their shame," in OUR shame; for none of us is exempted. But, in view of such a state of things, does the Lord leave us without resource? No, no; He is too tender and gracious. What does He give in 2 Timothy 2:19, etc.? "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity."

Further, "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood, and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, (the vessels unto dishonor) he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

God's principle in dealing with us now, is not the reparation, or reformation of the ruin; but distinctly—"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work"; and that is what is referred to in Hebrews 13:13, where the comparison is made to the camp of Israel, that is, the great professing body of the people, where the worship of God was degraded. "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (v. 13).

[By referring to Ex. 33:7, you will notice

(1) that idolatry had got into the midst of what had been before of God;

(2) that God did not say to purge the camp in this case—the faithful were to GO FORTH outside. Separation from evil, not patching, is always the Divine principle;

(3) those left were Israelites; but they did not seek the Lord. It says distinctly "Every one which sought the Lord, went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp." "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear."]

In this day of ruin God calls upon us not to reform the church, nor to repair the ruin; but He calls upon the faithful to purge themselves from the vessels of dishonor. And this is the ground which every faithful Christian must take in obedience to God's Word; owning one body, nothing else, and meeting on that large ground—"one body", "one Spirit," etc. (Eph. 4:4, 6), where every believer in the Lord Jesus may be gathered, if subject to the truth. Of course the Holy Ghost warns us against doctrinal evil (2 John); such as hold it are not to be received. It is a broad ground on the one hand, admitting all believers in the Lord Jesus; on the other, it is narrow, shutting out evil—moral and doctrinal. Was it a small thing for Elijah to stand apart from the evil of his day? He could not boast of numbers; but, he was a witness for the truth and the rights of God.

And what is the blessed promise of the Lord Himself?—"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" {Matt. 18:20}.

What did the early believers do in the time of Paul? They were gathered on the first day of the week to break bread {Acts 20:7}. And, when they were so gathered, they publicly manifested their unity in partaking of the one loaf. The Lord's Supper was the external sign of their unity; the presence of the Holy Spirit the power of it. This we get in 1 Corinthians 10. They thus manifested the oneness of the body, while, at the same time, they carried out the injunction of the Lord—"This do for a remembrance of Me." When the Apostle Paul addressed a letter to the church at Ephesus, there could be no mistake that it would go to the assembly at Ephesus. It was not a time when there were sects and parties. There was one gathering of Christians at Ephesus, and one only. So if Paul had addressed a letter to the church at Corinth, it would go to the assembly in Corinth only. But, if today, any one addressed a letter to the church in London, it would go to the dead-letter office, for there is no gathering there that could rightly claim it, as being THE Assembly of God in London. There is no such thing now to be seen.

May lowliness and godliness of walk, as well as zeal for the truth and steadfastness in the faith, characterize the few gathered together in the faith of the "one body," the abiding relationship into which Christians are formed by the presence of the Spirit. They are not THE assembly, though in faithfulness to Christ, spite of their feebleness, and much and often-confessed failure, they seek to own practically the truth concerning it. The saints now are scattered about in various sects, and under various names, to our common shame. There were times when there were no sects or parties, but when all were of one heart and soul, and love to Christ inspired the whole. At the present all are split up into more than a thousand sects and parties, and we cannot put our hands upon what is the church of God. It is all scattered, and we don't know where it is. "But the Lord knoweth them that are His."

Ministry

The next thing we come to is MINISTRY. "An Elder," in his book says, that the "brethren" deny ministry. His own words are these—That we hold "that a standing ministry in the church, is not an ordinance of God."

