

"Receive ye the Holy Spirit"

John 20: 17-23.

Lecture 5 of 'The New Testament Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.'

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Rouse 1906.

If there is no part of Scripture, perhaps, which has not suffered from being dislocated from its context, there are few portions which have been injured more by this unnatural divorce than the one which I have just read. It is impossible to enter into the force of the particular communications, the dealing of the Lord with Mary Magdalene, and the words of the Lord as well as His acts on the same day at even, unless we bear in mind that it is in the strictest connection with His resurrection from the dead, and this, too, as the Son of God. It is by raising dead men that He is defined as such. (Rom. 1: 4.) This emphatically is the view the Holy Ghost takes of Him in this chapter — not as raising others, but as rising Himself. The perfect ease of the circumstances, the undisturbed clothes, laid not confusedly but in their due order, the napkin that was about His head in one place, the rest of the linen garments in another, — these were the evidence to any one, who looked upon them with the least discerning eye, that all was done as peacefully, whatever the glory of it, as when a man rises from the bed on which he has spent a night of rest. In truth, it was the Son of God that had accomplished that work of grace on which He had been sent of the Father. It was not merely as an object of God's power raised from the dead. This is true in its place and season, and elsewhere enforced. God did raise Him from the dead; and Paul and Peter insist on it distinctly. But it is also true that He Himself arose from the dead. "Destroy this temple," says He, even in an early part of this gospel, "and in three days I will raise it up." "I have power," He says again, in John 10, "to lay down my life, and power to take it again." At the same time, He takes care to add, "This commandment have I received of my Father." Thus there was not only the perfect blending of obedience to His Father, but the divine power which determined Him to be Son of God by such a resurrection. There was the very same power, only put forth still more blessedly, in which He had raised the dead Himself, as for instance, Jairus's daughter, the widow's son, Lazarus, and others. As He said, looking on to Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

So now He raises Himself. But even Peter and John (and the latter is the one who records it) show how feebly the truth of His resurrection, according to the Scripture, at first penetrated their minds. John tells it, albeit to his own shame and Peter's too, that they saw and believed. They were true children of God, as we know; nevertheless they had but poorly entered into the revealed mind of God. They had not apprehended the "must be" of the Scriptures (Luke 24: 44-46); neither had they yet beheld the grace or the glory of God in the person of the Son of God as alone adequately expressed in His resurrection. They saw the facts; they discerned the evidences; and they returned to their own home; for such is the powerless result, even where such facts are weighed by the mere human spirit, however just the conclusion that may be drawn.

It was not so with Mary. She might be as little acquainted with the glory of the resurrection, or the word of God about it, as Peter or John; but at all events there was an answer to her heart's wants in Jesus; and, consequently, there was such a sorrow within, that she could not but hang over the place where His body had lain: she could not be contented so easily as the two apostles. In point of fact,

there was no home for her in this world, and therefore it was that she lingered over the empty tomb of the Saviour. And what brings out, too, the perfect absorption of her spirit in her thoughts and love of Jesus was this that when she looks again into that tomb which she had known to be empty just before (for so she had brought the word, and truly), and now sees two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain, she feels and manifests no such alarm as the women described elsewhere. Under ordinary circumstances, what surprise and fear such a sight must have been to her! Our evangelist attributes to her no such emotion in the smallest degree. Her heart was so possessed with the want of Jesus who was taken from her, that the presence of all the angels, I may say, would have left her comparatively unaffected. The two angels who were there say, "Woman, why weepest thou?" And she tells out the feeling of her heart — "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have lain him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus." But at first, not recognising the Master, and thinking it was but the gardener, she answers His question too: "Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." One word breaks the spell, recalls her to the truth, and reveals Himself. It was His voice, the Good Shepherd's, calling His own sheep by name. "Mary," says Jesus. She, at once turning herself towards Him, confesses Him her "Master;" and then it is that we have the words on which I propose first to dwell a little.

