

ABSTRACT OF THE ARGUMENT,

IN THE

PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE QUESTION:

“ ARE THE CHRISTIANS OF A GIVEN COMMUNITY THE CHURCH OF
SUCH COMMUNITY ? ”

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MADE BY  
GERRIT SMITH,  
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IN

HAMILTON, N. Y.

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ARGUMENT.

The question, said Mr. Smith, refers to a local church:—not to what *men* may mean by a local church; but to what *God* means by it;—to what his inspired apostle meant by it, when he wrote to the church of Rome, or of Corinth, or to some other church.

A sectarian, or man-selected church, said Mr. Smith, is, as a general fact, made up, in part, of the regenerate, and, in part, of the unregenerate persons of the place, where it exists. But, he would attempt to prove, that a local church is, in the eye of God and the Bible, made up of all the regenerate persons in the given locality and of no others. Passing over, for the present moment, the assumption, that they, who are not Christians can belong to a church of Christ; he would ask, whether it is possible, that any Christian, however weak or erring, who lives within the territorial limits of a God-made and God-approved local church, is, in the eye of God, left out of it? What answer does the Bible give to this question?

All the disciples of Jesus Christ, even the most weak and erring, are inexpressibly dear to his great, and generous, and loving heart. Again, they all need, vitally need, the instructions, supports, comforts, means of increase in holiness, happiness, and usefulness, which the Saviour, at the cost of his blood, has, so freely and so fully, provided in the local church. And the most weak and erring need them most. Now, in the light of these facts, what answer should we naturally expect the Bible to give to this question? Most assuredly, the answer, that, wherever there is a local church, every Christian there belongs to it; and has right to its nourishment and to its helps

for growing in grace;—a right too, not partial, neither conditioned on his doing certain things; but a right, full and absolute, simply in virtue of his being a Christian. I add, that what we should so naturally expect the Bible to prove on this point, it does prove. And, now, let us look into the Bible for such proof. But, ere doing so, let me ask, whether we dare look into it for proof to the contrary? We dare not look into it for justifications of slavery, or of the drinking of intoxicating liquors. Why then, dare we look into it for justifications of sectarianism?—for justifications to divide Christians into sects, and to confine our sympathies, *as church members*, to a part of the Christian brotherhood? Is not the attempt, in this case, to make the Bible the minister of sin quite as guilty—quite as blasphemous as in the others?

But, to the Bible proof, that a local church comprises all the Christians within its territorial limits.

The Bible speaks of a mystical body, and of Jesus Christ, as its head. Who are its members? Christians; none but Christians; and all Christians. There is not a Christian on earth, who is not a member of it. But the Bible repeatedly calls this body the church. Hence, if what we have said of the membership of the body be true; the church includes all Christians.

Rom. xii. 5—Eph. i. 22, 23—iv. 15, 16—v. 23, 30—Col. i. 18, 24—1st Cor. x. 17—xii. 12, &c., teach, that Christians, church, body, have the same meaning.

The figure of the spiritual house in 1st Pet. ii. 4, 5, and in the close of 2d chap. of Eph., and the figure of the vine and branches in John xv., and the figure of the bride and bridegroom in Rev. xxi. 2—Isaiah liv. 5—lxii. 5—Psalm xlv.—Rom. vii. 4—all teach what is taught by the figure of the body.

Also in Heb. xii. 22, 23, we are taught, that the church universal is composed of all Christians.

But, if the church universal be composed of all Christians, how reasonable, nay how irresistible, is the inference, that a local church is composed of all the Christians within its territory?—and that it differs from the church universal, only as a part differs from the whole? Thanks, however, to the Bible and to the God of the Bible, we are not left to mere inference, in this important matter. There are many passages of the Bible,

which teach, by express declaration, that a local church includes all the Christians within its territory, and none else. I will quote some of them. Rom. i. 7—1st Cor. i. 2—Eph. i. 1—Phil. i. 1, connected with iv. 15—Col. i. 2. See, also, Acts xx. 28, and 1st Pet. v. 2. His Lord had told Peter to feed the flock—the lambs, as well as the sheep—the weak, as well as the strong. How natural then to suppose, that, when Peter charged the elders to feed that part of the flock under their care, he meant the lambs, as well as the sheep—the weak, as well as the strong: and that, in correspondence with his Lord's instructions to himself, the flock, of which he spoke to the elders, included none but sheep and lambs.

In addition to these testimonies, we have the Saviour's own definition of a local church in Mat. xviii. 20. He here teaches, that two or three, gathered together in his name, constitute a church. We learn, also, from the 18th and 19th verses of this chapter, that a church has none the less power conferred upon it, because it is small. By the way, the 19th verse of this chapter is a perfect key to the meaning of the 19th verse of the 16th chapter of the same gospel. Only interpret the latter in the light of the former; and all is plain. In the former, the power in question is clearly given to the church. Now, the true meaning of the one verse cannot conflict with that of the other: and, hence, the Roman Catholic claim for Peter is groundless. I believe, that "thee" in Mat. xvi. 19 refers to the church—and that the Saviour addressed Peter, not so much as the representative of the church, as in apposition with it. Nothing is more natural, or common, than thus to address an individual for a multitude—than thus to make an individual stand for a multitude. To illustrate—you are interested in the project of a plank road to run northwardly through your village. We will suppose, that Rome, as well as Utica, is spoken of, as the point of its northern termination. You see your old and esteemed neighbor, Judge Gridley of Utica, and say to him, "Judge, we don't know, that we shall let you have the plank road." You also see Mr. Foster of Rome, and say to him, "We think we shall let you have the plank road." In the one address, "you" obviously means "Utica," and, in the other, "Rome." I would add, that the "rock" referred

to is, in my judgment, the confession, that Jesus is "the Christ—the Son o' the living God." Bear in mind, that, although "Peter" means "rock" in the original; the word here translated "rock" is not only another word, but of another (feminine) gender.

But, to return from this digression—the Bible teaches, not only, that the Christians of Rome and Corinth composed the churches in those places; but that the Christians of a single family (or, if not so, that the handful of Christians accustomed to meet together in a private house,) composed a church. See Rom. xvi. 5—1st Cor. xvi. 19—Col. iv. 15—Philemon 2.

I referred to figures of the Bible, which prove, that all Christians belong to the church. These figures denote the intimacy and indissolubleness of the union of the disciples of Christ with himself. This union is as essential, as that of the body with the head; of the branches with the vine; of the other stones of a house with the corner stone. It follows, that no less close is the union of the Saviour's disciples with each other. If individuals are each bound up in Christ, then are they also bound up in each other. If, in Bible language, they "are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" then, in Bible language, they are also "members one of another." How decidedly, in 1st Cor. xii. 25, 26, does Paul speak against "schism!"—and how touchingly of those sympathies, which, with electric swiftness, fly from one Christian heart to another! One Christian may be regarded as one of the arms of the Saviour's mystical body, and another Christian as the other. Can these arms refuse to acknowledge each other? Not while the life-blood of the same divine heart courses through both;—not while the same divine head directs both. The making of war by one member of the mystical body upon another, is a greater and more abhorrent absurdity, than the making of war by one member of the natural body upon another.

Surely, a relation, so endearing, so tender, as that between the members of the Saviour's mystical body; as that between the members of his church;—surely, a union, so intimate, so sacred, and cemented by a love so divine—can never be broken. It must be ever-during, ever strong. However else, and wherever else, Christians may differ, they, at least, constitute

one church. There, they are brought together, and kept together. There, they are one. The church is the very place—the place above all others—where Christians must feel, that they are to be brought together, and to be kept together. That they should refuse mutual union at a point, so significant, so vital, is as absurd and as monstrous, as for the feet and the hands to quarrel with each other, or with the head.

But, why have I spent so much time to prove, that all Christians are to be recognized, as belonging to the church; and that to attempt to cast any of them out is a great sin both against them and their Saviour? Christ and Christians are one. To cast *them* out of his church is to cast *him* out of his own church. For proof of this oneness, see, in addition to the scriptures already quoted, John xvii. 21, and 1st Cor. vi. 15. See, also, the close of the 25th chap. of Mat. for proof of the Saviour's gracious and condescending identification of himself with even the least ones.