If by that, he means, that they refuse God's ministry, it is untrue, as I shall show presently. But, in this book, he not only makes that charge, which is false, but he does not tell you what ministry is. The Elder mixes up the ministry and the priesthood, and a greater blunder he could never have made. Ministry and priesthood are very different things. Every believer is a priest to God; as we read in 1 Peter 2:5, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Now, PRIESTHOOD IS THAT WHICH CARRIES UP WORSHIP TO GOD FROM MAN. MINISTRY IS THAT WHICH BRINGS DOWN GRACE FROM GOD TO MAN. In this sense every believer—every Christian—is a priest to God; can go and worship God, offer up spiritual sacrifices, and can intercede with God for others. They are a holy priesthood. We are agreed, in that we do not own those whom men call priests, as such. Every believer is a priest; but every believer is not a minister, in the sense in which ministry is spoken of in Ephesians 4:12.

What, then, about ministry, to come to the matter more closely? The Apostle Paul gives the answer in 2 Corinthians 5:18—“God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the MINISTRY of RECONCILIATION; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the WORD of RECONCILIATION.”

So you see that the ministry spoken of here, is that which has the word of reconciliation committed to it. But it is MINISTRY from GOD. Note this: “Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

(Leave out the word “you” in reading the last verse.) The word translated Ministry, in the first part of the passage, is the same word as is elsewhere translated service and waiting; and the word minister is from a Greek word which means a servant, a doer, a waiter, an officer. So that you must not confine it to one particular character of service. In Ephesians 4 we not only get a list of ministers, but we get their source. The Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, is the giver as Head of the church, His body; who having received gifts, provides for the establishment, growth, and development of His church, through means of apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Let us look at it. The 11th verse says, “And He”—that is, the ascended One—“gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” etc. From this Scripture I want to show you one or two things:

(1) The immediate source of the ministry is the LORD JESUS CHRIST Himself. He ascended, and He gave gifts unto men. If this be so, then men cannot be choosers; the Lord Jesus in this case is the Giver. It is said, on the one hand, that the Queen, or her advisers, can choose ministers for the church. This the word of God absolutely denies. It is said, on the other hand, that the people can choose their own minister. This has no foundation in Scripture. Ephesians 4 tells me that the Lord Jesus gave gifts, and He only; and in 1 Corinthians 12:18 we read, “But now hath God (not man) set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

It is important to note that we nowhere get a complete list of these gifts—God would have us search His word to discover His mind. Hence, if you will refer to Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, you will find gifts mentioned which are not found in Ephesians 4, but which have their function in the one body, as much as the five specified in this latter chapter, Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4:10-11, show God in His grace, the spring of all gifts. Ephesians 4 presents to us Christ as the giver while 1 Corinthians 12 gives us to understand that the Holy Spirit distributes them to every member of the body, to profit withal, (v. 7); and, “all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (v. 11). This distinction is, moreover, recognized in the same chapter (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

To this I may add, that if 1 Corinthians 12 Thus shows the Holy Spirit communicating these gifts, 1 Corinthians 13 tells us the atmosphere (love) in which they must dwell, to be of use for edification in 1 Corinthians 14, which displays the assembly as the sphere of their exercise.12

With the apostles and prophets we have to do in their writings; in the nature of things, as being the foundation, they could not exist now. They have no successors in men. There is no such thing in Scripture as “Apostolical succession,” except it be “the grievous wolves” whom Paul alludes to, as successors to himself (Acts 20:29); or those who said they were apostles, and were not, and were found liars in Revelation 2:2.

Before the Canon of Scripture was completed, there were prophets; and when the assembly of God was gathered together, the prophets could speak two or three, by course (1 Cor. 14). And why were the prophets given? Because the Canon of Scripture was not completed. Now that it is completed, we have not such gifts. The apostles and prophets are at the bottom of the building. The foundation stones of your buildings are not put in the middle; they are put at the bottom. The apostles and prophets are the foundation—the church began with them—Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. I mention these things because there are some calling themselves Christians, who tell us they have the power to appoint apostles. They must be false apostles, for you do not get the apostles at the top of the building; they are at the bottom. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers we have still in this day {and prophets in the forth-telling sense}. Is the church always to have them? Most positively, while it is on earth. Ephesians tells me we are to have them till—mark that word, till—“we all come unto a perfect man”; that is, while there is the need of them in the church, there will be evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In Ephesians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 12, not a word is said about bishops, elders, or deacons, but the evangelists, pastors, and teachers go on till, etc. The next question is—Were these men ordained to their offices? Here you must draw the line between a gift and an office. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers are all GIFTS of the Lord Jesus—the evangelist’s labors being in the world, and the others confined expressly to the church. An office does not necessarily suppose gift; and while evangelists, pastors, and teachers are spoken of as gifts, bishops, or elders and deacons, are local officers in the church.

