

"Hold that fast which thou hast."

Hamilton Smith

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Publisher's Note

When "Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast" by Hamilton Smith was first published in the early 1930s, it was sub-titled "A brief consideration of present exercises, arising from recent statements as to the revelation and relationships of Divine Persons." These "recent statements" had reference to teachings given currency amongst the "London" party of the Exclusive Brethren. It was in June 1929, at a large gathering of brethren in Barnet, England that James Taylor Senior brought forward publicly the denial of the Eternal Sonship of Christ with the words "I do not know that there is such a term in Scripture as eternal sonship." In reply to S. J. B. Carter's remark, "I thought that in incarnation He took up in new conditions a relationship that had ever existed in eternity and that as the Son of God it was the relationship in a new condition," J. T. stated, "I think you are asserting too much in saying the relationship 'had ever existed'." Other developments soon followed, and C. A. Coates gave his name and lent his pen to this denial with his "Personal and Mediatorial Glory of the Son of God" and "Remarks on a pamphlet by A. J. Pollock entitled 'The Eternal Son'." In 1932 a corruption of the "Little Flock" hymn book appeared which expunged all mention of Christ as the "Eternal Son" and "Eternal Word." All remaining in this fellowship had to subscribe to these views, and it was thus constituted a sect to enforce error concerning the Person of Christ.

Hamilton Smith believed that error concerning the Person of Jesus, the Son of God, went beyond the bounds of sect and party, and so examined these statements in the light of Scripture. Since that time the "Taylor" brethren have been scattered far and wide, and the errors concerning the Person of Christ have also spread beyond the bounds of that party. This pamphlet is reprinted for those who may still have "present exercises" on these questions. Hamilton Smith's conclusion is still valid that individuals and meetings should firmly refuse to have fellowship with any who hold or teach error as to the Person of Christ.

"Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast" was originally published by the Central Bible Truth Depot. It has been re-typeset with only minor changes in punctuation and emphasis. Quotations have been carefully checked with the original sources. Those in italics, which the author is controverting, are mainly found in the "Remarks" by C. A. C. published by the Kingston Bible Trust. References have been added to the quotations in bold type in favour of the Scriptural views the writer is defending.

Hamilton Smith is best known for the books and pamphlets he wrote on various portions of Scripture, mainly of a devotional and expository nature. Some had a wide circulation in his lifetime,

and many have since been reprinted. A list is appended for reference at the back of this volume. They are increasingly in demand, and some have been translated into French, German and Dutch. However, Mr. Smith could also "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). He would have agreed with the words found in J. N. Darby's handwriting "I hold it vital to hold the Sonship before the worlds. It is the truth."

"Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast."

All will have to concede that, throughout the past centuries, the great body of intelligent Christians have tenaciously held that the eternal Sonship of Christ is a foundation and vital truth. It is true that from time to time individuals have arisen who have denied this great truth, as for instance the commentator Adam Clarke, in the early part of the last century. Also, amongst Brethren, individuals have, on a few occasions, ventured to deny the eternal Sonship of Christ; but these denials have hitherto been promptly disavowed by their brethren, and strong protest against this error has been raised by leaders such as the late J. N. Darby, J. G. Bellett, and C. H. Mackintosh.

Alas! today, Christians are compelled to face the fact that once again this ancient error has been revived, and that in a very pronounced form, amongst those who have always assumed to be well versed in the things of God.

Hitherto we have been instructed, and firmly believed that Scripture taught, that what came to light, through our Lord Jesus Christ becoming incarnate, was the full revelation of Divine Persons in their subsisting relationships — the Father being declared to be the Father from all eternity, and the Son to be the eternal Son, and the everlasting Word.

Now it is being taught that these Names, and the relationships they represent, can only be applied to Divine Persons since the Incarnation.

These views, apparently, have been discussed by a few individuals in a private way for some years past. It was, however, only in June 1929, in a large gathering of Brethren at Barnet, that they were publicly asserted.

On that occasion the statements made were confined to the Person of our Lord. It was asserted that the term "eternal Sonship" is not found in Scripture; that while the titles "Son" and "the Word" imply the Deity of Christ, yet we cannot give names to, or define relationships between Divine Persons, before Incarnation. Further, it was said that the passages in Scripture that speak of the Father sending the Son do not mean that the Son was sent before He became flesh, but that, having become flesh, He was sent as in Manhood; and that they refer to His actual entrance into service.

In correspondence that arose as to these assertions it was stated that, at Barnet, eternal Sonship was neither denied nor affirmed, but simply that Scripture says nothing about relationships between divine Persons before Incarnation; therefore that it becomes us to be silent where Scripture is silent.

Since then, the statements as to these holy matters have become much more definite. The eternal Sonship is no longer left as something we can neither affirm nor deny. It is now plainly denied, and arguments are used in the endeavour to prove that not only there is no such expression as "eternal Sonship" in Scripture, but that Sonship could not exist before Incarnation. Furthermore in the same way, it is denied that the Word is the everlasting Word.

Moreover, these denials are not even confined to the Person of the Son. It is now boldly stated that the Father was not the Father before the Incarnation. It is said, to quote the exact words, "*We know*

Him now as the Father, but it would be misleading for us to say that He was always the Father;" again, it is said, "It is quite beside the mark to say that 'the Father was the Father before the Lord Jesus was born into the world.'"

