

[STEM Publishing: The writings of C. H. Mackintosh](#): Unity: What is it? And am I confessing it?

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Leviticus 24 and Ephesians 4: 4.

A lecture by C. H. Mackintosh.

I suppose, beloved brethren, there is not one of us, whatever may have been our experience, whether our course has been long or short, who is not impressed with the unspeakable importance of having the truth of God distinctly before us, and not only before our minds, but in our hearts, as a divine reality — something influential and formative — a living link between our souls and the living God, not merely as to the question of individual salvation, infinitely precious as that is, but as to the path we are called to tread, and the position that we occupy as Christians.

As you get along, beloved brethren, you must be discovering that nothing stands, but having the truth of God in your own hearts, and holding it directly from Him, no matter who may be the instrument in communicating it to you. You must be able to give a reason, not only for the hope that is in you, but for the path which you tread, the niche which you fill — you must be able to give a divine reason for all, or else you will not be able to stand. Never was the truth of this more apparent than at the present moment, because, as we all know, people are being tested; there is a testing and a sifting going on in the professing church, and in our own very midst, brethren, which most of you may feel. No doubt some of us may be called to feel it more than others, but the most cursory observer cannot fail to see this, that the sieve is doing its work in the professing church, and doing its work amongst ourselves, and that it is being made manifest, in the most striking manner, who has been really taught of God, and who has been merely hanging on to something of his own, or blindly following in the wake of his fellow. It has been made manifest, brethren, whether our faith is set in the wisdom of men or in the power of God. Secondhand faith is being proved and found lacking. It cannot stand in the day of trial. We must have to do, each for himself, with the living God.

Now in the whole of what I have to say, there is one thing which I believe the Spirit of God has laid upon my heart to impress upon you, beloved — and you know I always speak in the utmost confidence and freedom, and I feel assured you will receive it in the same manner. I feel then, brethren, that the Spirit of God would have me impress first of all upon you the importance of having your faith standing *only in the power of God*; that no matter what may be the measure of it — it may be very small or it may be very large — it does not matter what the measure is, the point is that your fixed stay must be in the wisdom and the power of God, so that if you had not a second person to support you, if you had not the sympathy of another individual, you at least possess the blessed consciousness that God has communicated to your soul truth which you hold from Him, and which is the spring of all your authority, the ground of your confidence, and the true secret of your power.

A saint once said, when passing through a time of deepest exercise, he was brought to ask himself this question, and to ask it in all solemnity, in all godly simplicity, "If the whole world and church were gone, is the word of God sufficient as a thread to take me across the abyss?" That is the question, my brethren, and that question I will suggest at the outset to every one of you, from the oldest to the youngest. I see before me saints of God who were such long before the one who is speaking to them, and I see before me saints of God of perhaps a few days' or a few weeks' standing, but the principle I am now urging upon you is a principle of cardinal importance; it is a principle of unspeakable value; it is what I would urge upon you; and if I do nothing else than to urge and re-urge and rivet home this principle on your souls, I shall feel that I have not spoken in vain. The question is this — Can you say

when you are all alone, "The word of God is quite sufficient for me, if both world and church were gone; is it quite sufficient as a thread to take me across the abyss?"

Now, that is the point. Can you say that, beloved? I pause and put this question to you, as in the very presence of our one Lord and Master, Have you such a sense of the value and authority of the word of God; have you got such a sense of the reality of this truth, this revelation which God has given you, that, though you had not a second person to support you, you could say, "That is quite enough for me?"

Of course you will tell me, beloved, that it is only the Spirit that can enable you to appreciate and grasp and hold that word. Quite so; but I am speaking now of the value of the word of God; and never, I am persuaded, was there a moment in the history of the church of God on earth, when it was so distinctly necessary that your souls, my beloved brethren, should be rooted and grounded, stablished and braced up in the knowledge of this fact, that you have in the word of God all that you can possibly want — the word of God as brought home by the Spirit to your hearts.

Now some of you may be disposed to ask, "What have these introductory remarks to do with the scripture that has been read?" Or perhaps you may ask, "What is your subject? What is your message?" Well, beloved brethren, I tell you at once, my thesis is this — The unity of the church of God as stated in Ephesians 4: 4. And then again, if any feel disposed to ask, "What has the 24th of Leviticus to do with the unity of the church of God?" I reply, It has to do with it in this way. I read Leviticus 24 with the purpose of illustrating to you, brethren, from the history of Israel, and the unity of the nation of Israel, the deeper truth of the unity of the one body, and it is my object now to set before you the fact of the unity of God's Israel, His earthly people, as an illustration, as a type, if you please, of the higher unity of the church of God.