The question is raised whether the evangelists, pastors, and teachers were ordained by the church. Let Acts answer it. I read that there was a persecution after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8 and 9), and what do you find? “They that were scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the word.” In Acts 11, we find God honoring their preaching, for by it “a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” But not a word about human ordination in it all. In other words, these men were gifted by the Lord Jesus; they were responsible to Him, and to Him only. Out they went upon their ministry, asking questions of no one. The church owned them, but could not appoint them, for they were already appointed to the work by the Lord. In the case of Matthias, who was numbered among the apostles, people say the apostles appointed him. Nothing of the kind. Those present cast lots according to Jewish custom, and the lot fell upon him; so he was numbered amongst them. There was no ordination; no laying on of hands. [It may be well to remark here, that in Acts 1:22, the words “ordained to be” have been gratuitously interpolated—there is nothing corresponding to them in the original, which reads simply, “must one be a witness with us of his resurrection.”]

Then, as to Paul. Was Paul ordained? We read that the brethren laid their hands upon Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:2-5). But was it for the purpose of ordaining or appointing them? Just think of such a thing the lesser appointing the greater. What is the fact? Barnabas and Saul had

been already used by God in a very marvelous way, long before anything was heard of the brethren laying their hands on them. They had gone into Asia and other places preaching and teaching, and the Lord had used them abundantly. In Acts it is stated that there was a special work to be done; and hence the Holy Ghost says when the disciples were gathered together, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."¹³ It was a special work which they were at this time called to do. And the brethren then gathered together, having fellowship with the work of Barnabas and Saul, fasted and prayed, and then laid their hands upon them as a sign of fellowship simply. Just as in 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul writes telling Timothy, "Stir up the gift of God that is in thee, by (διὰ the particle signifying the instrumental means), the putting on of my hands," and in 1 Timothy 4:14, "neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with (μετὰ the particle signifying association), the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery." The Presbytery had fellowship with Paul, and laid their hands upon Timothy, although the gift was an apostolic impartation. Not that the Presbytery conferred a gift or ordained him to anything, but simply showed fellowship with Paul as he imparted it. And so in Acts 13, the brethren expressed, by the imposition of hands, their association or fellowship with what the Holy Ghost was doing through Barnabas and Paul. (For Paul's separation and appointment to the ministry, see Acts 9, 22; 2 Cor. 4; Gal. 1, etc.). As I have said, the evangelists, pastors, and teachers are the gifts of the Lord Jesus {of Christ}, specially given by Him. They are sent forth by Him who says, "Occupy till I come;" and the gifts are responsible to Him, and to Him only.

But what about bishops, elders, and deacons? In Acts 6, the word deacon is not used at all. However, I suppose the persons chosen there answered to deacons. But for what were they chosen? The apostles wanted to give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word, and not to serve tables, and they therefore said, "Look you out seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

The business was taking care of the money contributed for the poor saints. The apostles and teachers did not want to have anything to do with the money matters, saying, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables, but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word."

The men chosen were not necessarily men with gifts; they were men selected to hold the office of deacons—to take care of the money and distribute it to the poor. [Stephen and Philip were beyond these men with gifts. The former was stoned for exercising his, and Philip went away preaching the gospel. In other words, as an evangelist, the Lord gifted Philip with it—the apostle had nothing to do but to own it. But the church chose the deacons, Philip among them; the apostles appointed them.] Hence the qualification mentioned in 1 Timothy for them, that they must be grave, not given to much wine, nor greedy of gain; but pure in walk, having sober wives, not slanderers, but faithful in everything, and ruling their children and their own houses well, etc. These were the men who, being "of honest report and full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts. 6:3), the apostles appointed over the business of distributing, among the poor saints, the contributions that were made on their behalf.