A similar line of argument is used in attempting to prove that Jehovah was not Jehovah before the revelation of the Name of Jehovah in Exodus 6. It is said that "*'Christ' and 'Christ Jesus' are used in speaking of Him in the past eternity, but we all know that He was not actually the Anointed Man then.*" Then this writer applies this argument to Jehovah, for he goes on to say, "*We see a similar use of a Divine Name in the Old Testament. The Name Jehovah was not made known until Exodus 6, but Moses, as knowing that Name, continually uses it throughout the book of Genesis in relating circumstances which took place long before God was known by that Name.*" Here the argument is that as the title "Christ" is used in speaking of Christ in days when actually He was not yet the Christ, so the Name Jehovah is used in speaking of God in days when He was not yet actually Jehovah. In a word this writer suggests that Jehovah was not Jehovah before He was revealed as such.

Thus, while the Deity, and distinction of Divine Persons in eternity, as well as in time, are maintained, it is nevertheless asserted that the Names, the Father, the Son, and the Word, with the relationships that they imply, are only true of Divine Persons after Incarnation.

It seems impossible to avoid the solemn conclusion that it is asserted,

First, that *The Father was not the Father before Incarnation.*

Second, that *The Son was not the Son before Incarnation.*

Third, that *The Word was not The Word before Incarnation.*

Fourth, that *Jehovah was not Jehovah before the revelation of His Name as Jehovah to Moses.*

This then is the extreme way in which this old error has been revived. One of the most serious aspects of this revival is the solemn fact that it is no longer confined to a few individuals; it is adopted by a considerable body of Christians. A whole community of Christians have committed themselves to ideas that the godly of all ages have hitherto refused as being serious error concerning the Person of Christ.

In any community of Christians individuals may arise teaching perverse things, or who act in an independent way. But these teachings and actions raise protest, and are neither endorsed nor followed by those with whom they are professedly in fellowship.

How different, alas! is the case in this recent revival of error. It cannot be pleaded that these errors are simply the views of one or two individuals, which those with whom they are in fellowship refuse. On the contrary, among the Christians where these views are held there has been a carefully organised effort by means of a subsidized press to promulgate and defend these views. Further, by means of a revised hymn book, altered to exclude the thought of the eternal Sonship, or the everlasting Word, this particular community of Christians has been compelled to give public and collective sanction to these errors. These efforts have been so far successful that the leaders feel safe in boldly asserting that this teaching has now been propounded long enough for all to see it, and therefore to refuse it can no longer be treated as a sin of ignorance, and those who refuse it should now be regarded as transgressors.

By such means these views are forced upon a whole body of Christians, each one of whom is faced with the alternative of professing to accept these views, or else being treated as a transgressor.

Apparently to these views all must subscribe, who would remain in this fellowship. By the adoption and enforcement of these views those within this fellowship have plainly constituted themselves a sect, and that of the worst kind; for they are not a sect to maintain a truth, or even to oppose an error, but a sect to enforce error touching the Person of Christ.

It is obvious that no community of Christians can lay claim to the exclusive possession of any truth, and least of all truths that touch the Person of our Lord. Thus the questions at issue go far beyond the bounds of sects and parties. Anything touching the holy Person of Jesus, the Son of God, directly affects every one that loves Him.

It behoves us then to examine these statements, and refuse all that is contrary to sound doctrine; above all to turn to Scripture desiring that our souls may be confirmed in "those things which are most surely believed among us." May we then, in a spirit of dependence examine these views in the light of Scripture.

THE WORD

The Gospel of John opens with the sentence, "In the beginning was the Word." No Christian would question that this profound statement sets forth the eternal existence of the Divine Person who is called the Word. Some, however, are now saying it is incorrect to speak of the "**everlasting** Word." They affirm that neither the expression, nor the idea it conveys, is found in Scripture. It is asserted that the statement, "In the beginning was the Word," does not mean that in the beginning **He was the Word**; for, they say, it is only in Incarnation that Christ actually became the Word, and therefore this statement is limited to mean that the One who became the Word, and was known as such in time, existed in the beginning.

In the endeavour to substantiate these statements three main arguments are being used.

First, it is being taught that the title "*the Word is an appellation under which the disciples spoke of the Lord. It was how they apprehended Him.*" No evidence is adduced to support this assertion. We have incidents recorded in Scripture in which the disciples spoke of the Lord amongst themselves as "the Teacher," as "the Lord," and as "the Lord Jesus," but we can find no recorded case in which they referred to Him as "the Word." Moreover, the Lord, Himself, tells us how His disciples spoke of Him, for He says, "Ye call Me the Teacher, and the Lord" (John 13: 13, N. Tr.); but He never said, "Ye call Me the Word."

This strange assertion seems derogatory to the One who inspired the Apostle John to write one of the most sublime passages in the Bible, as it would suggest that the Holy Spirit was dependent, for the title He uses, upon man's apprehension of Christ, rather than God's revelation of Christ.

We may be sure that if John uses this appellation it is not because the saints in the early ages used it, or even apprehended its deep meaning, but because he was inspired to use the only title that suited the great truths of the opening verses of the Gospel. We may be equally certain that if the disciples of the early days ever used this appellation it was because this title was already used by the inspired writers of Scripture.