The Saviour teaches, in Mark iii. 23, that it is God, who casts out devils. Who, then, casts out Christ? It must be Satan. And, when we are casting out Christ, we are doing Satan's work—the work of the under—not of the upper world.

I need say no more to prove, that the Christians on the earth compose the church on the earth; and that the church of a given locality comprises the Christians of such locality. We will now look at what is relied on to disprove these positions. What, however, can be said, in the face of the great amount of inferential and direct proofs, which have now been brought to sustain these positions? It would seem, that to question those proofs is, well nigh, to question whether the Bible proves any thing. Nevertheless, we proceed to examine the passages of scripture on which sectarians depend for showing, that unregenerate persons can be in the church of Christ, and regenerate persons can be out of it.

1st. It is contended, that the parable of the tares and the parable of the fish in 13th chap. of Mat., and also that of the virgins in the 25th chap. of Mat., teach, that the church is made up both of the righteous and the wicked. But, in the case of the parable of the tares, the Saviour expressly says: 'The field is the *world*:' and it would be doing the greatest

violence to analogy to suppose, that, in the case of the other parables, the scene is laid in the church, instead of the world.

The parables of the tares and fish are employed, as I suppose, to illustrate the endeavors to bring souls into the kingdom of heaven—into a state of salvation. The net and the sickle gather what is worthless along with that, which is good. So too, what is gathered under the preaching and influences of the gospel is not all precious. Much of it is vile. “Many are called; but few are chosen.” Many seem to come into the kingdom; but do not.

2d. It is also contended, that the parable of the vine and branches in John xv., teaches, that wicked persons are in the church. In the case of the stony and thorny ground hearers there is a seeming, but only a seeming growth in grace. So too, in the case before us. The fruitless branches but seem to be in the vine. That they are not in it is a certain inference from the 4th and 5th verses. If a branch, to be fruitful, must be in the vine, and will then not fail to be fruitful: it follows, that a fruitless branch is not in the vine.

3d. It is claimed, that the description of the Laodicean church, in Rev. iii. 15, 16, proves, that there may be wicked persons in a local church. But, does not this claim impeach the veracity of the Holy Spirit? Who, after reading Rev. i. 4, 5, 6, 9, dares say, that there was one unregenerate person in the “seven churches?” But, the Laodicean church, as is universally believed, was certainly apostate and spiritually dead. And is it of men, sunk in apostacy and dead in trespasses and sins, that the Saviour can say: “they are neither ‘cold nor hot’ in religion?” Are not such men all absolutely cold in religion? But, what means, it will be triumphantly inquired, his threat to spew them out of his mouth? I confess, that I do not certainly know. My conjecture of its meaning is, that for his disciples to become, in a great measure, indifferent to his truth and his cause, is as loathsome to his soul, as a lukewarm liquid is to the palate of him, who drinks it. I confess my ignorance. But, no man should suffer his ignorance to control his knowledge. I must not surrender to my ignorance of the meaning of a part of the description of the character of the Laodicean church the certain knowledge of that

character, which I have derived from other parts of the description. This church was guilty, not of abandoning the cause of Jesus Christ; but, as we learn by the 19th verse, of losing its zeal in that cause. That its members were Christians, has already been proved. Cumulative proof to this end may, however, be derived from the same verse: "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Neither this language nor the like language in 12th chap. of Hebrews can be applied to the unregenerate.

4th. The 3d Epistle of John is relied on to prove, that there were bad men in the New Testament churches; and that good men were cast out of them.

That Diotrephes was a bad man I admit. That he had been, and was, even now, by some persons, regarded as a Christian, and, therefore, a member of the church, is highly probable. But, that he was a member of it, I deny. Paul says, Acts xx. 29, "For I know this, that, after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Would you claim that these grievous wolves were of "the flock?" They were but *among* it. So was Diotrephes but *among* the members of the local church, of which he claimed to be a member. The same apostle, who writes of Diotrephes, informs us, in his 1st Epistle, ii. 18, 19, that there were "many," who had been reckoned as belonging to the church, who were "not of" it: and that their open apostacy was to prove, that supposed members of the church were "not all" of it.

Did Diotrephes cast out from the church!—good persons?—for, if he cast out any, they were good persons; since we have proved, that such a thing, as a wicked person, in God's universal church, or God's local churches, there is not. I would here say, that, even if he did cast out good persons, it becomes sectarians to be sparing of their reproaches:—for why should they reproach him for doing that, which they justify in themselves? Where is the sectarian (and by this name I mean nothing more offensive than to designate those, who believe it right to withdraw themselves from the universal Christian brotherhood, and form sects,) I say where is the sectarian, who would not, in certain cases, consent to have the confessedly

best member of his church hurled out of it? Such a member, in all the sincerity of his devoutly pious heart, has come to adopt the Quaker view of the "ordinances." He has come to believe, that they pertained to the Jewish Dispensation, and expired with it. "Hurl him out," would be the sentence of every consistent Baptist and Presbyterian:—and this too, notwithstanding the sentence would be in the very face of the Saviour's perfectly plain teaching, that the person we exclude from our church fellowship, must, in our eyes, be as utterly destitute "as a heathen man and a publican" of all claims to Christian character.

But did Diotrophes cast persons out of the church? And will they, who believe in the congregational polity—will the Baptists, for instance, who take so much complacency in the democracy of their ecclesiastical arrangements, and who claim, that these arrangements are after the pattern of the apostolic churches—will they admit, that, even in the time and presence of the apostles, the government of a church could degenerate into a monarchy—into a mere autocracy? But this they must admit, if they allow, that Diotrophes had power to cast persons out of the church.

I am opposed, not only to sectarianism, but to every form of ecclesiastical government, except that, which is purely congregational and democratic:—for, I believe, that nothing else is so democratic as Christianity. Hence, I experience a two fold pleasure in substituting "assembly" or "congregation" or "meeting," for the word "church," in the 10th verse. Such substitution relieves both congregationalism and anti-sectarianism of all the difficulties, which the universal reading of this epistle clusters upon them. That these meanings of the original word are as fully authorized, and as well settled, as the other meaning, every Greek scholar knows: and that the translation, which I have preferred for it in this case harmonizes with the context, with common sense, with the teachings of the New Testament, and with the genius of Christianity, every person, who does not look through the spectacles of sectarianism, or Roman Catholic or Protestant popery, must, in my humble opinion, readily see. I add, that it was, probably, the missionary brethren, instead of the members of the church, whom

the tyrannical Diotrephes had the influence to have ejected from the assembly. For the information of such, as are ignorant of Greek, I would remark, that the Greek word translated “assembly” in Acts xix. 39 is the same which is translated “church” in the present case; and that “church” in Heb. ii. 12 is also translated from the same word. But Psalms xxii. 22, and xl. 9, make it certain, that “church” in Heb. ii. 12, means “congregation.”

The sectaries claim, that the incestuous man, spoken of in 5th chap. 1st Cor., was a member of the church. He was, however, no more such than was Diotrephes. The incestuous man was *among* church members; but not of them. He was also “called a brother,” (see 11th verse,) and was once believed to be a Christian brother; but was no more such (certainly not at that time,) than was any other of the vile persons referred to in the verse. That, in the eye of divine inspiration, he was not of the Corinthian church, is evident from 1st Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.

We have, now, cleared our way to the last and most relied on fortress of the sects. To the 3d chap. of 2d Thess. they are wont to resort for their most valued arguments to prove, that Christians can be excluded from a local church—from a Bible local church. The universal mis-reading of this chapter is no proof, that wise and good men have not examined it. They have examined it—and, that too, most learnedly and honestly; and that they have failed to unlock its meaning is only because they have not held in their hand the simple anti-sectarian key. Had they, as they should have done, taken up the chapter with no more expectation of finding authority in it for one Christian to disfellowship another, than for one man to enslave another, the sectarian interpretations of this chapter, if not, indeed, sectarianism itself also, would, ages ago, have passed away.

