

Gathered unto His Name:

A letter somewhat revised and enlarged.

W. Kelly.

My Dear Brother,

I am but one of many who are praying the Lord to make Him your first object in your service of His name. There are far more who, if they knew the circumstances, would join in this, and not least some who are very devoted in the gospel work.

But they justly feel that it is Christ who gives every thing and every one due measure of importance in God's sight, and therefore in His children's, as in itself too.

Now Christ loved the church supremely and gave Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, having purified it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present to Himself the church glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or any of such things, but that it might be holy and blameless. That He came to seek and save the lost is most true and blessed; but nothing is nearer to His heart, next to His Father and ours, to His God and ours, than His body the church, now exposed to every snare and danger in the present evil age. For that precious object is a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men, in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenly places might be made known through it the manifold wisdom of God.

If you weigh this and far more which may occur to you throughout the New Testament, you will allow that the duty to the Lord in caring for poor sinners ought not to swamp the yet higher one of loving His own that are in the world, as He did to the end. And how can we do it better than keeping His word and not denying His name, urging others in faith and love to do the same?

Men speak of the necessity of organisation but they know not or overlook that God has Himself taken this into His own hands, and has already effected it. So we read in Rom. 12: 4-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4: 1-16; Col. 2: 19; and 1 Peter 4: 10, 11. It is therefore glaring presumption for men to pretend to such a work; nor this only, but unwitting contempt for what God has done. Human responsibility has failed to preserve intact the treasure: the church no longer walks in unity. Even in apostolic days we hear of schisms and divisions, nay of sects. The Gentile ceased to stand through faith, and became high-minded instead of fearing. Thus abiding not in goodness, the sentence was to be cut off as the Jew had been (Rom. 11).

Ecclesiastical history, though miserably undiscerning as to the Lord's way and will, is forced to own, not only heterodox parties, some of them numerous and wide-spread, but the church of the west antagonistic openly and for a long while to that of the east on a trivial question, aggravated later by a graver dogmatic difference after the original breach was healed at the council of Nice in A.D. 325. For how utterly sad to make a public breach about the time of observing the Pasch (or, Easter, as it was called later)? But the saddest fact of all was the church's observance of it at any time, whether when the Asiatics celebrated it, or as the Romans did. It was a return, as Gal. 4 had ruled, to the beggarly elements of the world. In east or in west the church judaised beyond all recovery. At length came the Reformation, which gave occasion to national churches so-called, and subsequently to nonconformist bodies. No wonder that Augustine's idea of the invisible church revived and prevailed among Protestants.

Throughout this system of change, ancient or modern, the assembly of God was let slip in

principle and in practice. By baptism of water individuals were outwardly recognised as Christians by the power, or in virtue, of one Spirit were they all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, and were all given to drink of one Spirit. Justification by faith absorbed men just escaped from the idolatries and darkness of Romanism; so that none need wonder, that even the most advanced of the reformed were as ignorant of God's church as they were of the coming and of the day of the Lord. Of this their writings are the most conclusive proof; whether of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin; or of Knox, Cranmer, and any other.

It is the fact that only since the first quarter of the last century was it given to any by grace to discard human tradition and return to apostolic truth and fellowship. As they recognised one another simply as members of Christ in the light of His glory on high and in the hope of His coming whom God raised from the dead, their Deliverer from the wrath to come, they learnt as never before the "one body and one Spirit." More and more they realised its blessedness, and sought to conform their ways, individual or collective, to the divine word which revealed this, the calling of all Christians (Col. 3: 15). No doubt grievous departure came to pass, early and recent. But are there none that hold fast, whatever it may cost? Let saints judge by the word and Spirit of God, and be faithful themselves if they can find none else obedient.

God formed the assembly by the presence of the Holy Spirit on and since Pentecost. The body is therefore one; and it subsists to the end in that divine constitution. "God set the members each one in the body even as He pleased" (1 Cor. 12: 18). "Now ye are Christ's body" (could the apostle say to the Corinthian assembly, and the same thing was true everywhere else of the like), "and members in particular" (ver. 27). "And God set some in the assembly: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; then, powers; then, gifts of healings; helps; governments; kinds of tongues" (28). Eph. 2: 20 lets us know that we were built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, who, as they did their work perfectly by divine power, were not continued. But all is given that is needed for the perfecting of the saints, unto ministerial work, unto building up of the body of Christ, until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Hence sign-gifts also soon ceased, such as miraculous powers, and tongues with their interpretations. But as God fails not in His grace, so we have nothing to add to His guaranteed gifts. We have only to walk in faith ourselves, and accept gratefully what He gives, recognising all by His word and Spirit.

There is also another difficulty. Local charges, elders, in order to have full authority, needed institution by an apostle or an apostolic delegate like Titus to choose or establish them. Compare Acts 14: 23, Titus 1: 5, and probably 1 Tim. 5: 22. But scripture provided for the lack of the completely regular appointment by such considerations as are suggested in 1 Cor. 16: 15, 16; 1 Thess. 5: 12, 13; Heb. 13: 7, 17, 24. If there be not apostolic nomination, there are among the saints such as possess the qualities requisite for elders; and, appointed or not, such men are to be held in due honour and deference by all who fear God. A human or unscriptural title would lend no spiritual weight. But churches, as any one may see, are fully recognised as in the Epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Thessalonians, where we do not read of elders as yet existing in their midst.

Take the quite simple yet most affecting and very important duty of remembering Him on the first day of the week in the breaking of the bread, His supper. No doubt you are well aware how greatly this institution differs from what all Romanists and Protestants have perverted it to, as a sacrament with its priest or *the* minister set officially apart to administer it. You have learnt too that there is now also the added truth, in the standing and precious privileges of the church, that the Holy Spirit, Who baptised into one body, abides for ever in and with those that are Christ's, to work in them of His own will, one or another in all liberty, to glorify the Lord Jesus.