Now in this passage of the 24th of Leviticus, what have you got? You have one of the most expressive and beautiful figures that can possibly engage the spiritual mind; you have in those twelve loaves ranged upon the golden table before the Lord, the distinct figure of the indissoluble unity and yet the perfect distinctness of Israel's twelve tribes. Now there is a grand truth — the perfect distinctness and yet the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes, and you may have noticed — I do not think you could have avoided noticing — the frequent occurrence in this chapter of the words "continual, perpetual, everlasting." Again and again these words occur in reading this passage. What do they mean, beloved brethren? They mean this, that the unity of God's people Israel was not a thing of today or tomorrow; it was a grand verity, an eternal truth of God foreshadowed in those twelve loaves on the golden table, before the Lord.

Oh what a type, brethren, what a presentation! And, further, as to the intention of this passage, you may perhaps feel disposed to ask another question, "What has that paragraph about the stoning of the blasphemer to do with all this?" I believe it has a great deal to do with it, beloved brethren. I believe that the grouping of this passage by the Holy Ghost is striking, forcible and instructive. In the stoning of the blasphemer you have that which might be the fate of the nation under the governmental dealings of God; but, at the same time, in those twelve loaves on the golden table, you have the eternal truth as to the nation's condition in God's view — that looked at from God's stand point the nation was ONE whatever might be its condition, as viewed from man's stand point. I repeat it, beloved — looked at from God's stand point, looked at in the light of those seven golden lamps which in other words was the expression of the light and testimony of the Holy Ghost, based upon and connected with the perfect work of Christ, Israel is ONE, the nation is one; there are twelve tribes maintained in the unity although, as I have said, in the governmental dealings of God, and looked at from man's stand point,

the nation may be suffering the penalty of their sin. In a word, however the nation of Israel may be scattered, and broken, and crushed, in man's view, it is in God's view — in God's eternal counsels — and in the view of faith one and indivisible. To deny this is to call in question the integrity of the truth of God. If we can play fast and loose with scripture as to one point, we may do so as to all.

And now I will give a few illustrations of the way in which faith laid hold of and acted upon this grand truth.

Turn with me for an instance to 1 Kings 18. I shall not ask you to read the passage, but have your Bibles open there. It is familiar, I am sure, to all. The scene is upon the top of Carmel. It is a scene in the history of Elijah the Tishbite, perfectly familiar to all, but I want you to look at it for one special object. I want you to look at it as an illustration of the power of faith in that great truth of the unity of Israel's twelve tribes.

I feel sure that you have often read of Elijah's building his altar of twelve stones. Every Sunday school child has read it; but I confess to you, beloved brethren, that, often as one has read the passage, it has lately shone before the vision of my so I with a brighter lustre than I have ever seen before. I ask myself this question, Why did Elijah build an altar of twelve stones? What was his authority for that? What was it, shall I say, that nerved his arm to the act? He was standing in the presence of eight hundred false prophets, he was standing in the presence of all the power of Jezebel, and in the presence of ruin and apostacy. The ten tribes were separated from the two. There was a rent made in the nation, looked at from man's stand point, but Elijah stands upon Mount Carmel, and he looks at that nation in the vision of GOD, and with the eye of *faith*. He does not reason; he does not say, "It is no use now my taking this lofty stand, it is no use my attempting to build an altar with twelve stones now. The day is gone by for that. I must lower the standard according to the practical condition of things around me. It was well and perfectly consistent for a Joshua or a Solomon to build such an altar, but it would only be a piece of folly on my part. It is the height of presumption to be talking about an altar of twelve stones when the ten tribes and the two are divided, and when the whole scene is plunged in ruin."

No, my brethren, Elijah did not reason thus; he took his stand on the imperishable ground of faith. Elijah placed his foot where I want every child of God to place his foot — that is, on the indestructible revelation of God. I want you to read this act in the light which emanates from the seven golden candlesticks, and in the light which emanates from that golden table in the sanctuary of God. I want you, my beloved brethren, to see that the words "continual, perpetual, everlasting" are stamped upon the whole of the history of God's truth and His thoughts respecting Israel. Elijah knew nothing of the principle so rife in this our day, "It is no use talking about the unity of the church of God." You see a sneer of contempt and unbelief upon the lips of people when you talk about the unity of the body of Christ. Persons will shrug their shoulders and say, "Do not talk to me about the unity of the body. It is a thing of the past. It is a bygone thing. Don't talk to me about the unity of the church. Where is it to be seen? Where is it developed? Where is it illustrated?"