Second, it is boldly stated that "*it is to be noted that while the titles 'Son,' 'Jesus,' 'Christ,' 'Immanuel' are given to Him formally by God, 'the Word' is not.*" It is difficult to understand how those, who doubtless believe in the full verbal inspiration of Scripture, could make such a statement, seeing that the Spirit of God formally gives our Lord this title in the opening verses of the Gospel of John.

Third, in order to deny that the title "the Word" and "the Son" apply to our Lord Jesus before Incarnation, it is being said that "*Divine Names and titles, when known, are used in Scripture to identify the Persons without necessarily meaning that they were so known in the conditions referred to.*" As an illustration of this statement it is said, "'Christ' and 'Christ Jesus' are used in speaking of Him in the past eternity, but we all know that He was not actually the Anointed Man then."

This argument, we submit, is only true in connection with titles that apply to Christ in Manhood; **it becomes a wholly false argument when applied to titles used to designate Divine Persons in the Godhead.** Surely it must be so; Divine Persons cannot change with the passing ages. We see in Scripture that there has been a progressive unfolding of Divine Persons, and different Names are revealed suited to each dispensation, but each Name by which a Divine Person is declared, must be a revelation of what ever has been, is, and ever will be true of the Person so revealed.

Accept this simple and obvious truth, and at once it becomes clear that the Word must be the everlasting Word. None can read the opening verses of the Gospel of John without seeing that it presents Christ in the personal glory of His Deity. As such He is entitled "the Word." As the Word He is the revealer of God — the Person in the Godhead who is in Himself the sum-total of the thoughts of God, as well as the One who, by His acts, and what He became, gives expression to those thoughts.

John instructs us that the Word is an eternal Person - "In the beginning was the Word": that He is a distinct Person — "the Word was with God:" that He is a Divine Person — "the Word was God:" lastly, that He was eternally a distinct Person — "the same was in the beginning with God."

Then, the glory of His Person being declared, we learn the two great ways in which God has been expressed through the Word. First, in Creation (verse 3); and second, in Incarnation (verse 14). Thus we read of the Word that, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." We may well ask, if the Word is the Divine Person through whom God is expressed, how could God have expressed Himself in Creation if the Word did not become the Word until after the Incarnation? Scripture, however, is very plain, the Word was there, for we read, "In the beginning **was the Word.**"

Let us listen to the words of a Christian scholar: "**It is not said that in the beginning He was, in the sense of then coming into being (*egeneto*), but He existed (*en*). Thus before all time the Word was. When the great truth of the Incarnation is noted in verse 14, it is said — not that the Word came into existence, but that He was made (*egeneto*) flesh — began so to be.**"*

{**Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels*, by W. Kelly, page 410. Available from the publisher.}

We are told "In the beginning was the Word." We never read "In the beginning He became the Word." We learn that there came a time when He became flesh: we never hear of a time when He became the Word. When all that has a beginning began, He **was**, — the everlasting Word.

THE SON

For the unfolding of the great truths concerning the eternal Son, and the relationships between the Son and the Father, we must turn to the Gospel and Epistles of John; the Epistle to the Colossians; and the Epistle to the Hebrews.

As we have seen, the Gospel of John opens by presenting the personal glory of the Lord as the Word. In verse 14 historical Christianity begins. Here we read, the Word became flesh. At once this

leads to a further unfolding of the Personal glory of Christ, for the Apostle speaks of Christ as "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." The form of this sentence does not imply that the Son only commenced to be in the bosom of the Father in Incarnation, but rather that he does not cease to be there by reason of Incarnation. He **ever was**, and still **is** in the bosom of the Father. It is true He left the glory and has now gone back into glory as Man, but He never left the Father's bosom.

Here to transcribe the words of the late William Kelly, "**It is no longer a question of nature, but of relationship; and hence it is not said simply the Word, but the Son, and the Son in the highest possible character, the only-begotten Son, distinguishing Him thus from any other who might, in a subordinate sense, be son of God. 'The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.'** Observe: not which was, but 'which is.' He is viewed as retaining the same perfect intimacy with the Father, entirely unimpaired by local or any other circumstances He had entered. Nothing in the slightest degree detracted from His own personal glory, and from the infinitely near relationship which He had had with the Father from all eternity.... Under all changes, outwardly, he abode as from eternity the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father."*

{**Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels*, by W. Kelly, page 421. Available from the publisher.}

The personal glory of the Son with the Father, cannot be dependent upon a human genealogy, the virgin-birth, or His perfect youth. Hence these details, so precious and perfectly in place in the Gospel of Luke, would be entirely out of keeping with the great purpose of the Gospel of John.

His personal glory must indeed add lustre to the place He has taken, the path He has trodden, and the work He has accomplished. But nothing that He became, no earthly glory that He inherits, can add to, or detract from, His personal glory as Son. **Being His personal glory it must of necessity be eternal.** The glory of His Person must ever remain unchanged and unchangeable from eternity to eternity. If the exact words "the eternal Son" are not found in Scripture, the truth of Eternal Sonship shines out in every page, and underlies every truth, in the Gospel of John.