Before giving my own interpretation of this chapter, I would remark, that if it be wrong, and that if the persons, from whom the “brethren” were commanded to withdraw, were, indeed, Christians, then the extent and nature of the withdrawal are to be judged of in the light of the fact, that they were Christians. Circumstances may arise, in which a Christian very pro-

perly comes to stand in doubt of the person, whose piety he has hitherto fully admitted. His confidence in his piety is now suspended—is now weakened—but not overthrown. As yet, he only suspects him of conduct incompatible with Christian integrity. Nevertheless, they can no longer take “sweet counsel together and walk to the house of God in company.” The reserved deportment toward the suspected one, which such circumstances call for, is, however, very different from the deportment, which would be proper, were the suspicion ripened into conviction. Open disfellowship would, in the latter case, be a plain duty; but, something immeasurably short of it, in the former.

I proceed to my interpretation of the chapter.

1st. The “brethren,” to whom this epistle was addressed, were to withdraw themselves from certain disorderly walkers.

2d. They were to have no company with the man, who would not “obey our word by this epistle.”

Now, the question is: “Are these disorderly walkers and this disobedient man a part of the ‘brethren?’”—a part of the Thessalonian church? I hold that they are not.

The Thessalonian “brethren,” as we see by 1st Thess. i. 4 and other passages, were eminently pure and holy. This (see 2d Thess. i. 3,) was true of “*every one*” of them. But it is said, that the appellation of “brother” is given to the disorderly walkers. I doubt not that they had mingled with the “brethren;” had worn the name of “brother;” and, though, probably, more from the force of habit than from mistake of their true and now developed character, were still wearing it. Indeed, the fact, that they were still wearing it; that they had been numbered with the brethren; and that there was, therefore, special need of vindicating Christianity by openly protesting against these, its false professors, was, doubtless, among the most urgent reasons for the apostolic direction to withdraw from them. How much more important it is to withdraw from such—“from any man that is called a brother”—than from those, who have never been identified, in the public mind, with Christianity, is evident from 1st Cor. v. 9, 10, 11.

The incestuous man was “called a brother.” So was the

disorderly walker spoken of in the chapter under consideration. But that did not make them Christian brethren any more than their being called brethren made the "false brethren," of whom Paul speaks, Christian brethren. The Saviour calls him "brother," who, in the sequel, might no more merit the name of a Christian brother, than does "a heathen man and a publican." Such was clearly but a nominal Christian brother.

To proceed—how carefully and continually does inspiration keep up the contrast between the brethren and these wicked persons, who had got *among* them, but who were not *of* them! I have already quoted proof of the excellence of the "brethren"—of "*every one*" of them. The 3d and 4th verses of this chapter concur with that proof. The 7th verse appeals to the "brethren" in contradistinction from others. Forcibly also, does "ye" in the 13th verse contradistinguish the "brethren" from "them" in the 12th verse. There is striking disproof of the identity of the disorderly walkers with the "brethren," in the phraseology of the 11th verse. The disorderly persons, instead of being *of* the "brethren," walked *among* them. Paul does not say, as he so naturally would have said, had he complained of the "brethren:" "For we hear that some of *you* walk disorderly;" but he says: "For we hear that there are some which walk *among you* (en umin) disorderly." Surely, surely, he would not have so expressed himself, had he meant to charge disorderly walking on the "brethren" themselves. Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy, were not of this church, which they addressed: and that they should say, that themselves also, as well as the disorderly persons, were *among* the "brethren" is another argument, that the disorderly persons were not of the church. "We," says the epistle, "behaved not ourselves disorderly *among you* (en umin.)"

It is noteworthy, that the original word for walking in the 11th verse is a participle of the very verb, which, in 1st Peter v. 8, describes the devil as *walking about*. It is proper, however, to admit, that this verb, so far from being used in exclusive connection with the wicked, is, sometimes, coupled with the name even of the Saviour.

A few words respecting the 14th and 15th verses will close what I have to say respecting this chapter. These verses are

to be considered by themselves; and not to be confounded with the other parts of the chapter.

As he could not be a Christian, who disobeyed what he knew to be a command of an inspired apostle, so the person, guilty by the *supposition*, of the disobedience spoken of in the 14th verse, could not be a Christian. But, although he was to be excluded from Christian fellowship, he was to be counted, “not as an enemy, but admonished as a brother.” Under the Jewish dispensation men needed to be told not to hate their brother, Lev. xix. 17;—and they need the same instruction under the Christian dispensation. “Brother,” in the 15th verse, necessarily means but a brother man, instead of a Christian brother. Such, evidently, is the comprehensive meaning of the word (same in the original,) in Mat. v. 22—James ii. 15—1st John ii. 9, 10, 11.

We will pass on to examine another of the arguments in favor of the position, that the friends of God can be excluded from the church of God. It is said, that no Christians, who rejected baptism and the Lord’s supper, would have been acknowledged to be members of a church in the time of the apostles. But, I deny that, on the supposition, that the apostles enjoined these ordinances on their cotemporaries, there were such Christians. They were not Christians, who withheld obedience from what they knew to be apostolic requirements. So too, the cotemporaries of the apostles, who rejected the “doctrine of election,” could not have been Christians, provided the apostles told them to acknowledge it. But, does it follow, that the present rejecters of either of these doctrines are not Christians? By no means. And, yet, either the one or the other class of them are rejecters of apostolic teachings—for such teachings there doubtless were, in respect to these doctrines, and as plain also, as were apostolic teachings in respect to baptism and the Lord’s supper. They are Christians, however, notwithstanding they reject apostolic instruction—for they know not that they reject it. So, also, on the like ground of honest ignorance, may persons at this day be Christians, notwithstanding they directly oppose what the cotemporaries of the apostles well knew to be apostolic teaching, respecting baptism and the Lord’s supper. Were I to misapprehend the immediate

causes and the mode of the assassination of Julius Cæsar, I should not be judged harshly for my misinterpretations of the historical accounts of that event. But a misstatement on these points from the pens or lips of Brutus and Cassius, who had a hand, both in the plot and execution of it, would be justly stamped with guilty falsehood. To confound, however, my innocent mistake in this case with the wilful misrepresentation of Brutus and Cassius, would be no more unjust and absurd, than to class the good men, who in this age, misinterpret apostolic teachings, with the wicked men, who, eighteen centuries ago, heard those teachings, as they fell from the lips of the apostles, and yet rejected them.

I close my remarks under this head by asking candor and common sense to tell me—why, if sectarianism excludes from church membership confessed Christians, who err in respect to baptism and the Lord's supper, it does not also exclude confessed Christians, who err in respect to the "doctrine of election," or its rival doctrine?—and by further asking how meritorious that logic is, which argues, that, because it was right not to number in the first churches those, *who were certainly not Christians*, it is also right to refuse to number in the present churches those, *who certainly are Christians*? But this question associates in my mind, and leads me to reply to, another and the only other relied on position taken by the sectaries.

This position is, that baptism is the door of the church: and that, hence, whilst church members may be guilty of errors on innumerable other points, no one can be a church member who errs in relation to baptism.* Even in the present age, and by such truly great and good men, as Dr. Griffin and Dr. Dwight, has it been contended, that water baptism is the door of the church. Says Dr. G. in his letter on communion:

"Baptism is the initiatory ordinance which introduces into the visible church. Of course, where there is no baptism, there are no visible churches. We ought not to commune with those, who are not baptized and who are, of course, not church members, even if we regard them as Christians. Should a

* In the Debate, Mr. Smith but glanced at this position. But in writing his Argument for the press, he thought it better to be explicit upon it.

pious Quaker so far depart from his principles, as to wish to commune with me at the Lord's table, whilst he yet refused to be baptized, I could not receive him."

Says Dr. D. in his 156th sermon :

"Baptism is made by Christ (in John iii. 5,) a condition absolutely necessary to an authorized entrance into his visible church."