Beloved brethren, bring yourselves back in thought for a moment, and stand beside that man of faith on the top of Carmel, and ask yourselves, Where are the twelve tribes? It might, with equal force, have been said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Do not talk to me about the unity of the nation. It is a thing of the past. It no longer exists. It is the height of presumption to think of building an altar of twelve stones in the face of a divided people — a broken unity." But what weight would such suggestions have had with our prophet? None whatever. He looked at the nation from a divine standpoint, and therefore he erected his altar of twelve stones "according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name."

Now, the question is, How long was Israel to tee the name, and how long was Israel's unity to subsist? Continually, perpetually, everlastingly. Here Elijah took his stand.

And mark further, beloved, what I think is of unspeakable importance. It was not a mere speculation of Elijah's mind. It was not an inoperative dogma, an uninfluential opinion which he held. Elijah might have held the truth of Israel's unity as a cold theory, in the region of his intellect) he might very comfortably have gone on, and said in his heart, "I believe in the unity of the nation of Israel, but I am not going to confess it. There is no manifestation of it, and, therefore, I am not going to bring it forward; I am not going to take, as it were, my stand upon it. I am not going to carry it out." But this would never do. Elijah justly felt that if the unity of the twelve tribes was a grand truth, then it must, at all cost, be carried out, and hence he did carry it out. How? By building an altar of twelve stones, "according to the number of the tribes of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." Faith could never give that up. It was a great practical truth — to be owned and acted upon, in the face of ten thousand difficulties, and ten thousand foes. Elijah could not lower the standard the breadth of a hair. He could not surrender the truth of God to be trampled under foot by the priests and prophets of Baal. He felt that the sacrifice which he was about to offer to the God of Israel could only be presented on an altar of twelve stones. *This was faith.*

And here I pause, that your souls may dwell upon this, because it really demands our deepest attention. It is not a mere matter of opinion to be taken up or laid down at our pleasure. People speak of holding the doctrine of the mystical unity of the body of Christ; but there is no truth that is not designed to be practical, no truth that is not designed to have an influence on the heart and life. This is very manifest in Elijah's case. The unity of the twelve tribes was to him a grand reality; it was something which he felt bound to confess in the presence of Baal's eight hundred prophets, and in the presence of Jezebel and her persecutions. He did not hide the truth under a bushel, or under a bed; but confessed it openly and boldly before men and devils. He built an altar of twelve stones, and, by so doing, he expressed his lively faith in that grand truth, namely, the eternal unity of the nation of Israel.

And mark, if he had not done that, he would have been lowering the standard of God's truth to be trampled in the dust by the prophets of Baal. This he could not do. God's truth was a sacred thing. And not only so, but it was and is formative and influential. So the prophet felt, and so he acted. And we are safe in asserting that if he had not built the altar of twelve stones, the fire of God would not have fallen upon the sacrifice. That fire was the expression of the divine approval. It was like the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle of old, and the temple afterward, when all had been done according to the divine command. Beloved brethren, what a sublime spectacle for the heart to gaze upon! It is perfectly magnificent to see Elijah the prophet unfurling the standard in the presence of those eight hundred false prophets, and to read on that standard, in imperishable characters, the truth of the unity of the nation of Israel.

There is a moral grandeur about it that captivates the heart. And more than that — for that would be a small thing — there is moral power in it to *sustain* your hearts and mine in the confession of that higher truth of the unity of the body of Christ, in the very face of the sneer of unbelief, in the face of all the contempt and ridicule which we may have to encounter in seeking to carry out that precious truth, "There is one body and one Spirit." But here allow me to ask you, brethren, Do you think that Elijah had no heart to feel that the ten tribes and the two were divided? Do you suppose for a moment that with all the sublimity of that spectacle presented to us on Mount Carmel, he had no tears to shed over the ruin and desolation around him? Ah! no. Take another look at the prophet, and see him — where? See him prostrate before God, his head down between his knees, down in the very dust. Waiting — waiting upon God for what? Till a cloud should appear, a harbinger of blessing flowing forth from the

exhaustless treasure-house of God, who, in spite of all the unfaithfulness of his people, is always ready to answer faith where it exists. Faith owns the ruin, bows low under the sense of it, yet rises above it and counts on God, who never fails a trusting heart.