They were selected by the church, because by the grace of the Holy Spirit, those who gave their money were permitted to choose the men who were to distribute it—but always, be it noted, subject to the apostles' appointment: as it is written, "whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:3).

And what about elders? The word elder is from a Greek word that means an elderly person, an elder—πρεσβυτερος. But the very same persons are called in Acts 20:17, 28, "overseers," or "bishops." Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, "in which" [The true rendering of the original here is in which, not "over which." Translated by King James as divines, we can easily understand how the word "over" was introduced. 1 Peter 5:2 is a co-relative passage worthy of note, "Feed the flock of God which is among you." Here the translation is correct, the original word (ἐν) is the same in both passages] the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers—(ἐπισκοπους). But who were these that are called overseers? The very persons who, in an earlier verse, are called elders—"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." Moreover, "overseer" is translated "bishop" in 1 Timothy and in Philippians 1:1. So that bishop, overseer, and elder are words applied to the same person. Now, the translators of our, generally speaking, very excellent version of the Bible {KJV}, in the time of James I are chargeable with intentional departure from a plain translation in some cases, swayed no doubt by their own ecclesiastical ideas of things. Mind, I am not finding fault with the translation—I am not capable of that; but I cannot help seeing that in Acts 20:28, it should have been "in which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops." But that would not have accorded with their idea of only one bishop. Now, the church at Ephesus had many bishops, or overseers, or elders. But who chose those elders? Did the church? Nothing of the kind. The church never chose them. How, then, were they chosen? Paul and Barnabas visited every church in the circuit here mentioned in Acts 13 and 14, and "chose for them elders" (Acts 14:23). The elders were never chosen by the church; they were chosen by the apostles; they were either chosen directly by the apostles themselves according to the true meaning of this Scripture, they "chose for them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23) not, the churches chose for themselves, and the apostles ratified their choice, but distinctly, the apostles chose for them, or they were chosen by the apostles' delegates. Here Paul and Barnabas chose them directly, so that there was no church here whose elders were not appointed directly by apostolic authority. It is not said they laid their hands on them, either here or elsewhere though possibly they did, judging by analogy. For this cause was Titus left in Crete, to set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as Paul had appointed him (Titus 1:5). But there is not a word here about another's continuing the task; nor even that Titus was to continue it after the apostle's death. Nor was he to appoint where he pleased, but definitely at Crete, where he had this special duty to perform; and, when required, to be diligent to return to the apostle at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), and not stay at Crete. Timothy no doubt had a similar authority to exercise, probably in a more general way, inasmuch as he is so fully instructed as to the necessary qualifications of those who were to hold these distinctly local charges. It is strange that people never notice these things, and yet here they are in the word of God. And this is why I say that we cannot appoint elders: because we have no authority to do it. The church has no authority to do it. The appointment was apostolical; and, as I said before, we have no apostles now.

But the apostle says, "Know them which labor among you, and are over you, in the Lord, and admonish you."

Know them and respect them, and bow to them, when they act IN the Lord. The next verse, at the same time, giving the common responsibility of all the saints, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men" (1 Thess. 5:14-15). If you ask me—Do you own them in the church?—I say that if in any gathering, however small, I find any person, a sober, faithful man, who goes out leading and helping the saints of God, I respect that man's judgment, I bow to it as to one in authority; but

mark, I cannot appoint him. If I see anyone that acts like an elder described in Timothy, I recognize him; But, I cannot appoint him. And on this point also Hebrews 13 gives clear light. There they are told to “remember them which have the rule over you (or “guide you,” in the margin), who have spoken unto you the word of God.” This is authority indeed. It is one thing to assume “rule,” another to “speak the word of God,” which is what characterizes a sure guide. By him, the present mind of God for His saints is communicated. These were doubtless now departed; hence the word “remember.” But, in the Lord’s faithfulness, others filled their place; hence, in v. 17, the word “obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves;” and in v. 24, “Salute them, etc.”