Passing to Colossians 1: 15-17, we have brought before us the proper glory of His Person as the Son before the world was. Very blessedly He is spoken of, in verse 13, as "the Son of His love" — the One of whom John speaks as "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." This is the highest character of His personal glory from which all else flows. It is as being the Son of the Father's love that He is perfectly able to make known that love. In Person He is the Son and thus able to represent God; but He becomes Man in order that men may have the living representation of the invisible God. If, however, He becomes Man, of necessity He must have the place of pre-eminence — the firstborn of all creation; and the reason of this pre-eminence, we are told, is that He is the Creator. By Him - the Son — all things were created. We do well to recall the words of the late J. N. Darby, who, writing of this passage, said, "**The Son is here presented to us as Creator, not to the exclusion of the Father's power, nor of the operation of the Spirit. They are one, but it is the Son who is here set before us. In John 1 it is the Word who creates all things. Here, and in Hebrews i., it is under the name of Son, that He, who is also the Word, is revealed to us. He is the Word of God, the expression of His thought and of His power. It is by Him that God works and reveals Himself. He is also the Son of God; and, in particular, the Son of the Father. He reveals God, and he who has seen Him has seen the Father. Inasmuch as born in this world by the operation of God through the Holy Ghost, He is the Son of God. (Ps. 2: 7; Luke 1: 35.) But this is in time, when creation is already the scene of the manifestation of the ways and counsels of God. But the Son is**

also the name of the proper relationship of His glorious Person to the Father before the world was. It is in this character that He created all things." *

{*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, by J. N. Darby, Vol. 5, page 15 in reprint of Morrish edition. Available from the publisher.}

In the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Spirit of God again brings before us the glory of the Person of the Son. God has spoken to us in the Person of His Son. Again we are told that the Son is the Person by whom God made the worlds, and He is the express image of His being. All the glory of God shines forth in Him. Moreover, from this passage we learn, according to Psalm 2, that as born in time Christ is declared to be the Son. If the first verse speaks of the relationship between the Son and the Father in eternity, the fifth verse tells us of the relationship between the Son and God **in time** — a position and relationship acquired by the miraculous birth. Though the Person is the same, and the title Son of God tells us, as surely as the title the Son of the Father, that He is a Divine Person; yet, as born into this world He is viewed as entering the relationship in a new way in Manhood, so that God can say, "I will be to Him a Father, and he shall be to Me a Son." The point in the verse is the relationship in which He is with God and not specifically His eternal relationship with the Father, for, as it has been pointed out, these words are also applied to Solomon (2 Sam. 7: 14; 1 Chr. 17: 13).

Again and again, Scripture brings before us the glory of this divine Person as the eternal Son. The Father has decreed "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." Alas! men take occasion by His becoming Man to belittle His glory as a Divine Person. Hence the pains the Spirit of God has taken to record in Sacred Writings the varied ways in which His personal glory as the Son is maintained.

If He comes into the creation we are reminded that He is the Son by whom all things are created.

If He is born of Mary, we are told that, "that holy thing" conceived by the power of God, was to be called "the Son of God."

If He becomes flesh and dwells among us full of grace and truth, at once we learn that He is the only-begotten Son which dwells in the bosom of the Father.

If He goes into death, we learn that, by the power of life in Him, He is declared to be the Son of God by resurrection from the dead.

If He ascends to glory as a Man, at once He is proclaimed to be the Son of God (Acts 9: 20).

If in that place of glory He serves His people as the Great High Priest, we are reminded that it is the Son who is consecrated a priest for evermore (Heb. 7: 28).

If He comes to judge as Son of Man, we are also reminded that he is the Son of the Father to whom all judgment is committed (John 5: 22).

Thus in these varied ways and seasons, eternity and time, Creation and Incarnation, resurrection and ascension, bear witness to the glory of the eternal Son.

THE FATHER

When this modern revival of an old heresy, that denies eternal Sonship, was first advanced at Barnet,

nothing was said that directly denied eternal Fatherhood. It was, however, at once felt that this

would inevitably follow. Seeing that the terms "Father" and "Son" are co-relative it was recognised that if we cannot affirm Sonship before Incarnation, neither can we affirm Fatherhood. As we have seen this further denial has now been definitely asserted. *"It is quite beside the mark,"* we are told, *"to say that 'the Father was the Father before the Lord Jesus was born into the world'."*

The Scriptures clearly show us that there has been a progressive unfolding of the names of God in the Old Testament. To Abraham He was declared as the Almighty; to Israel as Jehovah. With the opening of the Christian era we have the full revelation of God; hence baptism is to be to "the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Further, in Millennial days God will be known as the Most High.

While, however, the revelation is progressive there can be no change, no advance, in the nature of, and the relations between, Divine Persons. In Exodus 33: 18, Moses longs for a full manifestation of God. He says, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." In reply he is told that the goodness of the LORD should pass before him, and the name of the LORD would be proclaimed. But he is also told, "Thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen." The face speaks of the full disclosure of a person. The time had not yet come for the Son to declare the Father, or for the Son to be sent. All that had hitherto been declared — the back parts — Moses is permitted to see and appreciate, but the "face" could not at that time be revealed. Nevertheless, **the face was there**. The Father was there but awaited the coming of the Son to be revealed. Can we admit the thought that Divine Persons are dependent upon Incarnation in order to enter upon the sweet and hallowed relationships of Father and Son! Incarnation can add nothing to Divine Persons as such, or to the relationships that exist between them. The relationships must be as eternal as the Persons.