I shall now ask you to turn with me to the 29th chapter of the second book of Chronicles. Take one clause in the 24th verse of that chapter, which contains the same principle. "For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for" — whom? For Judah and Benjamin? No. (2 Chr. 29: 24) For "*all Israel.*" Here we have the same principle. Here you have Hezekiah taking his stand upon the same lofty ground that Elijah had occupied in his day. The ten tribes were divided from the two. Jotham and Ahaz had been doing their work, and things had gone from bad to worse. But here is Hezekiah doing the same thing as Elijah, and acting in the same faith. It is not a question of the measure of intelligence — that is not the point; but, beloved brethren, it is one of the most precious features of the subject that is before us to-night that it is a question of simple faith in the truth of Israel's perfect unity before the eye of God. It is simple faith gazing on those precious words which shine like gems in Lev. 24: "A *perpetual* statute," "An *everlasting* covenant." It is not a question here of Israel's conduct towards God. That assuredly has its place and its importance. But we are not speaking now of man's deserts, but of God's dealings — not of Israel's failure, but of Jehovah's faithfulness. It is our holy privilege to stand in the sanctuary of God, and gaze with the eye of faith on those twelve loaves on the pure table beneath the seven lamps of the golden candlestick — type of the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

And what does that testimony set forth? This, most distinctly, that all through the dark and gloomy watches of the nation's night the twelve tribes are before the eye of God in their perfect unity, undisturbed by all the heavings, and tossings, and surgings of the nations. The blasphemer may have to be stoned outside the camp; the governmental dealings of God may be displayed in all their stern reality; but faith sees the twelve loaves on the golden table. Faith has to do with eternal realities. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. It looks at things within the veil. It makes God its significant figure, and is in nowise moved by outward appearances. In a word, faith knows God, and can trust Him for everything. Faith is the knowledge of God, it is confidence in God — this is faith. Ah, what a reality, beloved brethren! I earnestly beseech you, as in the presence of God — I beseech every one of you to get hold of what this is, this simple faith in God, that will carry your soul through all sorts of circumstances, the same faith that sustained Elijah on the top of Carmel, the same faith that enabled Hezekiah to command that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for "all Israel" — that is to say, the sacrifice which was to be the foundation of all the nation's hopes, the sacrifice which was in its aspect to embrace the whole Israel of God.

And now, in reference to the actings of the good king Hezekiah, let us see how his faith was regarded; let us mark how he was treated when he sought, according to his measure, to carry out practically the truth of God. For be it well remembered, Hezekiah did not rest satisfied with offering the sacrifice for "all Israel." He not merely established the ground on which God's people might gather, but he sought to gather them thereon. And observe how he did this. "So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto *the Lord God of Israel* at Jerusalem: *for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.*

So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout *all Israel* and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, *Ye children of Israel*, turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren which

trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and *enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever*: and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again to the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him." (2 Chr. 30: 5-9.)

This, if rightly viewed, was a most touching and powerful appeal. Hezekiah takes the highest ground, and would have others to do the same. He was himself consciously on God's ground, and he would have others to occupy it with him. His eye rested on the God of Abraham — on the land of Israel — on Jerusalem — and on the whole nation of God's people. It might, and doubtless did, in the judgment of many, savour of presumption in Hezekiah to put forth such very lofty language, to speak as if he and those with him were alone right, and all their brethren wrong. But that would entirely depend upon the spirit in which the letter was received and read. To pride and self-sufficiency such an appeal would be absolutely intolerable; but where there was true contrition and humility it would be received with a hearty approval. Thus, in fact, it proved, as we read in the scripture before us. "So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but *they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them*. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun *humbled themselves*, and came to Jerusalem."

This, brethren, is just as it will ever be. Faith and its actings will be laughed at by those who are on false ground, those who are walking in the sparks of their own kindling. But the broken and contrite heart gets the blessing which ever flows from taking God at His word, and acting on His eternal truth. Those who humbly bowed to Hezekiah's appeal gathered themselves together on God's ground, and owned God's centre. They did not say, "It is vain to take such lofty ground in the face of the nation's actual condition. It is the height of folly and presumption for Hezekiah to attempt to carry out such principles amid the hopeless ruin of the dispensation." No; they "humbled themselves," and came up to Jerusalem. In true humility of mind they gathered themselves together to carry out God's object — namely, to keep the passover.