Let me observe that "Touch me not" is not by any means an adequate rendering of the expression; and inasmuch as I am addressing those who are familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures, and among them many individuals who, I presume, have more or less the power and means of judging what I say, I feel the more free to speak out plainly that which I believe to be the truth. The fact is, that the word which is employed here implies much more than simply a touch. It is the verb which should be translated "handle." So, too, it should be in Colossians 2, to which I call your attention for a moment. The apostle refers to the contrast between the dictates of tradition and ordinance and a dead and risen Christ for the purpose of putting aside what only diverts from Christ. We have done with such language as "touch not, taste not, handle not," which may suit men alive in the world, not those dead in the Christ. But, as every one knows who has considered at all the matter, the climax is really inverted in our common English Bible. The order appears in a way exactly contrary to the truth; for the real thought is, first of all, "handle not;" then, "taste not;" and finally, not even "touch." Thus, it is a descending climax, if I may so say, the most familiar thing of all, the handling, being put first; then the tasting, which might be considerably less; and, finally, not even a touch. This is the manner of human safeguards; this is man's way of preserving flesh in this world. He has no other means. What device but this can nature adopt to keep itself from being overwhelmed in an evil world — what but these various restraints and negations of evil? Christianity is of a totally different nature. It is the revelation of a Deliverer, God and man in one person, who comes into the world, and dies to the evil in atonement, wins the victory over all, and rises victorious into the presence of God, where He eventually brings all that are His. This associates the Christian with Christ on the foundation of His work of reconciliation to God, and His triumph at the right hand of God. Thus Christianity is the practical carrying out of this into effect by the Holy Ghost first in the souls of Christians, as by-and-by in their bodies also. And this manifestly is the great doctrine of the epistle to the Colossians as well as of Ephesians. What had those thus blessed with Christ and dead to the world to do with such ordinances as "handle not, taste not, touch not"?

That this account of the word is correct I have no doubt whatever, as indeed it is one that would not be disputed by any who are competent to judge of such a matter. It is, of course, entirely apart from any views that might be considered by adversaries to be peculiar (though I know not why such sounds should be heard: I cannot on any account admit that a fair interpretation of God's word should

be treated as a peculiar view). I hope it will not be regarded as a question of the number of those who really accept it. But however this may be, what I am now saying would be, and has been, admitted by persons of the most diverse views, provided they really search into and examine the matter of which I now treat. If this be so, the expression of our Lord to Mary Magdalene is not exactly given in "Touch me not." It is rather, "Do not handle." He tells her not to yield to her impulse in familiarly laying hold of His person. What confirms it is this, that the particular part of the word (μή μου ἅπτου, and not merely μη ἅψη) supposes a continuous handling of Him. In Colossians it is not so; there it is a single act, which might be ever so transient. But here it is a continuous act; that is, it would give this force, "Do not persist in clinging to me." Such is the idea conveyed by the word and its form here.

This appears to me to give much more force and distinctness to the passage, because Mary of Magdala here represents one who is still looking to Jesus according to the hopes of her nation, as well as the desires of the heart; one who could not but sorrow over His bodily absence, who would have had a mournful pleasure in thinking of His dead body even still there. Thus we can readily understand the instinct, as it were, with which she laid hold of the Saviour directly that she knew Him. But at once He forbids it; and this is the more striking, because, as has been often remarked, in the gospel of Matthew, when the Galilean women seized His feet, He does not refuse it from them, but, on the contrary, accepted their homage. Nay, more, in this very chapter of John, we see how the Lord invites incredulous Thomas eight days after to reach his finger, and thrust his hand into His side.

Surely then we cannot fail to learn the weighty lesson that is conveyed under actions so various and even opposite, performed nearly about the same time, the Saviour refusing in the one case what He accepts in the other, and in a third even demands. There was certainly some wise intent in His mind. Nor is it to be allowed for an instant that our Saviour loved Mary Magdalene less than the others who followed Him from Galilee. To what, then, are we to impute the difference? and how are we to account for the fact, that the same Holy Ghost should give in Matthew the acceptance of bodily homage, and in John this renunciation of it? The reason is as simple as it is instructive. In the first gospel we have, it is true, the rejection of the Messiah by His people the Jews, and the purpose to which God's grace would put that rejection, in meanwhile sending out the gospel to the Gentiles, and calling disciples out from them all, just because the chosen nation had refused their King. How blessed that God's grace refuses, as it were, to be inactive! It must go forth in the energy of His own love, and if the Jews refuse, it is impossible that He should not take fresh measures, and bring in even better blessings. If the ancient people forsook their own mercies, there are others, poor and wretched, who had been left comparatively unheeded by His love in times past. If they were so unbelieving and ungrateful and blind to the day-spring from on high that had visited them, and if they had consummated their unbelief in the rejection and death of their own Messiah, God, who had turned that very rejection into the accomplishment of redemption, sends out the glad tidings to all nations under heaven. Yet, with all this development of the resources of grace to the Gentile, Matthew gives the Galilean women holding Jesus risen and worshipping Him. What a testimony, that though the Messiah was rejected by the nation, and though God would turn that rejection to the account of His grace, there is the greatest care taken to maintain the hopes of Israel on an immutable foundation. Granted that their rejection of the Messiah was their ruin; but was this all? It was righteous; but what would grace do? The time was coming when the mercy of God would turn their impenitent hearts to Him whom they had too long scorned, and so bind their hopes and weld them, so to speak, to the throne of the glorious Son of man in such a manner, that when the moment came for God to judge the world in righteousness, they would be received in grace. The chain of divine mercy would be found to be so strongly riveted to the death and resurrection of the Lord, that, though there might be a postponement of their hopes, there would be a basis never to be shaken, and the grace of God will then bless them to