Christians have hitherto believed, and taught, that the many Scriptures that speak of the Father giving, and sending, the Son, as well as those which speak of the Son coming from the Father, definitely imply that the Father was the Father, and the Son was the Son, before Incarnation, and outside this world. Now we are asked to believe that these Scriptures do not mean that *"He was sent before He became Man, but sent as in Manhood."* In support of this interpretation of these passages, John 17: 18 is quoted, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." It is argued that this cannot mean that the disciples were sent from *"another place literally,"* but as not being of or in the world **morally**, they were sent into it for testimony. Applying a similar interpretation to the passages that speak of the Son being sent, gets rid, so far, of the thought that there was a Father to send, or a Son to be sent, before Incarnation.

Is this, however, a just interpretation? Would a simple and sincere soul thus read Scripture? Have the godly, and instructed saints, throughout the ages, so interpreted these Scriptures? Is it not forcing a peculiar interpretation to make Scripture support a particular theory?

The late J. N. Darby gives the denial to such an interpretation. Writing on the verse, "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," he says, "**There was a living Person there who said He was sent. Nor was it merely when in this world, that He was sent for He says, 'I came forth from the Father, and came into the world; and again I leave the world and go to the Father'"** John 16: 28).* In this passage the Lord definitely speaks of coming from a Person, and that Person the Father, and coming into a literal place — this world, which He again leaves to return to the Father. Thus the Lord's own words interpret for us the force of the passages which speak of His being "sent," and "coming" from the Father.

{*Notes and Comments on Scripture, from the note books of J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, page 281 in present reprint. Available from the publisher.}

John, in his Epistle, speaking of eternal life, tells us that the life that has been manifested in the Son down here is such a life as was "with the Father" — a life lived in eternity in the enjoyment of relationships between Divine Persons. The One who had lived this life throughout eternity "with the Father" was, for this very reason, the only one who could exhibit this life down here amongst men. Into this life we are brought — not indeed in the relationships of the eternal Son with the Father, but in the relationship of sons with the Father, the place and relationships in which Jesus was seen as Man down here. The statements of John imply, as a truth beyond question, that the Father was the Father, and the Son was the Son before Incarnation. Otherwise the words of John have neither force nor meaning.

To surrender this great truth is to let go the foundations of all truth. As J. N. D. has said, "**The ground of the truth is that the Son had come forth from the Father and come into the world, and that He left the world and went to the Father. This was a declaration of incalculable importance It was laying the foundation of the whole of eternity; the full revelation of the Father and of the Son.**"*

{**The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, edited by William Kelly, Vol. 33, page 273 in present reprint. Available from the publisher.}

Moreover, the denial that the Father was the Father, and that the Son was the Son before Incarnation, robs the soul of the immensity of the love that led the Son to come into the world. As Mr. Darby so truly observes, "**This it is that makes the notion of sonship in Christ only when incarnate so destructive to the very elementary joy of the Church, and abhorrent to those who have communion by the Spirit in the truth.**"*

{**The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, edited by William Kelly, Vol. 3, page 89 in present reprint. Available from the publisher.}

JEHOVAH

A brief reference to the false use that is being made of the Name Jehovah will suffice. As already stated, it is being said that "*The Name Jehovah was not made known until Exodus 6, but Moses, us knowing that Name, continually uses it throughout the book of Genesis in relating circumstances which took place long before God was known by that Name.*"

A concordance will show that the Name Jehovah occurs one hundred and ninety-five times before Exodus 6: 3. Without question, in the majority of these cases, Moses uses the Name in reporting the **circumstances** that took place. But the writer of the above appears to have overlooked the fact that, on occasions, Moses reports not only circumstances, but the **exact words** used by God, by Angels, and by the Patriarchs and others, in which the Name Jehovah occurs.

God said to Abraham, "I am Jehovah who brought thee out of Ur," and again, "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" (Gen. 15: 7; Gen. 18: 14). The Angel said to Hagar, "Jehovah hath heard thy affliction;" to Lot, "Jehovah will destroy this city" (Gen. 16: 11; Gen. 19: 13, 14). Abraham speaks of "Jehovah the God of heaven" (Gen. 24: 7, 40). Jacob says, "Surely Jehovah is in this place" (Gen. 28: 16, 21; Gen. 32: 9).

These and other passages clearly show that Exodus 6: 3, by no means implies that God was not Jehovah before that time; nor even that He was not known to be Jehovah; but, rather, that He was not known in the character of that Name in relation to the Patriarchs. To them He revealed Himself in the **character** of the all-preserving One - the Almighty, before Whom they were to walk (Gen. 17: 1; Gen. 35: 11). So today Christians know that God is the Most High, and will be known in that character in a

day to come; though in the meantime they are in relation with God as the Father.

One error leads to another. The attack on the truth of the Eternal Sonship has led to serious errors concerning the revelation of God, both as the Father and as Jehovah.