And what was the result? Were they disappointed? Did the issue prove them to be mere visionary enthusiasts who were acting on some silly chimera of Hezekiah, or some wild imagination of their own minds? Ah! no; they were permitted to taste as rich blessing as ever was known in the nation's brightest and palmiest days. "The children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven." (2 Chr. 30: 21-27.)

Here, then, was the answer of God to the faith of Hezekiah, for He never disappoints a heart that counts on Him. These fourteen joyous days, spent by the congregation around the paschal feast, furnished the most ample proof of the reality of counting on the living God, spite of all the failure and

ruin which ever mark the history of man and his ways. "Since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem." God can fill the hearts of His people with joy and thanksgiving and praise, though all around be characterised by confusion and desolation.

And, be it remembered — yea, let it never be forgotten — that all this joy and blessing may well comport with the deepest sense of the failure and unfaithfulness of man. Indeed they will ever be found in company. Thus, in Hezekiah's case, we see him most fully recognising the true practical condition of the nation. This is seen in the fact of their keeping the passover in the second month instead of the first. "Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the Lord." Here we observe the congregation availing themselves of grace as set forth in Numbers 9: 10-12. This was in lovely moral order. Faith always recognises the true condition of things, but counts on the ample provisions of divine grace. Hezekiah felt that the people were not up to the divine standard, but he knew that the grace of God could meet them where they were, provided only they took their true place; hence he prayed for them, saying, "The good Lord pardon *every one that prepareth his heart* to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."

Thus it was in Hezekiah's day, and thus it is now. There was the confession of human failure, and yet the grasping of divine faithfulness. If Israel was not in a condition to keep the passover in the first month, God could bless them in the second month. Though Israel's condition was not up to the standard of God, yet the grace of God could come down to the condition of Israel. The second month most surely was not the first, but if only there was true preparation of heart, God could bless in the one as well as in the other. There is no use in assuming to be what we are not. We must take our true place, and God can meet us there, according to what He is in Himself. Thus it is that faith mounts up to God, and lays hold of those things that are according to His infallible faithfulness.

Hence, then — to apply our illustration — I read in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians that "there is one body," and I find that truth lying side by side with all the great cardinal truths of the Christian religion, insomuch that if you touch one you must touch all, if you shake one you must shake all. I do not see, beloved brethren, how a person can really and solemnly hold any one truth of God, if he allows another truth to be frittered away, because it is not practically exhibited. Suppose you ask me, "Do you believe in the doctrines of justification by faith, original sin, and man's hopeless ruin?" Surely. "Do you believe that 'there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all?'" "Why do you believe these things? Because you *feel* them, or see them?" No. "Why do you believe them?" I believe them because God's word reveals them. This is the only ground of faith in any truth of the Christian religion, and therefore were I to reject the grand doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ because of the innumerable divisions of Christendom, I should be judging by the sight of my eyes, instead of building upon the truth of God. I should be reasoning upon what I see, instead of believing what God tells me.

If, therefore, I be asked why I believe in the doctrine of justification by faith, I reply, Because it is set forth in the imperishable volume of God. On the very same ground I believe in the unity of the body, the deity of Christ, the perfect humanity of Christ, and the sacrificial virtue of His blood. I believe in the efficacy of His priesthood. I believe in the fact of His coming glory. I believe all these verities because they are written in the holy scriptures. Very well, on the selfsame ground, there is one body and one Spirit. Do you suppose that I should believe this more firmly if all the true saints of God in London were to break bread in one building every Lord's day? Indeed I should not. I believe it, but it is not because I see it practically carried out, but because it is declared in the fourth of Ephesians, that

"there is one body."

Let us turn now, for a few moments, to the profoundly interesting and instructive history of Josiah, as recorded in 2 Chr. 34 and 35. We shall find a striking illustration of the same weighty principle. Josiah, like Hezekiah and Elijah, recognised the unity of the twelve tribes, and acted upon the truth thereof in the face of the most depressing and humiliating condition of things. He acted according to the immutable truth of God, and not according to the practical state of God's people. He carried his reformatory operations into all the cities *that pertained to Israel*. And in speaking to the Levites, he charged them, at the opening of that marvellous day, to serve the Lord and His people *Israel*. Get hold of that point. He charges the Levites that they were to serve Jehovah, and not His people *Judah*; but 'His people *Israel*.' He can only speak of and act toward the nation according to the revealed mind of God, and not according to their practical condition. It is the altar of twelve stones over again. It is the "burnt-offering and the sin-offering for *all Israel*." It is the twelve loaves on the golden table, beneath the light of the seven golden candlesticks. It is the Israel of God in the vision of faith.

