

"All Saints."

Eph. 3: 18.

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There are two ways in which we may fall into sectarianism. We may adopt a distinctively sectarian platform by associating ourselves with those believers whose bond is avowedly a common agreement on points of doctrine, or upon questions of church government; or, while we professedly take the ground of the Church of God, we may become sectarian in feeling by narrowing our thoughts, interests, and affections to the few with whom we are found in fellowship. In both cases the mind of God is entirely missed. A few illustrations from the Scriptures will both explain and justify this statement.

After the return of the remnant from Babylon, and when, after much neglect and unfaithfulness, they had prospered in building the house of God, "through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo," they came together, "the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity," and they "kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." (Ezra 6: 14-16.) As a matter of fact, these "children of Israel" were composed only of a feeble remnant of the two tribes Judah and Benjamin, besides the priests and the Levites. At such a moment they might have been tempted to forget, if not to exclude, their brethren who had not responded to the proclamation of Cyrus, and united with them in returning to the land of their fathers, the land which had been given them by the Lord their God. Choosing Babylonish ease, though captives, rather than to suffer affliction with those "whose spirit God had raised" to encounter the dangers of their pilgrim journey, and the perils attendant upon their dwelling in the land, now in the possession and under the power of their enemies, might they not be held to have forfeited their place and title among the people of God? A spirit of harshness might have thus reasoned; but this poor feeble remnant, whatever their condition, was in possession of the thoughts of God, and accordingly, at this feast of the dedication of the temple, they offered, in addition to other sacrifices, "*for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.*" The heart of God embraced all the children of Israel; for He had not chosen them because of what they were, but because He loved them, and because of His faithfulness to the oath which He had sworn to their fathers. (Deut. 7: 7, 8.) They were therefore still His people, whatever their unfaithfulness, and wherever they might be scattered upon the face of the earth. Hence it was in true communion with the heart of God that the whole of Israel was represented in the sin-offering of that day. Had it been otherwise, had these children of the captivity forgotten their brethren, and had they been tempted to think that they alone were the objects of the thoughts and counsels of God, they would have been a sect, and a sect only, notwithstanding that their present position was in some measure an evidence of their obedience and faithfulness. As has often been remarked, while the feet must walk in a narrow path, the heart must never be contracted.

We pass now to another scene, in the days of Elijah. It was one of the darkest moments in the history of Israel, but prior in time to the one just considered. Under the reign of Ahab, who had suffered his wife Jezebel to teach and to seduce the servants of God to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (see Rev. 2: 20), Israel had become apostate. There were indeed seven thousand known to God who had not bowed the knee to Baal; but Elijah was the only remaining public witness to the truth of God. In the energy of the Spirit of God, he confronted the idolaters and the idolatrous prophets of Baal, and challenged them to vindicate their faith, and the name of their god. From morning to evening these wicked prophets sacrificed and prayed, and in proof of their devotion "they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." It was now the turn of Elijah; alone, he again remarked, as to the public testimony; alone in the face of timid time-servers, halting between two opinions, and open wicked apostates. His first act was to repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down — the condition of the altar being the proof of the state of the people. Then — and mark the action — "Elijah took twelve stones, *according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob*, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord." (1 Kings 18: 21-32.) Never had there been a time so dark, a time surely when a servant of God might have been tempted to utter despair, as indeed was the case with Elijah in the very next chapter. But here, while still confronting the enemy, and upheld by the power of the Holy Ghost, he was enabled to rest in God and His faithfulness, and thus to embrace in his faith and in his heart all the twelve tribes. The man of faith can never give up what God does not give up, and accordingly, spite of rebellion, and even apostasy, he must still claim all the people of God. Filled with God's thoughts, he must move in that circle; and were he, even unwillingly, to adopt a narrower, he would be, as to feeling and experience, a sectarian. And, it may be added, there will be no room for despondency, even in the greatest confusion and departure from the truth, as long as we are maintained in communion with the heart of God concerning all His people. Their sorrowful condition will only then be an incentive to continual ministry on their behalf, whether in labour or in prayer.

Take yet another example. When Paul was "speaking for himself" before Agrippa, he said, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise *our twelve tribes*, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." (Acts 26: 6, 7.) Looking at the twelve tribes, as they actually and practically were at that moment, how different their case. Ten tribes were lost; and the two that had been brought back out of Babylon had crucified their Messiah, and were now seeking to compass the death of His servant Paul! Still faith claims them all — and all as instantly serving God night and day in hope of the fulfilment of the promise made to the fathers! So in the wilderness, whatever the state, morally, of the camp, there were always the twelve loaves in their ordered beauty, covered with frankincense, on the golden table in the holy place before the Lord. (Lev. 24.) It is thus that faith enters into the thoughts and purposes of God, and views them as they exist before His eye.

Coming now to the scripture at the head of this paper, the same principle is exemplified. The apostle prays that the Ephesians might be able to comprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth, and length, etc. There might be departure from the truth, all they in Asia might have turned away from him, Demas might have forsaken him because he loved the present age, the

Corinthians might be on the verge of refusing his apostolic authority, but, notwithstanding all, he cannot, because in communion with the heart of God, omit a single saint of God in the desires, begotten and expressed in the power of the Holy Ghost, which he pours out on their behalf before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself included all His children in His heart of love, in His desire for their growth and progress, in His perpetual ministries of tenderness and grace, and on this account the apostle does the same.

The lesson is obvious. We in like manner must comprehend all the saints in our affections and prayers; and in a day when there are so many temptations to narrowness there is the more need to enforce it. But be it observed that it is enlargement of heart, for which we plead, not the widening of our path. In both things Christ Himself is our standard. If we have to love one another as He has loved us (John 15: 12), we have also to walk even as He walked. (1 John 2: 6.) May these two things be ever increasingly displayed by us — to the glory of the blessed name of our Lord and Saviour! E. D.