How truly the late C. H. Mackintosh wrote, "**The Person of Christ is the living, divine centre round which the Holy Ghost carries on all His operations. Let slip the truth as to Him, and you are like a vessel broken from its moorings, and carried, without rudder or compass, over the wild watery waste, and in imminent danger of being dashed to fragments upon the rocks of Arianism, infidelity, or atheism. Question the eternal Sonship of Christ, question His Deity, question His unspotted humanity, and you have opened the floodgate for a desolating tide of deadly error to rush in. Let no one imagine, for a moment, that this is a mere matter to be discussed by learned theologians — a curious question — a recondite mystery — a point about which we may lawfully differ. No; it is a vital, fundamental truth, to be held in the power of the Holy Ghost, and maintained at the expense of all beside — yea, to be confessed under all circumstances, whatever may be the consequences.**"* Does it not look as if these warning words were almost prophetic of what is coming to pass in our days? Are not those who have revived, and as a company adopted, this old error, under the misnomer of "fresh light," in danger of drifting on to the rocks of modernism?

{**Notes on the Pentateuch*, by C. H. Mackintosh, page 295 in present one-volume edition. Available from the publisher.}

The question forces itself upon the mind, How is it that from amongst those who have, in common with others, inherited such a rich ministry of truth, from faithful men of God, there can arise a company of people who can be so easily swayed by every wind of doctrine and led into such serious errors?

History, which so often repeats itself, may help to answer this question. Nearly one hundred years ago it came to light that the late B. W. Newton was holding and teaching deadly error as to the Person of Christ, in an Assembly of Christians at Plymouth. This error, however, was preceded, through a course of years, by a gradual departure at Plymouth from Scriptural principles, the record of which we have in the "Narrative of Facts" by the late J. N. Darby. In his account Mr. Darby speaks of the existence at that time of a system in which there was "The unsettling the souls of saints in everything precious and even vital."

He shows that under this system the gospel was neglected, and even slighted. He writes, "The gospel had been formally sent away from Ebrington Street [the Meeting Room, Plymouth], and teaching substituted for it It was said in so many words that they did not want the gospel — it was a bad sign to wish for it; they ought to be going on to more complete knowledge."

As to the teaching, Mr. Darby remarks it "was not exactly unorthodox teaching, but important truths dealt with in so rash and daring a manner, and the authority of the teacher leant upon for them, and his wildest notions put upon the level of certainty with justification by faith; so that were his authority once shaken there would be danger that no one would know what was certain. It would be scepticism as to everything. So have I seen it with Roman Catholics."

Again, he says, "The one undeviating object seemed to be to teach differently from what brethren had taught, no matter what, so that it set their teaching aside."

Again, as to stopping the Word of God being read in Meetings, Mr. Darby says, "Some read a chapter in the Bible sometimes. This was stopped as hindering the ministry. "

As to ministry, Mr. Darby says, It was not taught that "the Holy Ghost resides only in teachers," but it was "that the Holy Ghost wrought in the body by members, and that these members were the gifted teachers;" and though it was not a gift to pray or give out a hymn, "only gifted persons would take part in either."

Of such a system, Mr. Darby says, "The activity and zeal will be for the system. It will be to make proselytes, and establish them in what will keep them there, not to save souls or lead them on in Christ. There will generally be a good deal of acting **against** or depreciation of others who even hold the faith of Christ Paramount importance will be attached to the views which distinguish that institution, not to what saves or to what brings faith to the test by the revelation of Christ."

"Connected with this is the pressing much certain doctrines when it is safe, which form the bond of the institution, and denying them in the alleged meaning, or explaining them away, when they are pressed on them by those who detect the evil."

"Another mark is the extreme difficulty of fixing them to any definite statement, save as they have power to enforce it; and then it is bound on others; and there is the sternest rejection of all who do not bow."

It would seem almost impossible for anyone, who is conversant with what is taking place in our day, not to see that the same evil principles are at work, which were exposed by Mr. Darby nearly one hundred years ago. We know, alas! how it ended at Plymouth in an attack on the Person of Christ, finally leading to a division among the people of God. Alas! are not the same principles leading to the same end, for what are the statements that are being made as to the denial of eternal Sonship but an attack on the Person of Christ, whatever those who make these statements may profess? History repeats itself: "**new light**" is too often only "**old error**." There is nothing new under the sun.

Moreover, the evil at Plymouth, and its modern outbreak amongst a community of brethren, is only a repetition of the evil that first showed itself at Corinth, and that, through the ages, has wrought sorrow and division among the people of God. At root it is unjudged flesh, manifesting itself in the **exaltation of man**. This came out at Corinth in two ways: first, the Corinthian believers were exalting gifted servants of the Lord into a false position as leaders of parties: second, they were seeking to exalt themselves by attaching themselves, as followers, to well-known servants. In attempting to make Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas (names used as figures), the leaders of parties they fell into the evil of **clericalism**; in forming parties round gifted servants they fell into **sectarianism**; while those who said, "I am of Christ" fell into the grossest **spiritual pretension**; such were attempting to make Christ the Leader of a party, that used the Name of Christ to ignore the gifts that Christ had given. It was the assumption of superior spirituality that professed to be able to dispense with the ministry of others, while assuming to exclusively appropriate Christ to themselves.