After saying that I regard the distinction between an earthly visible and an earthly invisible church as wholly fallacious and immeasurably pernicious; and that I will speak further upon it, at a future stage of this discussion, I proceed to say, that the argument, that baptism is the door of the church, is simply the sectarian interpretation of John iii. 5. But this interpretation, inasmuch as it proves too much for the position of the sectaries, proves nothing for it. I might, indeed, add, that it not only proves nothing *for* it, but all that I could ask *against* it. If, as the sectaries contend, the kingdom of God in this verse means but what they call the visible church—that is, the aggregate of righteous and unrighteous persons, which they understand by the phrase "local churches"—then is my definition of a local church irresistibly true—then are the local churches of the world made up of all the Christians of the world. For if the local churches make up this kingdom, then, inasmuch as on the very face of this verse all the subjects of this kingdom are born of the spirit, or, in other words, are Christians, it follows unavoidably, that the local churches are made up, neither more nor less, of all the Christians in the world:—a conclusion, which crowns my argument with triumph, and utterly demolishes sectarianism.

I might, here, take leave of this verse, having turned the interpretation of it by the sectaries fairly and fatally against themselves. I will, however, give my own interpretation of it. This interpretation will be so new and surprising to you, that you will, probably, regard it as wrong. But what if it be wrong? Sectarianism, which has already been proved to be entirely and irredeemably wrong, will not, therefore, be right. Wrong the interpretation may be—for, as in the case of my interpretation of 2d Thess. iii., and of 3d John x., I have not a particle of human authority for it. Wrong it may be, for I am

an unlearned man, and am, therefore, obliged, in all my Bible arguments, to make the Bible not only its own interpreter, but, well nigh, my only interpreter of its meaning. Nevertheless, I have, for many years, had a growing confidence, that it is the true interpretation. Ere entering upon it, let me remark, that, in my judgment, the sectarian reading of this verse, which makes it say: "Except a man be born of water he cannot enter the visible church; and except a man be born of the spirit he cannot enter the invisible church," is a liberty with the scriptures, quite as absurd, as it is unwarranted.

There are four verses in the Bible, which, looking at their bare letter, seem, in greater or less degree, to teach, that water baptism contributes directly and essentially to save the soul. One of them is the verse before us. The others are Mark xvi. 16—Acts ii. 38, and xxii. 16. Do these verses really teach this doctrine? Let the Bible answer. But, whilst I say, let the Bible answer, I also say, that we are not to insult the Bible and common sense, and to degrade the Christian religion from the glory of its spirituality to the vileness of materialism, by doubting, for an instant, what answer the Bible will give to this question. We are to take it for granted, that the Bible will be found to ascribe no power to water to cleanse the soul.

Innumerable scriptures teach, that faith, and faith alone, saves the soul. Look, for instance, at John iii. 18, 36—Acts xvi. 31—Rom. x. 9—2d Thess. ii. 12. Even one of the four verses, which we are to examine, teaches, by irresistible implication, that faith saves the soul: "but, he that believeth not shall be damned." It also teaches, in this phrase, that, though one be baptized, and yet does not believe, he cannot be saved. In the light of this teaching, therefore, and of the many scriptures, which directly give salvation to faith, how utterly powerless is water to save! But, in addition to these testimonies to the impotence of water, there is one verse (1st Peter iii. 21.) which explicitly teaches this impotence. I will delay no longer to give you my interpretation of John iii. 5.

The Jews laid a very great and a very undue stress on the religious use of water. Their baptisms of their persons, vessels, &c., were without number or end. In the language of our temperance times, they were, emphatically, "a cold water

people.” But, probably, never did their imaginations carry them so far on this subject, as at the period of the interview of Nicodemus and the Saviour—the period, when John was baptizing in the wilderness, and “there went out unto him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.” What more reasonable than to suppose, that Nicodemus partook of his nation’s superstitions and extravagant opinions concerning water? What more reasonable than to suppose, that Nicodemus came to the Saviour with the thought in his heart, if not, indeed, upon his lips, that John’s baptism, to which all were rushing, had possibly some, if not all, power to save the soul? We know little of what Nicodemus said in this interview. The record of the interview probably does not give one-tenth part of what he said in it. The third verse is not an answer to the second. But it is, as I suppose, an answer to the uttered or unuttered sentiments of Nicodemus, regarding water baptism. All the same, if unuttered, as uttered, to him, who, as we learn, only two verses back, needed not the revelation of the lips to learn what was in man. In the fourth verse Nicodemus scouts the idea of a literal second birth—his heart still clinging, as I suppose, to its reliance on the regenerating power of water baptism. To this vain and absurd reliance the Saviour replies in the fifth verse. So far is he from teaching in it the efficacy of water to save the soul, that he pours contempt on the absurd idea; and gives to the Holy Spirit all the honor of accomplishing the soul’s salvation. That he gives this honor to the Holy Spirit, in other verses in this chapter, none will deny. That, in no other verse, does he give any share of it to water, none will deny. And that, in the verse before us, he disdains to give any share of it to water baptism will be manifest in what the way is now prepared for me to say.

He, who, with a dull imagination, reads narratives—especially of oriental writers, as are the narratives of the scriptures—will, to a great extent, fail to catch the spirit, and comprehend and feel the force of their instructions. To read them without the called-for pictures in our minds of scenery and circumstances, is to expose ourselves to great misconception of what they teach. Imagination has aided us—I trust not misled us—thus far in our

examination of this verse. Continuing to invoke her help, as well as every other help, which we need, we will proceed in the examination.

Suppose a man says to me : “ I will attend church and thereby be saved :” and I reply : “ Except you attend church, *and be born of the spirit*, you will not be saved ”—would it be reasonable and natural to infer, that my object, in repeating his words, was to admit, that attending church is essential to salvation? Certainly not. But the reasonable and natural inference would be, that I repeated them for the directly opposite purpose of testifying, that it is the divine influences, and not attending church, which saves the soul. “ I will talk to the boys in the apple tree, and they will come down.” “ Except you talk, *and throw stones too*, they will not come down.” “ I will threaten the robbers, and they will run.” “ Except you threaten, *and shoot too*, they will not run.” His repetition of the words “ talk ” and “ threaten ” manifestly argues the repeater’s sense of the ineffectualness, instead of the effectualness, of the talking and threatening. Now, in the case before us, the Saviour catches up the word “ water ” from the lips or thoughts of Nicodemus, and repeats it for the purpose of declaring the utter vanity of water to revivate the heart. He says to him :—“ Except a man be born of water *and the spirit*, &c.”

How well does this interpretation of the verse harmonize with the contrasts in Mat. iii. 11, and Acts i. 5, between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

I pass on to the examination of another of the four verses, viz. Mark xvi. 16. You will remember, that, when adverting to this verse a few minutes since, I showed, that no argument for the power of water baptism to save the soul could be derived from it. It remains to explain, why it is, that water baptism is referred to in it : and this reference I will explain in a way not very dissimilar to that which I took in explaining the like reference in the fifth verse of the 3d chapter of John.

Read the last five verses of Matthew’s gospel, and the 13th to 18th verses in the last chapter of Mark, and hold them all clearly, steadily, strongly, in your minds, until I have done with this branch of my subject. The Saviour had no need to urge his eleven disciples to baptize : for, whether as Jews or Chris-

tians, they felt no indisposition to this service. But, there was one thing, of which the beloved and adorable, and oh! how patient God-man had need, even to the very last:—and that was to convince those eleven disciples of his Messiahship, and of his equal title with his Father to be worshipped. To produce this conviction, he did “many signs,” after his resurrection. See John xx. 30, 31. Even after his resurrection, they were still full of unbelief. Even after his resurrection, their worship of him was mingled with doubts and misgivings. It was faith, that he had need to inculcate upon his disciples. And because of their own too little sensibility to its vital importance, he had need to spend his last earthly moments in enjoining on them to require those to be exercised with a right faith, who should present their claim to be numbered with his followers. It was, as if he had said: “Tell men, that it is faith—faith in me, as the Messiah and the equal of the Father—not baptism, which saves the soul. Tell them, ‘He that *believeth* shall be saved.’” See also the promises, which are here made to faith: to “them that believe”—whilst, here, are none made to baptism. But, I may be asked, how I can reconcile this construed insignificance of baptism in this connection with the great stress laid on it in the commission to “go and teach all nations, baptizing them.” I reply, that neither great stress, nor any stress, is laid on it in that commission. It was not to inculcate the maintenance of the rite of baptism, that he refers to it in the commission. This rite, which God instituted—this rite of which Christ approved, even to the extent of submitting his own person to it, was, already, well established, and would continue to the end of time. The Saviour here mentions it, not for the superfluous re-inculcation of it; but to explain and enjoin *the new purpose* of its future observance. He here mentions it to teach his disciples, who, even now, worshipped him hesitatingly—who, even now, needed to be assured, that “all power was given unto him in heaven and in earth;”—that, henceforth, they must exact faith in him as God, and the worship of him as God, and the observance of all things, whatsoever he had commanded—in a word, that, henceforth—that because of his “all power”—that “therefore,” to use the Bible word—they must baptize in the name of *himself*, as well as of

the Father, and of the Holy Ghost. In this wise, they had never yet baptized.