And yet Josiah stood at the very lowest point; the nation was on the eve of dissolution; Nebuchadnezzar was almost at the gates — no matter. The whole thing was about to crumble into decay — no matter; faith was not going to crumble; Josiah in spirit, Josiah in principle, got back to the golden table — the only place for faith to get. Oh! brethren, do you see it? I ask you, Do you drink into your souls the precious truth, that however one may fail to put this before you in intelligible language, I am as convinced of this as that those lamps are burning before me, that we are occupied now with a principle which, if you grasp it, will brace up your souls and give decision and vigour to your entire practical career, no matter what is against you?

Do not suppose I am conducting you through these historic scenes of Old Testament scriptures merely to occupy an hour: no, brethren, I am delivering to you the verities that God has laid upon my heart to speak to you. For what is the grand object of this assembly? What are you here for? Is it to pass an hour? No; you must remember that the object of an assembly like this is to bring souls into personal, living contact with the truth of God. That is the object of such meetings; and it is the bounden duty of every man who stands in a position like this to speak in the ears of his brethren. I say it is his bounden duty, and should be his one absorbing object, to bring the soul and God into living personal contact. That is power. I may preach a sermon, I may deliver a course of lectures, and never bring the soul face to face with God, or bring the conscience under the light and authority of holy scripture.

Now this latter was what Josiah did. Having felt in his own soul the mighty action of the word of God, he sought to bring the souls of his brethren under the same mighty influence. (See 2 Chr. 34: 29, 30.) And what was the result? That from the days of King Solomon, those brilliant and palmy days, there had never been such a passover as that which was kept by Josiah at the very close of the nation's history. What is the meaning of that? It is another link in the chain; it is another pearl in the string; it is another gem in the tiara. It is God's answer to the faith of His servant. Josiah took his stand upon faith in God, and God answered the faith. There had not been such a passover kept during all the days of the kings. Just think of that! There had been all the glories of Solomon's reign, and all the victories of David's reign, but there is the testimony of the Holy Ghost that there never had been such a passover as was kept in Josiah's reign. And you see that, because the very fact of the circumstances in which he was, threw a halo round his faith, God was more glorified by Josiah taking that stand, than He was by all the gold and silver that flowed into the treasury of Solomon.

But I must ask you to turn to another instance. Those cases which we have already adduced are drawn, as you will observe, from the period *before* the captivity. I want you now to come to an instance

during the captivity. I ask you to turn to the sixth chapter of Daniel, and there you have another charming section in the history of faith. This chapter opens before you the same great principle. Here we see an exile, a captive of the children of Judah, under the most depressing and humiliating circumstances. The glory and the power had departed from Israel. God's judicial actings, God's governmental dealings, had taken effect upon them. They were all broken up, and carried captive; the city in ruins; all gone!

But, brethren, God's word was not in ruins; God's truth was not in ruins; God's faithfulness was not in ruins. And because God's truth and God's faithfulness were not in ruins, so neither was the faith of God's people in ruins. This latter shines out with peculiar lustre in the actings of that illustrious exile Daniel. Indeed, judging from his history, it would seem that the deeper the gloom that enwrapped the nation as a whole, the more brilliant were the flashes of individual faith.

Thus it was during the Babylonish captivity. Though the captives had to hang their harps on the willows; though the glory had departed from Israel; though the vessels of the Lord's house were in the temple of a false god; though all was as dismal and oppressive as it well could be; yet Daniel's faith rose majestically above the surrounding gloom, and laid hold upon the eternal and immutable truth of God; and not only laid hold of it, but carried it out practically. He opened his window, and prayed towards Jerusalem. Why did he do this? Why pray towards Jerusalem? Was this some notion of his own, or was it the fruit of some grand divine principle? It was the latter unquestionably, as you may see at a glance in 2 Chronicles 6: 36-38. This scripture anticipates the very position in which Daniel found himself, and prescribes his course of action. "If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, *and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name.*"

This was the basis of Daniel's acting at Babylon in the days of Darius; this was his authority.