In Acts 20: 29, 30, the Apostle traces the Corinthian evil a further stage. In Corinth he speaks of what existed in his day; at Ephesus he warns us of what would occur after his decease. In Corinth he shows that the evil commenced with the disciples; at Ephesus he warns us that the trouble will arise from the leaders. One evil leads to the other. The evil that commences with Christians forming parties round leaders, ends with the leaders teaching perverse things.

History has shown that again and again people have ranged themselves round favourite teachers, and the teachers, thus placed in a false position, have eventually taught false doctrine, and broken up the people of God. When appreciation of the ministry degenerates into adulation of the minister, the result is as disastrous for the leader as for the led.

Perhaps one of the most damaging results to souls, of exalting a leader into a false position, is that what the teacher puts forth, whether truth or error, is very largely accepted because he says it. So that where such conditions prevail the searching question arises, How much of the truth itself is really held in faith with God?

We are not to despise prophesyings, nor are we to receive everything that presents itself, even if professedly given by the Spirit, but to "prove all things," and "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5: 20, 21). If the truth ministered is proved by Scripture, and held in faith with God, we shall not waver in our convictions with every wind of doctrine. As J. N. D. has remarked, "**One is not ever learning the truth of that which we have learnt with God.**" Again he has remarked, "**If I do not believe the Word till it be sanctioned by someone else, I do not believe it at all; it is the sanction I believe.**" When, however, the teacher is exalted into a false position, and we accept what he says because he says it, without putting it to the test of the Word, we are in danger of being led into perversions of the truth, and losing the truth we once professed to hold.

How else can we explain the humiliating fact that a whole body of Christians can so lightly adopt new ideas that entirely contradict teaching that for long years they held to be vital truth. So truly is this the case that whereas at one time they excommunicated a brother for denying the truth of eternal Sonship, they would now treat him as a transgressor if he asserts that truth.

This revival of an old and serious error touching the Person of our Lord, is only another proof that, in common with all others, saints gathered to the Lord's Name have broken down in responsibility. It may be that one reason for the allowance of the present distress is to force upon us the conviction that all have failed to maintain the truths so graciously revived to us in the last century. The break down is our common shame. If there are still any that have not broken down collectively, then the ruin of Christendom is not yet complete. Is it not, however, manifest that all have failed, and that our only hope is to own our failure and thus take the place where God can meet us in His mercy?

Taking the lowly place shall we not find that the Word of God gives light as to the path of those who mourn over the failure, and desire to be faithful to God? Does not the story of the remnant, unfolded in Luke 1 and 2, afford us instruction? In these godly individuals we see the representatives of a remarkable movement of God, whereby numbers of His people had been delivered from captivity, and brought back to God's land. There they had once again set up the altar, rebuilt the House of God, and reared the walls of the city for the protection of the House. Alas! this movement, that commenced so brightly under the guidance of the Spirit, entirely failed in the hands of man. From the prophet Malachi we learn that by his day corruption, oppression and indifference, were found amongst those who had been so favoured by God's delivering grace. When the New Testament day opens, divisions such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees, are found in their midst. Yet in spite of all this failure there were still those who feared the Lord.

How, we may ask, did the godly act in the midst of the failure? Did they suggest that it would be better to abandon the position they had taken in God's land, and once again join the mass of God's people still in captivity? Did they seek to gather together all those who feared the Lord, in order to form a new and concrete fellowship of the godly? Did they remain where they were, simply accepting the low condition, and surrendering the principles, and promises of God?

They did none of these things. They did not return to their brethren in captivity: they did not seek to start any fresh movement: they did not acquiesce in the low condition, nor surrender the truth of God. How then did they act? Let us reply in the words of another who writes as follows: — "The few devoted ones of Luke 1 and 2, were evidently of the excellent of the earth, and there was everything in

their environment to make their hearts grieve and mourn. But though acquainted with each other, they did not seem to detach themselves from the existing institution. It must have seemed to their spiritual minds, formed in affection for, and set upon the Lord's Christ, a very terrible thing to be face to face with so much insincerity and emptiness in the temple regime and the public services. But if it grieved them to the quick, it does not seem to have induced any cessation of the only institution for which they had divine warrant; Anna departed not from the Temple, but served with fastings and prayers night and day. She was separate in heart, and the eye of the Lord must have rested with Divine complacency upon her and her companions, even though they were sometimes in the crowd with others. There was nothing to boast of: they knew each other, even in the midst of the masses of Israel; for she spake of Him to all them that waited for the redemption of Jerusalem. Yet there is no mention of any separate meetings for themselves. That they met with each other, and perhaps often did so, seems obvious; and found mutual comfort in so doing. But otherwise they would realize the sorrow of the general condition of Jehovah's people; perhaps the fastings and the prayers are a token of this. And the fact that they waited for redemption is evidence that they knew how far the existing conditions were from God's purpose for them" (W. H. Westcott).

These suggestive thoughts clearly show that this godly remnant remained in God's land, clung to that which God had instituted, surrendered no Divine principle, walked according to the Word, mourned over prevailing conditions with prayer and fasting, spake often one to the other, served God, and waited for the coming of Christ.