the full extent of His sovereign purposes in the latter day.

This is to my mind fully intimated, as elsewhere, so in Matthew. Hence, the final chapter of this gospel furnishes a pledge of this, given not merely in word, as in the prediction of Matt. 24, but in the typical worship of Matt. 28. I believe that the facts conveying this are before us in the action already alluded to. The Galilean women are a kind of foreshadowing of a remnant of the Jews, who in the latter day will be brought by grace and cling to Jesus, will seek and find in Him the Lord, will look for Him and cleave to Him. Nor will the Lord reject their worship, the form of it too implying His actual and bodily presence, after He comes again and meets with His chosen people. The Jew, as such, is hardly called on to "walk by faith, and not by sight," as a Christian is. For he will literally see the Lord; as it is said in Zech. 12, "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced." But they *shall* look upon Him. It is not merely believing; they shall *look* upon Him. Accordingly, the fact of these Galilean women receiving the Lord and thus holding Him fast, and of His accepting their worship, cannot but bring before us, in my judgment, the pledge of the Lord's great mercy towards a remnant of the ancient people in the latter day, when He shall appear to reign over them here below. And for this reason it is, as I suppose, that there is no ascension scene described — a great perplexity to critics, but as plain as possible to the believer. His ascension inserted here would have taken Him out of this connection, whereas, on the contrary, the having Him here bodily in their midst, and not a word said in the chapter about His departure to heaven, leaves Him to be, as it were, the everlasting joy of those whose affliction He will have visited and banished in His mercy. But in John 20 we have exactly the converse of this. We have a woman who was fully imbued with Israelitish feelings, who evidences still a clinging to these expectations, which the Jewish heart would naturally indulge in now that Christ had reappeared from the grave, and with the more keenness, because the cross and the grave had for a season deprived her of all hope. She accordingly was not for letting Christ go. In this instinctive love she lays hold of Him, but He bids her not thus to cling to Him; "for I am not yet ascended to my Father." It is otherwise He is going to be known. He is about to quit the only scene which the remnant of Israel would connect with the Messiah. That hope would not fade, but bloom in its own time and place. But now He was taking a remnant out of Israel. In point of fact, it was thus that Christianity began. "The Lord," it is said, "added to the Church daily such as should be saved."

Mary Magdalene was a kind of sample of this. She was one that up to this time had been cleaving to the hope that the Lord would come and bring in glory and blessing here on earth in the midst of Israel. But the Lord let her know that that is not the way in which He is pleased to bless now, nor is this the sort of blessing that this gospel reveals. The way in which He was to be known by the Christian is as ascended to His Father. Therefore it was unseasonable to think of keeping Him here. Even if it could be, how far below that which He had in His heart and was now intimating to the disciples through the astonished woman of Magdala! So far from being more distant from the saints, on the contrary, there is no such nearness as when we are united to Jesus at the right hand of God. This may seem to be a strange method of effecting union. It is anything but meeting the thoughts of flesh; but, in point of fact, flesh is not the means nor the manner of our association with the Saviour. If we look at Israel, it is thus after the flesh; for He was born of them, being a Jew naturally by descent and birth. It is not thus the Christian knows Him, but expressly in contrast with it; as St. Paul says, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." After a far better sort do we know Him. To know Him here below, the Messiah, was true blessedness; and Christ gave in the case of the Galilean woman a pledge of this as it will be accomplished in a day still future. But it is not, for all that, the pattern of the knowledge of Christ that is found in Christianity.