The word translated “have the rule,” and in the margin “guide,” is the same as is used in Acts 15:22, of Judas and Silas, “chief men among the brethren.” This is noteworthy.

1 Corinthians 16:15-16, also shows us how Christians, without losing their proper responsibility, are still to be subject to those who are specially engaged in the work of the ministry. “I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves unto the ministry of the saints), that ye submit yourselves unto such (mark the word), and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboreth.”

There are two clear reasons for not appointing elders and deacons now:

1st. Not being either an apostle, or an apostle’s delegate as Timothy or Titus, no one has the requisite authority;

2nd. “All the flock,” in which they were appointed, in any given place, is now, alas! outwardly broken up into sects and heresies; and hence the appointment could not take place, even were there the requisite power, till all the present sad divisions had ceased, and the saints had come together again, owning their common union by the Holy Spirit, as members of One Body. This is a simple reply to the constant query, “But why did the Lord at the first order such appointments, if they were not to continue?” It shows His wisdom and love. He foresaw the divisions, and wisely forbore perpetuating an appointment which would practically be null and void through the willfulness of men more intent on the success of a cause than careful for His glory. Be it remembered, Scripture recognizes but One church, the Body of Christ (churches, of course, locally), and speaks but of sects and heresies to condemn them (1 Cor. 3, 11, etc.). Now, on the contrary, there are numerous rival systems, calling themselves “churches,” and each of these will proceed to elect its own deacons and elders. I asked a deacon of a company of Baptists how far his deaconry extended. “Not beyond those who meet with us in—,” was his reply; and this was in a town of over 150,000 souls, among whom one rejoices to know there are thousands of God’s saints. “Can this be of God?” I said to him. He saw his error, and gave up the office to which, without the warrant of Scripture, he had been appointed. In the anarchy that prevails, through man’s sin, in the house of God, which normally is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth, but has become “a great house, full of vessels of honor and dishonor,” the perpetuation of appointments to the office, would be an empty form. God foresaw the anarchy which has crept into the church, and hence, in matchless wisdom, forbore to continue an office, which only helps, as now imitated, to perpetuate division amongst those He called in oneness, to walk in subjection to His word. To rightly recognize elders or deacons in any one sect, would be, either on the one hand, to unchristianize all outside that sect, according to the principle contained in those words, “Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and unto ALL THE FLOCK, in which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28); and again, “The elders I exhort Feed the flock of God, which is among you,” etc. (1 Peter 5:1-2); or it would be, on the other hand, to sanction and countenance those divisions so emphatically condemned by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 1, 3, 11, 13).

Such, then, is something of what I believe the Scriptures teach about ministry:

I. It is not priesthood.

2. The ascended LORD is the source of ministry.

3. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers will be afforded, as long as the church is on the earth.

4. Neither the apostles nor the church ever ordained any of these.

5. That bishops, or elders, and deacons were not necessarily gifts, but were officers in local assemblies. A teacher, evangelist, or pastor was such wherever he went. Elders, or bishops, and deacons were attached to local assemblies.

6. The appointment of elder and deacon was strictly apostolic, and hence there is no Scriptural authority today for their appointment; although if persons answering to them exist, they are to be recognized.