Faith always seeks and finds a warrant for its activities in the word of God. This is of the very deepest possible moment. If Daniel had not a divine warrant for praying toward Jerusalem, his conduct would have been preposterous in the extreme. It would have been the height of folly to rush into the lions' den merely to carry out some theory of his own. But, on the other hand, if there was a divine principle involved, then his conduct was what we may call perfectly sublime. It was, in point of fact, "the burnt-offering and sin-offering for Israel;" it was the altar of twelve stones over again; it was the twelve loaves on the pure table; it was owning God's centre, and taking God's ground, spite of the hopeless ruin of the dispensation, and the deep moral gloom that hung over the nation's horizon. Faith acts on the truth of God, let outward circumstances be what they may; and God always honours faith, and permits it to reap a golden harvest amid the most dreary and humiliating circumstances.

Thus then we see that Daniel simply followed in the wake of the Josiahs, the Hezekiahs, and the Elijahs of other days. He occupied the same platform with those men of God who, in the face of appalling difficulties had held up with a firm hand the standard of eternal truth. He takes his place amid that "great cloud of witnesses" of which the Holy Ghost speaks in Hebrews 11, witnesses to the power and value of faith in the living God. He opened his window, and prayed toward Jerusalem, though Jerusalem was in ruins; he prayed toward the temple, though the temple was in ashes. He looks not at the things that were seen, but at the things that were not seen. He owned God's centre — the gathering-point of Israel's twelve tribes, although that centre lay not within the range of human vision, and the twelve tribes were scattered to the ends of the earth. He did not lower God's standard to suit the condition of Israel, but held it up with the vigorous hand of faith.

And what was the result? A splendid triumph! True he had to go down into the lions' den; but he came up again. He went down as a witness, and came up as a conqueror. All God's worthies get up by going down. This is the law of the kingdom. Daniel went down into the den; but we doubt if he ever spent a happier night upon earth than the night he spent in the den. He was there for God, and God was there with him.

Thus much as to the night. But what of the morning? Further victory! Earth's proudest monarch is subdued before the captive exile. Daniel was allowed to realize in his own person the truth of that early promise to Israel — "Thou shalt be the head, and not the tail." It is ever thus. The individual who acts on the truth of God, regardless of outward circumstances, is allowed to taste as high communion as ever was or ever could be known in the very brightest moments of the dispensation.

This is an immensely important principle, and one which we would earnestly press upon all Christians. We are apt at times, when under the withering influences of unbelief, to suppose that it is impossible to enjoy the high privileges which attach to our calling as Christians, seeing that the church has failed, and is in ruins. This is the miserable mistake of a dark and depressing unbelief. Faith, on the other hand, counts on God. It fixes its gaze upon His imperishable and unchangeable revelation. It rests on the infallible faithfulness of God, and thus enjoys communion with the very highest truth that characterizes the dispensation under which it lives.

Daniel proved this in his day, and so shall all who will only act on the same grand principle.

No doubt it might be said to him, as it is not infrequently said in our own day: "It is the height of folly and presumption; you are a visionary enthusiast to be praying towards a place that is a scene of desolation; you ought rather to hush the very name in oblivion; you ought to draw the curtain of silence over the very name of Jerusalem; it is the very scene of your ruin and humiliation." But, ah! beloved, Daniel was in the deep and precious secret of God. He occupied the divine standpoint, and saw all from thence; and hence the correctness of his entire range of vision — hence the steadiness of his course — hence the splendour of his victory.

And here again, let me remind you of what I remarked before, that this truth was not a speculation; it was not a thing which you might keep very comfortably and quietly in some secret recess of your mind, while you occupied your house, and sat very comfortably in your arm-chairs by your firesides, and professed that Israel was one. No; Daniel acted thus in the very face of the lions' den. The lions' den was yawning to receive him, but Daniel never minded it; Daniel had nothing to do with the lions' den — no more than he had to do with the ruins of Jerusalem: he had to do with *God's truth*; he got back to the twelve loaves, to the golden table with the candlestick in the sanctuary of God — he got back to those twelve loaves, and there he saw by the eye of faith the stream of living light pouring down from heaven on the unbroken union of God's beloved Israel.