Here, however, a word of caution may be necessary; for a hasty view of the history of this remnant might lead to the question, Have we then been wrong in separating from the religious sects and systems of Christendom? A little thought should show that the question arises from a mistaken view of the position of this remnant. Let us remember that the remnant were connected with that which had been **instituted, and sanctioned by God**. Whereas the great religious systems of our day were never instituted by God nor sanctioned by His Word.

As a result of a very definite movement of God in the last century, the truth of the Assembly was recovered for His people. In accord with this recovered truth we have, in obedience to the Word, left the systems of men, which in their constitution, and practice, are in so many ways a denial of the Assembly. Thus we find ourselves with those, who, in much failure and feebleness, seek to walk in the path marked out by God for His people in a day of ruin (2 Tim. 2); and who in this path seek to act in the light of the Assembly, according to the principles of God for the ordering of His house. We thus seek to walk in the light of the Assembly as **constituted by God** and according to the principles which have **the sanction of His Word**. Alas! like those of Malachi's day we have entirely broken down; but, like them, we are not connected with the break up of that which is essentially false, but rather with the breakdown of that which is in principle true.

Under these circumstances we see no indication by analogy of Scripture, by the leading of the Spirit, or by the general trend of exercise, that would indicate the formation of a fresh concrete fellowship. Our natural thoughts might hanker after such, in the hope of finding a company free from things that grieve the spirit, but any such attempt is, it is feared, fore-doomed to failure.

While, however, it would seem right to refrain from efforts to commence some fresh movement, is it not possible for individuals, and local meetings, to avoid both the dangers into which the children of Israel fell? On the one hand, the independency under which every man does that which is right in his own eyes (Judges 21: 25): on the other hand, the opposite extreme in which all is made to depend on a leader, who "may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8: 20). Seeking to

avoid these two extremes, which in different ways set aside Christ as the Head of His Body, can we not seek to give Christ His place as the unfailing resource of His people? **And so doing, will it not be the only right course for such individuals, and meetings, to firmly refuse to receive any who hold, or teach, error as to His Person;** and further decline to extend fellowship to, or have association with individuals or meetings, that, after all entreaties have definitely committed themselves to independent ground? Would it not then be possible to pursue our way in dependence upon the Lord, without surrendering any truth or divine principle? Again to quote the apt words of another, who writes, "One thing stands out very clearly. We may not whittle down the height of the calling; we may not knowingly annul any part of the whole truth of Christ. The Levites were to carry the tabernacle through the wilderness, and not a peg nor a rope nor a single utensil was to be missing wherever they camped. We may not sacrifice one single principle of God's truth, nor ignore one of His ways. That we shall be conscious of our failure, our grievous failure, and shall be covered with shame and confusion of face — this goes without saying. But recovery is to God's standard in all its fulness. Solomon's golden shields were soon forfeited, and brass ones took their place in Rehoboam's day. But when Christ comes in, as recorded in Isaiah 60, and recovery is found, the standard is maintained, and we read, 'For **brass** I will bring **gold**.' God's standard can never be given up, though the coming of Christ Himself be the only way in which God's purpose will be absolutely realized." The same writer has said, in words which we may well take to heart, "Let each one very definitely refuse to countenance that defilement in his own environment which is inconsistent with the holiness of God, and look out for the company of any saint who likewise seeks grace to be free for God's will and pleasure; and their joint prayer and exercise and service may be one means God will use for saving others with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Oh! let us not be of those who imagine that to come out from denominations and to repudiate a sectarian name is the same thing as being gathered to the Name of our Lord and being assured of His presence. The latter — His presence — can only be connected with the condition of being gathered to His Name; and that implies the self-judgment in the individual which leads to the removal of all defilement. Jehovah's presence might not be associated with defilement in the days of old: nor can the Lord's presence be enjoyed where defilement is allowed today" (W. H. Westcott).

The common exercises of brethren, in different groups, are undoubtedly drawing individuals together, for which we may be thankful, even though such exercises go no further at present than "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." For the great coming together of all His people we must wait the day, so soon to come, when we shall see Him "face to face." Then, indeed, His people will see "eye to eye," and "together will they sing" (Isa. 52: 8).

In closing it may be timely to remind ourselves that, while we are told to "earnestly contend for the faith," we are warned against contending with our brethren. If we have to meet opponents let us beware of any bitterness of feeling towards individuals. Bad feelings towards a brother may well be checked, as one has said, by asking oneself, "How should I feel if I met this brother going in at the door of heaven?" The Spirit of Christ would lead each one to say, "I would like to think of individuals here, as I shall think of them there, without a trace of malice, with a love that appreciates all that is of Christ in each one, while refusing all that is of the flesh."

It may be that those who stand for the truth, and desire to walk in the old paths, will be treated with scorn, for it is still true that when "truth faileth he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" (Isa. 59: 15). Nevertheless, in the presence of hard speeches it is best to be silent, and bear them, casting all upon God, and praying even for those who make them.

May we have grace to judge the root of sectarianism so natural to every heart; to refuse the spirit

of Laodicean self-complacency that boasts in spiritual riches; and beware of a mere Pharisaical separation that exalts self while treating others with contempt. Above all may it be our earnest desire so to walk, that we may have the Lord's approval, so that, in spite of having but **a little strength, He may be able to say of us, "Thou... hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name."**

HAMILTON SMITH