7. The evangelist is responsible to the Lord for his services to the world; the pastor for caring for the saints; and the teacher for teaching them, and they for receiving his instructions and for walking in the truth thus taught; but over the assembly, as such, gathered—for example, to break bread—the word of God owns no human president, God Himself being present by His Spirit. I shall conclude this part of the subject by the following extracts:

“We are charged with rejecting Christian ministry. To this the short reply is, that we reject nothing but un-Christian ministry. I do not believe that persons appointed by the Sovereign, or chosen by the people, are therefore ministers. This is the point in question. I disclaim the title of either to choose or appoint them, or of any but God. But I believe Christian ministry to be as essential to this dispensation as the fact of Christ’s coming. So far am I from setting it aside, I believe it to be essentially from God, and object to the perversion of it, or the mere will of king or people (though both are to be respected in their place) interfering with so holy a thing. I read that when Christ ascended up on high, “He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” This is the only source of ministry; not the appointment of a king nor the choice of a people. I see it, on the one side, asserted that authorities have a right to appoint, and on the other, that the people have a right to choose. I do not believe either. Christ gives when and how He pleases: woe to them who do not own it! In a little tract called the “Protestant Dissenters’ Manual” it is stated that a man has as much right to choose his own minister as his own lawyer or physician. This seems to shut out God altogether, just as much as what is objected to. If Christ has given a gift, the saint is bound to own its use, and Christ’s word by it.

“Where is the proof of an evangelist’s gift? In the converted souls whom God blesses through His means. The church may own and recognize him in it; they must do so if they are spiritual—if the gift, and therefore, the appointment of God be there. They sin against Christ, who has sent him, if they do not. The consequence of these human appointments or choosings has been the fixing of a person who pleased the patron or people, fit or unfit, as the one only person in whom every gift must be concentrated, or the church loses part of its inheritance and portion. And the whole service has been turned habitually into a preacher.

“We do not object to ministry, but to the assumption of the whole of it by one individual, who may or may not be sent; and if he have one qualification, yet not all. A man may be eminently qualified for an evangelist, and he is made pastor, for which he is in no way fitted. He is qualified to teach, perhaps, but not to rule, and he is put to guide the flock. It is the substitution of a minister, good or bad for the whole work of the ministry, of which we complain.” [On Christian Ministry: What is to be Received and What to be Rejected, by J. N. Darby.]

Again,

“In the ministry of the Spirit there are two distinct departments that which is within the church, and that without. It is, indeed, true that the same individual may be (but is not necessarily) qualified for both; but the ministry of the pastor would not be required in the world, nor that of the evangelist in the church. The command is, “go and preach the gospel to every creature;” here is the evangelist sent forth into the world: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together;” here is the church, “come together in one place.” The first and necessary qualification of the evangelist is for himself to have been reconciled to God, and to have had put into him “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5)—“We believe, and therefore do we speak.” “Let him that heareth say, come.” The office itself would legitimately lead from place to place, it would require one to endure hardships, to be instant in season and out of season—continually pressing God’s message on unwilling hearers; “whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.” Its end is answered in the ministry of an individual, though it was the Lord’s grace to send His disciples out by two and two, and the apostles’ practice to follow, in this respect, His example. The evangelist sent into the world must necessarily need support, “for the laborer is worthy of his hire”; but this he is not to expect from the world, but from those who are worthy (Matt. 10:11). He is necessarily much cut off from a worldly occupation, in going from city to city and place to place; and, therefore, it would be a matter of wisdom to determine how far he should be employed in the things of this life ...

“With respect to the ministry in the church, it is not, as that of the evangelist, migratory, but stationary. It does not necessarily prevent a man from exercising a worldly calling because, in fact, it does not depend upon the energy of an individual, but brethren meet together to edify one another according to the power of the Spirit among them.

“Among the evils which have arisen to the church from the attempt to unite the two departments of the ministry in one man, may be noticed, first of all, the undervaluing of the pastoral office. Almost all systems that have been formed by men have been looked upon as more or less extensive spheres for preaching the gospel; and hence almost all stated ministry has become properly that of the evangelist. The church is not fed; believers are not built upon their most holy faith, because the heart of a minister is more called forth in its sympathy to those who are dead in trespasses and sins than to those who are converted. If, indeed, there be a heart burning with love for souls, and God has given him wisdom to win them, let him take the large sphere that is set before him—“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel!” [Bible Subjects for the Household of Faith, vol. 1, p. 114].