How manifest, also, from Luke xxiv. 47, and Acts i. 8—x. 42, 43, that the Saviour's object in the "commission" was not to teach his disciples the duty of the rite of baptism—a duty, in which they had been already abundantly instructed:—but to teach them to go "unto the people," and "among all nations," and to require faith in himself as the Messiah, and in his power to forgive sins. And how delightful the record, that, scarcely had Peter given this explanation of the "commission," ere the Holy Ghost, as if to seal the truth of it, "fell on all them which heard" it—Acts x. 44.

To illustrate and justify my interpretation of the "commission," I will suppose, that it is, already, the established practice for all the subjects of Great Britain to swear allegiance to their sovereign:—but that, now, Parliament enacts a law, which modifies this practice, and requires allegiance to be sworn to the sovereign's conjugal partner also—to Prince Albert, as well as to Queen Victoria. What news would this law send through the world?—the news, that the British Government required its subjects *to swear allegiance?*—oh no!—for such is an old requirement. It would send the news, that, *now*, it is required to swear allegiance to *Prince Albert also*. So, likewise, in the case of the "commission." It declares something new. The news of the "commission," was not, that it *required baptism*: but that it required ~~baptism~~, *in the name of the Son also*.

Pardon the remark, that never was I so deeply convinced of the divine dignity and Godship of Jesus Christ, as, when seeking, and (as I firmly believe,) finding also, the true, great, and precious meaning of Mat. xxviii. 19, 20.

Another object, also, the Saviour may have had in the "commission." His language is strong evidence, that he had it. In the former "commission" to his disciples, he had required them to confine their labors to the Jews—to "go not into the way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans." Henceforth, however, they were to "go into all the world." No longer were they to shut up their sympathies within the limits of their own nation. The time of such ex-

clusiveness—of such partiality—they were now to regard as forever past. Oh that it had been forever past! Then, would the world have no more been cursed with sectarianism. Sectarian and national prejudices die together. They are sprouts from the same root;—and are characterized by a common littleness and a common intolerance.

Another of the four verses, which we proposed to examine, is Acts ii. 38. Let scripture explain scripture, and let Peter explain Peter. Acts iii. 19, shows that Peter's reliance for the remission, or blotting out, of sins is not on baptism, but on repentance and conversion. Moreover, the inculcation of baptism in this case, as in Mat. xxviii. 19, had, for its prime object, the inculcation of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The command in this case to be baptized—a command, remember, addressed to those, who had hitherto been ignorant of Christian baptism, was a command to swear allegiance to King Jesus.

The remaining one of the four verses is Acts xxii. 16. And, here, the requirement of Ananias is evidently, that Paul should not content himself with the sign, but should realize the thing signified; that, in other words, he should wash his heart, as well as his body. This passage makes nothing for the efficacy of water to cleanse the heart. I think, however, that it favors a more copious use of water in the rite of baptism, than some Christians approve of. *Wash your heart*, as well as *wash your body*, is as congruous, as *wash your heart*, as well as *sprinkle your body*, is incongruous.

I have, now, finished the examination of the four verses, the letter of which has a show of argument for the power of water to renovate the heart. Is it said, that my train of thought, in this examination, goes to call in question the duty of Christian baptism? I reply, that I intended no such thing: and, I add, that, not to speak of other authority for Christian baptism, it has, in the practice of it by the apostles, not only the full authority of the apostles, but of Christ himself. I said, that the disciples had not hitherto baptized, as the Saviour, now, directed them to baptize. I add that Christian baptism was never practiced, until after the ascension of the Saviour. The time, from the beginning of John's ministry until the Saviour's death, was a dispensation by itself—a connecting link between the Jewish and

Christian dispensations—the evening twilight of the one, and the morning twilight of the other.

The Saviour's parents made an offering for him. He bade the leper offer to the priest. He ate the passover. All this was according to the Jewish economy. Not, until "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom," did the old dispensation pass entirely away.

John's baptism was not Christian baptism; and, when sectarianism shall have ceased, and, with it, all temptation to identify the one with the other, it will be, universally, seen and acknowledged, that the one is distinct from the other. John did not receive his commission from Christ. The Saviour refers (John v. 31, 32, 33,) to the fact, that John witnessed of him. But this reference he would not have made, had he himself commissioned John. John's witnessing of Christ had its great value in the fact, that he was commissioned and sent by the Father, and could, therefore, testify disinterestedly of the Son.

John baptized into the belief of one to come. John did not know certainly, that Jesus was the Christ—see Luke vii. 19. In the 28th verse of this chapter, we see, how dark is John's dispensation, compared with Christ's;—for we, here, learn, that even the least of those disciples, who enjoy the light and teachings of the Christian dispensation, is greater than John. The dispensation of John was not illuminated by that blessed Spirit, who teaches all things; and for whose coming it was needful, that the Saviour should go away. I do not believe, that even Apollos knew, that Jesus was the Christ, until after Aquila and Priscilla "had expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly." Acts xviii. 24 to 28.

The 19th chap. of Acts shows conclusively, that John's baptism is not identical with Christian baptism.

In the light of these facts and also of the facts, which show how ignorant of the Saviour were both the world and even His own disciples; how unreasonable to suppose, that John baptized into the belief of Jesus, as the Messiah and the sovereign God!

Baptism was, also, practiced by the disciples of Christ during his life. That, however, did not make it Christian baptism. They were, well nigh, as ignorant of the true and essential character of Jesus, as was John the Baptist. To keep the world

in ignorance of that character, was, manifestly, the Saviour's policy. To dispel such ignorance, only very gradually, from the minds even of his disciples, was, also, his policy. On the mount of transfiguration, he charged three of his disciples to "tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. And they kept it close and told no man." So too, when, Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ, he charged his disciples not to tell, that he was the Christ. Indeed; it was never until his arraignment before the high priest, that he, publicly, acknowledged himself to be the Christ. How irreconcilable with his studied concealment from the world of his Messiahship, and with the great ignorance on this subject, in which he kept even his disciples, is the supposition, that he authorized them to baptize into the belief of himself, as the Messiah, and the Lord of heaven and earth.

Christian baptism is into the belief of Christ's death—Rom. vi. 3, 4. But, his disciples could not endure the idea of his death. Mat. xvi. 22. It is also a baptism into the belief of Christ's resurrection—1st Peter, iii. 21. But, his disciples did not know "what the rising from the dead could mean"—Mark ix. 10.

The Christian sacraments belong to the kingdom of God. But, all the time, the Saviour was on the earth, that kingdom was represented to be future. He himself so represents it, even after John's imprisonment. "The kingdom of God is at hand," (Mark i. 15,) that is—near by—but, not yet. Evidently, John himself was not in that kingdom. And one of the petitions, which the Saviour bade his disciples offer is. "Thy kingdom come."

Under the promptings of these additional testimonies, I must, again, say, that it is utterly vain to contend, that John ever did, or that the Saviour's disciples, during their Lord's stay on the earth, ever did baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

In concluding this part of my argument, let me remark, that, although Christian baptism differs in its objects from the baptism practiced before the Saviour's death; I see not one reason to doubt, but, on the contrary, many reasons to believe, that the mode, in both cases, was the same. If immersion were the mode before his death, it was the mode after his death also.

The Bible argument *against* sectarianism and the Bible argument *for* it are now both before you. The former you find impregnable—the latter but a bundle of misapprehensions and misinterpretations. Here, I might stop. The objections to reducing to practice the Bible theory of a local church, I am not bound to reply to. Nevertheless, I consent to reply to them, notwithstanding, I might fairly excuse myself from the task of replying to objections to a theory, after I have, so fully, shown it to be from Heaven.