Ah! you see, it is not a speculation; it is a truth that must be confessed, come what may, and he did confess it. Yes; he "prayed toward Jerusalem." A man who did not understand what he was doing would say, "I cannot for the life of me understand that. I am sure you might pray as earnestly, as trustfully, with your curtains down and your windows shut. You might retire to your inmost closet. Why do you pray there? Do you think it was acting from some notion of his own brain? No, beloved, I want you to see this, and I cannot let you go without establishing this truth in your souls, that it was acting simply and entirely on the truth of God when he opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem. Daniel could say, "There, you may throw me into the den tonight, but I will never give up the truth of God. I must stand for that, cost what it may. I have nothing to do with results — nothing to do with consequences. These I leave entirely with God. My place is simply to obey."

And this is of the utmost possible value. We hear a great deal now-a-days about the absence of power in the church. We are told that there is no power for this, and no power for that. Our simple reply to all this sort of reasoning is that *it is not at all a question of power, but of obedience*. Was there much power in Daniel's day? There was. There was the power of faith, and the power of obedience. This is the sort of power which we want. It is not external power — or showy gifts — or astounding miracles, but that quiet, humble, steady spirit of obedience that leads the man of God along the narrow path of God's commandments. This is what we want. It is in this that our God delights, and to this He grants the sweet sanction of His presence.

Tell me, beloved brethren, to what does God give the sanction of His presence? He gives the sanction of His presence where there is faith to believe His word, where there is faith to confess the truth of God. No matter what the difficulties may be, no matter what the discouragements may be, never lower the standard. A person will say, "Oh, you must; it's no use talking like that; you must give it up: don't you see that God Himself is against you?" Governmentally, if you please — the blasphemer is being stoned without the camp, but the twelve loaves are undisturbed on the table. That is the principle — it is the double principle which overlaps the whole history of the ways of God, whether with Israel of old, or with the church now. The judgment of God may rest upon our practical state, while the eye of faith rests upon God's imperishable standard. Individual faith basks in the sunlight of God's eternal truth, spite of the wreck and ruin of the ostensible people of God.

This is a principle of the utmost simplicity, but of the greatest magnitude and practical value.

Its application to the special subject before us; namely, the unity of the Church of God, is as clear as it is forcible. If we look around us — if we judge by the sight of our eyes — if we form our conclusions amid the ruins of Christendom, it may seem an idle chimera to talk of the unity of the church of God. But no; we simply take God at His word; we believe what He says, not because we see it or feel it, but because He says it. This is faith. Why do we believe in the forgiveness of sins? Why do we believe in the presence of the Holy Ghost? Why do we believe in any one of the grand fundamental truths of Christianity? Simply because we find them on the eternal page of inspiration. Well, upon precisely the same ground we believe in the one body and in the indissoluble unity of the church of God.

"There is one body." He does not say, "There *was* one body," and "There *shall* be one body." No; he says, "There is one body." Here is our authority for believing and confessing this glorious truth, and for our practical testimony against everything that denies it. The first step in confessing the unity of the church of God is to step out of the divisions of Christendom. Let us not stop to ask what is to be our second step. God never gives light for two steps at a time. Is it true that there is but one body? Unquestionably. God says so. Well then the divisions, the sects, and the systems of Christendom are plainly opposed to the mind and will and word of God. Truly so. What are we to do? Step out of them. This, we may rest assured, is *the* first step in a right direction. If our standpoint is false, our whole range of vision must be false. We must get to a true standpoint, and then our entire range is correct. It is impossible to yield any practical confession to the unity of the church of God while we stand connected with that which practically denies it. We may hold the theory in the region of our understanding, while we deny the reality in our practical career. But if we desire to confess the truth of the one body, our very first business — our primary duty is to stand in thorough separation from all the sects and schisms of Christendom.

"But," some may enquire, "Will not this involve the formation of a new sect, and that, too, the narrowest and most intolerant of all sects?" By no means. It may seem to be so, in the judgment of

mere nature — even religious nature. But the question is, Are the divisions of Christendom according to God? Are the many bodies of the professing church in accordance with the "one body" of Ephesians 4? Clearly not. Then it is our divinely appointed duty to come out of them, and it is impossible that the discharge of a divinely enjoined duty can ever lead to sectarianism or schism; nay it is a direct and positive testimony against it; and, furthermore, the first grand step toward keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is to step out of the divisions of Christendom. And what then? Looking to Jesus; and this is to continue right on to the end. Is this — we repeat the question — to form a new sect, or join some new body? By no means; it is but fleeing from the ruins around us to find our resource in the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus. It is but leaving the ship at the bidding of Jesus, to keep the eye fixed on Him amid the wild watery waste, until we reach in safety the haven of everlasting rest and glory.

C. H. M.