Seven Hints to Young Believers

Beloved in the Lord,

If you have been led by the Holy Ghost to own the Lord Jesus as your Saviour—to know that, for His sake, your sins have been forgiven—allow me to exhort you on one or two particulars.

(1) Let HIM, not the instrument used for your blessing, have all the praise; for He alone is worthy; and His servants would be “carnal” indeed (1 Cor. 3:1-9) if they allowed you to think of them, when the praise and adoration belong only to Him.

(2) You have been led to see at least, that you know very little of God’s word: so all of us should candidly admit (1 Cor. 8:2). Then search daily to find in the Scriptures a deeper acquaintance with the PERSON to whom you are brought. You know what the word has done for your conscience; now learn about the Divine Object for your heart. In this day of confusion and lawlessness the saint of God needs, as ever, to be commended “to God and to the word of His grace” (Acts 20:32).

(3) Loud talking and much disputing ill become followers of {the Lord} Jesus in this day. A quiet consistent walk, in whatever relationship of life we are found, will weigh much more heavily (1 Peter 2:12).

(4) Make it a habit, when you meet together, to avoid the gossip tendency of the day. The PERSON of the Christ, as shown to faith, by the Holy Ghost, in the word, should be the only theme. This will exclude slander on the one hand and creature-worship on the other.

(5) Next to thus living consistently before your relations, persevere in prayer to God (Eph. 6:18) for them, and watch a favorable opportunity to speak to them. This needs wisdom (Isa. 1:4; Prov. 15:28).

(6) Wait on the Lord to enlarge your hearts towards unconverted persons. To such as you know, watch your opportunity to commend a good gospel tract or book. Respecting this, you should feel it your privilege to lay by, as the Lord prospers you, for the scattering of what you believe, according to God’s word, is the truth to help souls. So also, instead of wasting money on needless things, look after the poor—especially those who are the Lord’s (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

(7) I would lastly add, that you should most earnestly find out what is the mind of the Lord respecting you in these last days. To gather round men—to aid in schism, would be simply to go counter to the truth in John 17, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12., etc. if you are willing to do what is right, the Lord will make plain your path (Phil. 3:8-21). But surely every saint of God should feel that the present condition of the church—God’s church on the earth; is anything but what it was when

when no names, and sects, and parties, severed practically, as to outward testimony, the “one body.”

When the Lord was here His disciples gathered round Him. Soon after His ascension the HOLY GHOST baptized the believers into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), and all then, “with one accord,” owned no other name but His. And when He comes again it will be to gather all the saints, from Adam’s time to the moment He comes—to whom?—HIMSELF.

Where were names and parties at Pentecost? Where do you find them in the early times of the church’s history in the Acts? What will become of them in the glory? I speak to BELIEVERS only. (The unconverted cannot understand this.) Willful MEN sectioned off the church of God into sects and parties. The LORD JESUS, the HEAD, never did. And the HOLY GHOST positively condemns such an act (1 Cor. 1:1-13). “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.”

One is your Master, even CHRIST, and ye all ARE BRETHREN (Matt. 23:8).

May He who is coming “quickly” (1 Thess. 4; Heb. 10:37)—stir up the hearts of all His own to learn from THE Shepherd’s voice. May Divine wisdom be afforded to such as are gathered to His name (Matt. 18:20); and who endeavor, in much feebleness, and before many dear saints who do not understand us—to keep the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:” who in obedience to the Lord (2 Tim. 2:20-22; Heb. 13:13)—desire to keep His word and not deny His name—May we gladly welcome whom He receives—May we positively, for His honor, refuse whom He rejects.

May our true love, in Him, be manifested by us to all whom He loves and who love Him. May abundant grace, mercy, and peace be yours, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours truly in Him,

C. J. Davis

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