It was because Christendom had fallen away from those essential truths, here merely and briefly sketched, that a few (separating themselves from all denominational membership, as being but sects and denounced in God's word) met with little but growing light to begin, as the early disciples began, gathered to His name, to show His death till He come, and to recognise the abiding presence of the Spirit in the assembly, even if but two or three were thus faithful. They were not nor could be satisfied with an approach or a partial resemblance. They rightly felt that they must be faithful and do the will of the Lord. To this the Christian is sanctified by the Spirit.

When I was in C- through serious ill health, it was a great joy that we could meet, if ever so few, as gathered to the Lord's name. The dear few met there, Mrs.- giving the use of a fitting room in her house; and if visiting brothers and sisters came to the town, they gladly enjoyed the privilege in a foreign land. And I remember a sister who was Mrs.-'s guest (a Lutheran if I mistake not, and certainly not in our communion) who was not refused but welcomed in the Lord's name. She had not learnt that Lutheranism is but a sect; yet she loved the Lord's name and word as far as she knew; and we could and did therefore heartily give her the right hand of fellowship.

I left when most leave, the heat becoming an injury to invalids at any rate; and the meeting fell through, because there was none but one brother (his wife being sometimes unable to come). And I understand that, knowing you were in communion, Mrs.- appealed to you in this strait. For it was a very sad thing that there was indeed no place in the town where they could break bread with a good conscience. It seems that you pleaded not being at home in French, so as to express yourself in prayer or worship fittingly. But when you acquired familiarity enough to preach the gospel to the world, you did not remove the difficulty by remembering the Lord with them according to His word. Apparently you had got interested in evangelising work, so as to overlook the infinite claim of Christ on you as a member of His body, and all the more because they were so few and so circumstanced, that your holding aloof precluded their thus honouring Him scripturally.

If this state of things be substantially true, I earnestly appeal to you in the Lord's name. Help with all your heart that which is manifestly due to Him and His alone. Ought not you and they to keep His word at all cost? Mr.- I know; for he often came to readings at Mrs.-'s on the First Epistle of John; and I doubt not that he has otherwise received light beyond most in his society, preaching the gospel too as not a few do indefatigably and earnestly. Still he is the minister of the Free Church (as I understood): which in no way, more than other denominations, owns God's assembly, or the Holy Spirit for action in it, as God's mind for His saints, as long as Christians, however scattered, are here below. To recognise the Free Church, or the Evangelic Church (which are what scripture calls "sects," each with its peculiar polity, ministry, doctrine, and discipline according to man's wisdom), is to compromise God's word, and to dishonour the Lord Jesus as well as the Spirit's presence and action as in 1 Cor. 12, 14. They don't pretend to carry this out, as far as is now possible, but argue against it. "All things" are not "done decently and in order," as the apostle prescribed, but as men devise for their day.

Now you, I presume, have learnt from scripture, that we are the Lord's now and for ever more. Let us help each other to be obedient. No one wishes to slight the vast moment of preaching the gospel: but honouring the Lord by doing His will helps us to preach all the better. It also makes the Spirit's action in the assembly a living reality; whereas dropping this for the gospel makes it but a dead letter. Further, one grieves Him by lack of faith about God's plain will, so as to risk the loss of all conscience about it, and to slip by degrees into any sect or all sects, if we begin to own one that looks fairer than others, instead of adhering to the Lord's word and way exclusively.

Bear with me, beloved brother, if I urge the truth, and your debt to sovereign grace. How I should

rejoice, if you prayed over this matter before God; so that when our sister returns, you might all be together gathered to the only true centre, and not in word only but in deed and truth. Thus might you prove His blessed and blessing presence in the midst of the few, be a comfort and help in the highest degree to any converted by your means, and turn a real grief we feel when we think of it into a true thanksgiving. Beware of instability like Reuben; be rather a Joseph, adding on your part all diligence, and in your faith. supply virtue, in virtue knowledge, in knowledge temperance, in temperance endurance, in endurance godliness, in godliness brotherly kindness, in brotherly kindness love.

Ever affectionately yours in our Lord,

W. K.

P.S. A few words as to the position you are tempted to take. First, it is retrograde, breaking off, not only from all dearest to you in the flesh and in the Lord, but from what you have hitherto professed to be of God. The only thing which could justify it is the imperative duty of following scripture. But we, your family included, left all to follow scripture; we abandoned our denominations or sects, forbidden by God's word. The Eglise Libre began by adopting a new code of polity which is but of yesterday, with the ordinary false position of *the* minister, and *no* assembly open to the presence and free action of the Holy Spirit, as God's word requires. Weigh this before God; for departure into what is clearly unscriptural is most serious.

Secondly, you know that brethren as such went back to the primitive standing of God's church, gathered only unto the name of the Lord Jesus. To this we have adhered at cost of obloquy in 1880-1 and since, as your father well knew and refused with us to endorse the new departure of the Park St. party, which afterwards divided into Ravenites and Anti-Ravenites, to say nothing of the so-called Open Brethren who long before went off from us. I mention this to satisfy you that the resumption of meeting at P- is *not* adding a third or second meeting, but simply enabling those, now debarred by circumstances, to remember the Lord in truly scriptural simplicity. They, and they alone, would meet as all did, not only from the beginning of Brethren but from the day of Pentecost, however feeble representatives. The Lord provided for it in Matt. 18: 20; and, till they meet on this divine principle, there is no true representative in C-. Think of the solemnity of this, and of your being faithful or not, my dear young friend, I beseech you.

Be sure that I will pray earnestly for you.

Yours in Him, W. K.