The objectors say : “ But how can we consent to receive all sorts of Christians—Christians of all sorts of notions—into the church ? ” To these objectors my soul indignant replies : “ Who are you, that you should make the entrance of your fellow-men into the church of Jesus Christ turn on your consent ? Has he given to you this power ? No—neither to you nor to St. Peter. He keeps it in his own hand, and ever will.” Consoling assurance to the poor sinner, that it is so ;—that not men, but Jesus Christ alone, can shut out of his church. Consoling assurance too, that he has made the door of his church on earth no narrower than the door of his church in heaven. The Saviour has not given one set of rules for entering his church above ; and another and essentially different set, for entering his church below. Heaven is open to every Christian,—and, surely, then, there is no enclosure on earth, however sacred, that may be shut against any Christian. The church of Christ on earth is the family of Christ on earth ;—and are not its members to feel themselves as closely, as indissolubly, bound together, as the members of the natural family ? So intimate is the relation of husband and wife, that, whilst it exists, “ they twain are one flesh,” and inseparable. But, closer far is the relation between Christians, and far more abhorrent, therefore, should be the idea of their disunion from each other.

Alas, that men should regard the church as of human, instead of divine constitution ! Alas, that they should claim the right of voting in and voting out of it ! Alas the folly, the madness, which claims, that a member of Christ’s family may not, cannot, come into Christ’s family—into Christ’s church—unless he be voted in by men ! A child, born into the world, last night, in one of the families of this village, becomes, by the very fact

of his birth, a member of it. It is not necessary to take the vote, and obtain the consent of the family, ere he can become a member of it. Moreover, he is entitled to the provisions of his father's house, simply because it is his father's house. So too, when a little child is born into the Saviour's family (and every one born into it is a little child, Luke xviii. 17,) the new-comer is not obliged to ask his fellows, whether he may be reckoned as a member of the Saviour's family. The Christian claims his place among God's children for the sole reason, that he is a Christian : and he has no right to consent, that it should turn on the votes of his fellow-men, whether he get his place. His title-deed to the privileges and blessings of Christ's church—of Christ's family—comes not from man ; but from Christ himself.

But, it is asked : “ Are we to welcome into the family and church of Christ all Christians—even the weakest and most erring?” “ Yes—even the weakest and most erring;—and, this too, for the sufficient reason, that Christ welcomes them.” We are not to have a higher standard than Jesus Christ has. We are not to be more select in our associations, than he is. We are to obey the apostle, when he says, “ Him that is weak in the faith receive ye.” The weakness, here imputed to some of the Roman Christians, is, as the original language and the subject matter teach, *one* with the weakness spoken of in the 8th chap. 1st Cor.—and, in that chapter, it evidently means, not only *weakness*, but *error* of faith—not only a slender hold of *truth*, but a hold of *error*, also. The weakness, spoken of in that chapter, is a conscientious regard for idols—is, in short, as the 6th and 7th verses make indisputable, the, as yet, unextinguished remains of idolatry. We are to obey the apostle, when he says : “ Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us.” Christ receives every Christian into his heart, and rejects him for no error. So the Christian is to receive his fellow Christian into his heart, and to reject him for no error. Do you ask, whether Christ receives every Christian into his church? Then, do I ask, whether you think his church is a holier place than his heart? How foolish, how absurd, in view of my question, appears the sectarian distinction between Christian and church fellowship!—between Christian fellowship

and eating and drinking at the Lord's table! What can be more foolish and absurd than the attempt to exalt an expression of that communion, whose seat is in the heart, above the communion itself!

I said, that we are to welcome into the church the most weak and erring Christians. I add, that we are to be especially eager to extend the offices of church fellowship to such; for it is such, who most need them. Church fellowship is adapted both to correct the errors of Christians, and to make them strong. This is one of its heaven-designed objects. If there be in the village of Hamilton a Christian more weak and erring than any other Christian in it, I claim, that he is, for this reason, the very Christian, whom all other Christians here should be most glad to welcome to the nourishment and benefits of church fellowship. He should be regarded, as the very cosset of the whole spiritual flock of Hamilton. As parents, who have a weak and deformed child, make it the especial object of their tenderness and solicitude, so should Christians look especially after the weakest and most wandering of the flock;—carry them in their arms;—bathe them in the tears of pity and love;—and, if need be, exhaust upon their cure every medicine of the soul, which the Saviour has put at the disposal of his church.

I have been asked, in the course of this debate, how a church can be formed on the principles, I am commending; and how discipline can be observed in it. But, if these principles are, manifestly, the gospel foundation of a church, then the inability of myself, or of any, or of all other persons, to answer this question, should not be suffered to cast doubt or disparagement on such principles. But, I will attempt to answer the question. I will suppose, that, simultaneously, and from different parts of the world, a hundred families remove to a new western township. They name it Newtown. Among them are fifty individuals, who have saving faith in Jesus Christ. These fifty are, therefore, the church of Newtown. Their mere faith makes them such—just as mere faith made the church in Jerusalem and the church in Antioch. What person, not greatly perverted by a sectarian education, can read the following scriptures, and hold them together in his mind, and not be convinced, that persons became members of the church in Jerusalem and in Antioch, simply by believing in Jesus?

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved,” Acts ii. 47.

“And believers were the more added to the Lord,” Acts v. 14.

“And a great number believed and turned unto the Lord,” Acts xi. 21.

Who can read these scriptures and others of like import, and doubt, that TO BELIEVE IS TO JOIN THE CHURCH?—that to believe is to open the door to the earthly, as well as to the heavenly church? Is it not manifest from these scriptures, that to turn unto the Lord, and to be added unto the Lord, are the same, not only as believing in the Lord, but as being added to the church?

We now have, and know what is, the church of Newtown. In the next place, they, who compose it, do, by the very law of their regenerate nature, and by reason of the mutual recognitions of spiritual kindred, give the hand of church fellowship to each other. They proceed to do the duties of a church—to come together for worship, for honoring the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper, and for the other services, to which Christians are called in their church capacity. I would here speak of that exceedingly pernicious and almost universal error of confounding the *duties* of a church with its *formation*. The great mass of Christians regard the “ordinances”—especially baptism—as constituents in the *formation* of a church. They are, however, simply duties of a church. It is true, that there are acts of social interest and social worship, which, in the nature of things, and of fixed necessity, result from the constitution of a church: but these acts are no more elements in that constitution than my walking is an element of my physical organization; or than the water, which has flowed from a fountain, is the fountain.

But, it is asked, what the church of Newtown will do, in case one part of them recognises as a Christian the person, who comes to cast in his lot with them, and the other part does not. I answer, in the first place, that, whilst I deny, that such disagreement is fraught with very serious, much less, with fatal consequences, to the church, I, nevertheless, admit, that it is to be lamented. I answer, in the second place, that I readily confess that I know not, where the preventive of such disagreement can be found, unless in that increase of holiness, which is accom-

panied by a corresponding increase of spiritual discernment, and by a corresponding ability to judge of Christian character. It is, now, my turn to put a question : and, I ask, what advantage, in this respect, has a sectarian church over the church of Newtown? True, the voice of the majority in a sectarian church merges in itself the voice of the minority ; and determines with whom the minority shall, and with whom it shall not, have external or apparent fellowship. But, as this controlling voice has no power to determine the question of fellowship, or non-fellowship, in the heart, so its coercion is put forth, not only in vain, but infinitely worse than in vain.

We pass to the point of discipline. The church of Newtown follows the Saviour's directions in Mat. xviii. A sectarian church, from the fact, that it is a sectarian church, cannot follow them. The moment it practically admits, as this chapter clearly requires it to admit, that every person, who is not as utterly destitute, as "a heathen man and a publican," of all claims to the character of a Christian, is entitled to church membership, it ceases to be a sectarian church. I would here remark, that one of the numerous conclusive arguments against sectarian churches is their absolute incapacity to discipline for sectarianism, notwithstanding sectarianism is the great sin of schism. The "church of Peterboro" is, so far as I know, the only church, which disciplines for sectarianism. It has, now, under discipline for this sin, a deacon of the Baptist sect, who is an exemplary and beloved Christian.

The church of Newtown, when convinced, that the offender is not a Christian, disfellowships him. It does not vote him out of the church—for it claims no power to vote, either in, or out of, the church. It simply says, that, in its judgment, he is not in the church.

Such is the church of Newtown. We will, now, see what would have been the ecclesiastical doings in that town, had they, who emigrated to it, been sectarians. The church, as God gave it to them, they would have rejected. The duties, which they owed, as its members, they would have refused to do. The God-made church they would have displaced, or supplanted, with a man-made church—with, perhaps, half a dozen man-made churches. I would, here, say, that if men will take it upon ther

selves to make churches, they should, at least, follow the heavenly pattern, so far, as to aim to include in them all the Christians within their respective territories. But, however much the men, who make churches, may love the God-made church; they do not love it, as a pattern, for the man-made church. Its terms of membership are not at all to their taste. Its platform is quite too broad for those, who are even more select in their spiritual companionship, than the infinitely pure and holy God is in his.

“God forbid,” said those tribes of Israel, whom their brethren accused of schism—“God forbid, that we should rebel against the Lord and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar beside the altar of the Lord our God, that is before his tabernacle,” Josh. xxii. 29. Alas! that Christians should not be content with the church, as it comes from the hand of God! Alas! that they should build one “beside” it! If the idea of schism—of the building of a schismatic or sectarian altar—an altar to come in competition with the one altar of the universal brotherhood—were so deeply abhorrent under the old dispensation, how amazing, that the like idea should be welcome under the new!

But the sectaries will say: “If we do not collect and organize our church by voting in members, how shall we know, who are its members? If our church records do not show, who are its members, how shall we know, who they are?” I answer, that the Saviour has given a rule whereby to distinguish the members of his church from the men of the world—a rule too, which is far better—a guide which is far safer, than that on which you rely. It is this: “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” I am not of the number of those, who think it important to know, who are Baptists, and who are Methodists, and who are Presbyterians, &c. Such poor knowledge is not worth going one step after. I readily admit, if it be indispensable to know, who are Baptists, and who are Methodists, and who are Presbyterians, &c., that, in such case, it is indispensable to have church rolls of names:—but, I insist, that, for the purpose of ascertaining who are members of the church of Jesus Christ, such rolls are not only worthless, but unspeakably worse than worthless. None are members of his church, but those, whose hearts and lives bear

witness, that they are: and if your church rolls say, that any others are, and, also imply that some, who are Christians, are not members of his church, then do these rolls say and imply falsehoods. Who would act so absurdly, as to go to the records of the temperance society, to learn, who of his neighbors are sober men, and who are drunkards? But, would not he act as absurdly, who should go to the church records to ascertain who of his neighbors are Christians and who are not? The sectaries, nevertheless, contend, that the visibility of the church consists more definitely and more extensively than in any thing else, in the technical profession of religion, and in the roll of church names. In neither of these, however, does it consist, at all—but, alone, in the purity and holiness of the church. A worldly and gay gentleman once told me, that Mr. ———, and Mr. ———, were his favorite ministers. “Fine fellows,” said he, “you might be with them a fortnight, without once suspecting that they are ministers!” The enrolment of their names, as ministers of Jesus Christ, could afford no evidence, that they were such, whilst their lives contradicted it. This distinction of a visible and an invisible earthly church, which is so universally taken, is as pernicious, as false. What is more directly and powerfully adapted to lower the standard of piety, and, indeed, to efface all piety, than the prevailing delusion, that there may be a church on earth, which is a true church of Jesus Christ, and which, nevertheless, has no visibility, unless it be that, which is claimed, unjustly claimed, for it, in virtue of its forms, and records, and rolls? An earthly church, which is invisible, is not a church of Jesus Christ. It is recorded of the Saviour, Mark vii. 24, that “he could not be hid.” No more can the purity and holiness of a church of Christ. His disciples are, as he himself teaches—not *are to be*—but *are*, “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth:” and, so necessarily conspicuous is their moral excellence, that he likens them to the city, which crowns a hill, and which, therefore, cannot be hid. “Among whom,” says Paul to the Philippian church, “ye shine as lights in the world.”

Ere closing my remarks under this head, I would say, that the New Testament makes no mention of voting persons into its churches; nor of those churches having creeds in any such sense,

as modern churches have creeds. I need not say, that the banishment of human creeds, and the substitution of the Bible for them, would withdraw from sectarianism its chief prop. Men will soon stop making churches, and accept churches, as God presents them, after they have stopped making creeds, and taken the Bible for their creed. Why should we be content with an abstract of the Bible for our creed? and, this too, what fallible men are pleased to call an abstract of it? It is in the light, and by the standard, of the whole Bible—not of a part of it—of a divine—not of a human creed—that we are to judge ourselves and our fellow-men. Again, a human creed we may out-grow. What answered our convictions, and met our approbation a year ago, may not now. But the Bible, we can never out-grow. There can be no increase of our piety, which will rise above its perfect holiness. There can be no increase of our wisdom, to which its infinite wisdom cannot make additions. The Bible then—the whole Bible—and nothing but the Bible—should be the creed of every church. Dr. Chalmers says, a time will come, when “God’s own truth, expressed in God’s own language, will form the universal creed of intelligent, and harmonized, and happy Christendom. When men’s faith and their affections will come into more direct contact with heaven’s original revelation: and the spirit of good will to man, which prompted heaven’s message, will be felt in all its freshness and power:—when the uproar of controversy is stilled, and its harsh and jarring discords have died away into everlasting silence.”

But, again, the sectarians say: “If we do not have church records and rolls of church members, how shall we be able to protect the Lord’s table?” I answer, that, even with your records and rolls, countless numbers of unworthy ones come to it. Suppose, that I deeply desire, that, persons guilty of Sabbath-breaking, or rum-drinking; of using profane, or obscene language; should not visit my family. I go so far, as to hang up, in each of the rooms of my house, a copy of my printed testimony against these sins. Of how little avail would all this be to keep away the unwelcome visitors, provided I and my family were living in the practice of these same sins! But, our exemption from these sins—our pure and heavenly walk—how effectual would not that be! I know of no protection, which a church

can give to the Lord's table, other than that of its own holy living. Such living, if it rise to the gospel standard, will, as effectually, guard the Lord's table from intruders, as did the flaming sword the gates of paradise. Not only is the proposition, that light has no affinity with darkness, true: but the converse, that darkness has no affinity with light, is, also, true. The atmosphere of the Lord's table would be quite too heavenly for the wicked to breathe, were the men and women, who gather around it, as holy, as they should be. Such holiness would effectually repel the wicked. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." But, it is only by holiness, that he can be resisted.

One means of contributing to keep back impenitent and presumptuous persons from the Lord's table is to invite to it, not "those, who are in good standing in their respective churches," but those, who are conscious, that they love Jesus Christ and believe that they are saved by him. There is not a little danger, that, under the ordinary form of invitation in many of the churches, the invited may be emboldened by thoughts of the enrolment of their names in the church; of the certificates of their good standing in it; and of their good Christian reputation. On the other hand, the terms of the invitation, which I am commending, are happily and powerfully adapted to put the invited upon the examination of their hearts. Alas, how ruinous, how wicked, is it to invite to the Lord's table "all, who are in good standing in their respective churches!" Who does not know, that the unrighteous, as well as the righteous, come within the wide sweep of such invitation!—quite as many too of the unrighteous, as of the righteous! And who does not know, that it is a high crime to invite unrighteous men to the Lord's table! How preposterous, that they, who invite persons to the Lord's table, whom they know to be not Christians, should charge those with leaving it unprotected, who invite to it none but Christians!

But the sectarians are not yet satisfied on this point. They inquire: "And would you, really, have all sorts of Christians come to the Lord's table?" I answer, that we would—and for the sufficient reason, that the Saviour would. He loves all sorts of Christians. Alas, that the Lord's supper, adapted, far above all other ceremonies, to promote the union of Christians.

should be perverted into the chief occasion of dividing them! Alas, that they, who expect to unite in eating "the same spiritual meat" and in drinking "the same spiritual drink" in heaven, should refuse such union on earth!

Whence, however, is all this anxiety to protect the Lord's church and the Lord's table? He will himself protect them. Let us trust in him and in the sufficient guards, which he has placed around them. It is not for us, in our unbelief and officiousness, to multiply or change these guards. It is not for us to mend God's plan. No impertinent and unbelieving concern for the interests of the church led Peter to deny to the Gentile converts their right to a place in it, and to the benefit of its institutions. He well knew, that the true light had but just begun to scatter the great moral darkness, which enveloped them: and that, as yet, their apprehensions of Christian duty were extremely crude and erroneous. But, nevertheless, they were professors of the Christian faith (God had purified their hearts by faith, Acts xv. 9;) and, as such, they had a full title to the Christian privileges—a title, which he had no heart to question—to question which, would, in his esteem, be to "withstand God." Peter, very probably, feared, that the Gentiles, in coming into the church, were bringing with them pollution, discord, dishonor. But, he saw, that God himself opened the door to them: and, therefore, that it was not for man to repel them. He saw, that God was willing to risk the safety, purity, and reputation, of his church, by admitting "unclean" Gentiles into it: and that was reason enough with Peter, why he also should risk it. The manifestation of saving faith, however great or numerous the errors, which accompany it, is, at once, the proof of church-membership, and of an absolute title to all the rights of church-membership. The very chapter, from which we have just quoted, teaches us, that there were members of the church of Jerusalem (members of the church, because they believed, Acts xv. 5.) who took the ground, "that it was needful to circumcise." Theirs was a great error. Was it not full as great, as that, which the Baptist charges upon the Pædobaptist?—as that which the Pædobaptist charges upon the Baptist? And, yet, great as it was, even Apostles did not deny the rights of church-membership to the Christians, who

were guilty of it. How quick the light of revelation exposes the falsity of sectarianism!—and what a pity, therefore, that the sectarians, instead of bringing forth their dirty idol into this light, should keep it in the dark places of their prejudice and bigotry!

I will, now, glance at a few, though only a few, of the benefits, which would result from the universal abandonment of sectarianism, and from the universal adoption of the gospel theory of church formation. The honest heart, however, sees so much benefit in the mere fact of obeying God, that it needs no assurance of the other benefits of such obedience.

1st. Hundreds of millions of dollars, now wasted annually in the employment of superfluous preachers, and in the erection of superfluous houses of worship, many of which are as costly, as the highest degree of sectarian rivalry can make them, would then be saved for heaven-approved and earth-blessing uses. But for such rivalry, there would not be, in almost every one of our villages, several times as many preachers and houses of worship, as are needed. But for it, there would not be, in my own little village of sixty families, four preachers and four places of worship. But for this sectarian rivalry, Trinity church in New-York, which cost several hundred thousand dollars, and St. Peter's in Rome, which cost millions of dollars, would either not have been built; or would be such simple and low-priced structures, as the simplicity and modesty of the Christian religion call for.

2d. By far the greatest obstacle in the way of promoting moral reforms will disappear with the disappearance of sectarianism. Men care more for parties than for truth. The *esprit du corps* rises above the claims of God. EVERY RELIGIOUS SECT, WHATEVER THE MEASURE OF ITS PURITY AND HOLINESS, IS A RIVAL OF, RATHER THAN IDENTICAL WITH CHRISTIANITY. What a striking instance of this we have in the fact, that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church of this nation has, repeatedly, refused to declare slavery sin! Men of controlling influence in that body opposed the declaration; and were frank enough to oppose it on the ground, that it would drive away the Southern Presbyterians, and destroy the nationality and power of the Presbyterian sect. The voice of Christianity

shouted in the ears of that Assembly : “ Call slavery sin—call it sin ;—if the system, which forbids marriage, and forbids the reading of the Bible, and markets men as beasts, is not sin, then nothing is sin, and the religion, which you dishonestly profess, is a falsehood.” Sectarianism, upon its knees, begged to be spared : and it was spared. A tenderer regard for it than for truth, spared sect, and sacrificed Christianity.

3d. Christians would, then, labor *effectually* for the salvation of their fellow men. Until they receive each other ; and, heartily and practically, recognize themselves to be “ members one of another,” they will not be capable of highly successful social activity in the cause of their Master. Go into a manufactory, and look at one of the operatives—into a work-shop, and look at one of the artizans. How comes it, that they are able to accomplish their work so successfully ? The secret of the success of each lies in this—that his hands work in harmony with each other—that his feet do likewise ;—that his feet and hands co-operate ;—and that his hands, feet, body, all, are obedient to the directions of his head. So must it be with the church—such must be the co-operation of the mystical body and its members—ere the disciples of Jesus Christ can do what they are required to do, and what they are able to do, for the success of his cause.

4th. The abolition of sectarianism would fulfil the Saviour’s prayer for the unity of the church—John xvii. 21. In his last hours on the earth, his holy soul was absorbed with the desire, that his disciples might “ *all* be one.” This oneness would, as He himself teaches, convince the world, that he is the sent of God—that his religion is from Heaven. Alas, that this universal conviction, resulting, as it would, in universal salvation, should have been withheld so long ! Alas, that Christians should, by their unholy divisions and sectarianism, have hung so long, and, as to countless generations of men, so fatally, on the chariot wheels of salvation !

But, I must close ; and return to the bed, which I left for the purpose of attending this discussion. That, under my bodily infirmities, I should have come here to attend it, is evidence of the importance which I attach to it. I hope, that I have succeeded in making myself intelligible. But, perhaps, I have

not ;—for, often, during the last eight or ten years, when I have seen how vain were my endeavors to make men understand me on this subject, and be interested in it, I have felt, that, to speak the words of anti-sectarianism is to speak in an unknown tongue. Sectarianism is so much a matter of course—the education into it is so incessant, and deep, and universal—that men can hardly conceive of the possibility, much less understand the merits, of “a more excellent way.” Again, they shrink from yielding themselves up to a catholic spirit, lest they will thereby have to give up their cherished party spirit. Sectarianism is a bewitching thing ; and the hearts of men are so bound up in it, as to give way to the greatest alarms, when threatened with the loss of it. To lose it, if they could do so, without, at the same time, losing their idolatrous regard for it, would be to leave them to the feeling, that they are poor, indeed. Under the pressure of this feeling, they would cry out, as did the snivelling Micah to the Danites : “Ye have taken away my gods.”

Whichever of my deductions you may have failed to perceive, I most earnestly hope, that the following may not have escaped you.

1st. THE TERMS OF SALVATION ARE THE TERMS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

2d. THE TERMS OF SALVATION ARE THE TERMS OF ADMITTANCE TO THE LORD'S TABLE.

3d. WE ARE TO RECOGNIZE NO ONE, AS A CHURCH MEMBER, WHO DOES NOT GIVE US EVIDENCE, THAT HE IS A CHRISTIAN.

4th. WE ARE TO RECOGNIZE EVERY ONE, AS A CHURCH MEMBER, WHO GIVES US EVIDENCE, THAT HE IS A CHRISTIAN.

I do not expect, that sectarianism will die in a day. It is a monster of great age, and of as great strength. It raised its snaky head, even in the presence of an apostle. “Is Christ divided?” was the terrible and triumphant rebuke it then encountered. It had the effrontery to seek a friendship with Jesus Christ himself. But, it was, instantly, repelled by the declaration, that all, who work in the Saviour's name, are the Saviour's, and that all, who are not against him, are for him. In the vastness of its strength, this monster has been able to set church against church, nation against nation, and the world

against God. But, old as sectarianism is, it will not live always; and strong as it is, it will not “devour forever.” For a while longer, the spirit of sectarianism will continue to pollute the church. But, the Spirit of God will yet exorcise that foul spirit, and cleanse the church of all the defilements, which so unclean a spirit leaves behind him. For a while longer, the spirit of sectarianism will maintain those divisions in the church of Christ, which prejudice the men of this world against the truth, and put into their hands the most plausible and effective weapons against it. But, the Spirit of God will yet drive out this demon of discord and division, and present the church, in all the irresistible might of its oneness and indivisibility. Hasten, O God! the day, which shall witness this blessed change—this glory of thy church—this triumph of thy truth!