The essence of our privilege is, that when the work of redemption is done, Christ takes His place

as the heavenly man at the right hand of God. Accordingly, Christianity is not merely blessing coming down into the earth, though this was perfectly true, as preparing the way for itself. But the scene and character of our blessing is heavenly — the person of that blessed One who came down being now on high; and we know our blessing in Him there. There is nothing more blessed as the manifestation of God than the Lord Jesus seen here below. But the special position which gives our place and association with Him is found only in Him on high, after He has done the work of putting away our sins, and of vindicating God's nature to His glory about everything that could compromise His nature in this world. Christ is now gone up into heaven, and there He is revealed to our souls, and there we, too, are united with Him. Consequently, as He needs to go on high in order to it, so, too, the Holy Ghost needs to come down. Hence the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth is the necessary answer to the absence of Jesus at the right hand of God after redemption; and these two are the great and necessary constituents of Christianity.

Accordingly, then, our Lord in the spirit of this bids Mary Magdalene not to be clinging to Him; for He was not yet ascended to His Father. Thus He was now to be known. Thus the believers were to be put in relationship with Him, — taken out of their old thoughts and expectations, and put in connection with the love and glory into which He was just going, even the Father's house on high.

Let me refer to a scripture in the Old Testament which may help to give a little clearness as to the present work of God — a scripture, too, which is not always understood. If we turn to Micah 5, there is the well-known passage relative to the birth of our Lord: "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Here we have His human birth of Israel, as well as His eternal glory — One who, though born of a woman and a Jew, was, nevertheless, "from of old, from everlasting."

Who this person is, there is not the smallest difficulty in determining. It is the same that is described in the first verse. He is the ruler of Israel of whom it was said, that they should "smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." Clearly it is the humiliation of the Messiah — One born in Bethlehem — One belonging to Judah, and who, though here born, was nevertheless from everlasting. He was divine as truly as He was human. We have evidently thus, in that verse, a group of the most weighty and blessed truths about Jesus Christ, which no wit of man could ever have anticipated, which God in His own absolutely perfect knowledge gives beforehand in all simplicity and fulness. This is what manifests the gravamen of Israel's guilt; that He being what He is in His own person, as well as their Judge, should be smitten, and above all by them, with the rod upon the cheek. "Therefore," it is said in the third verse, "he will give them up." This is exactly what has followed. The smitten Judge of Israel has abandoned Israel for a season, "until the time that she that travaileth hath brought forth." In Rev. 12 a woman destined to great glory is seen bringing forth. Great is the purpose of God for the last days. This is first presented; then the dragon falls, and the struggle for the earth and about the earthly people goes on, when the Judge of Israel returns, and the ancient people once more resume their place, but thenceforth under their Messiah, here below. So here we learn of a return to Jewish purposes in the ways of God for the latter day. How far have we got in fact? Christ has appeared and been rejected by the Jews, whom He has given up. From the cross, not only are they given up nationally, but God has been calling out from among them a certain portion to be united with the Gentiles who believe as the body of Christ on high. These are they who are said to be added together in Acts 2 — "added to the Church* daily such as should be saved." But when the moment comes for the accomplishment of God's future and everlasting purposes for Israel on earth, then, says He, "the remnant of his brethren [instead of being taken out as now to form part of His Church] shall return unto the children of Israel."

Now they lose all their Israelitish character to form the one new man; *then* they will go back again to the old plans and ways of God about His earthly people. Nothing can, to my mind, be plainer than the wonderful way in which all truth, old and new, harmonizes together. It is just the fruit and proof of having got hold of the truth, that it gives us additional means of seeing new beauty and order in that which, without this fresh knowledge, looks disjointed — an immense mass of materials that we have no means of rightly assorting. But the moment that God says to our souls on any part of His truth, "Let there be light," then, indeed, we find all begins to change; and although there may be accessions of light, still God in His own glorious way shows us how blessedly the new fits into the old. Nor is any one thing so much a key-stone as that which seemingly has brought in confusion, disruption, and the apparent breach of His purposes. But, in point of fact, no purpose ever fails. There may be the need of waiting, and long for the longing heart seems the delay. Unbelief seems to have it all its own way; but faith alone is always right; and every word that God has spoken shall be accomplished, every purpose infallibly effected, and this by Christ's death.

* Or, "together," if the various reading be preferred to the received text.

Our Lord here discloses in principle an entirely new thing, beginning with the Jew who would feel it most. You will observe in the gospel of John how all is connected with His person. It is not a question of dispensation, but of Himself, and here in ascension. Indeed, there is nothing more important to understand, after we rest on His redemption, if we would go on to enter into Christianity. If you look at anything else, the persons connected with it are all comparatively insignificant; but take away Christ out of Christianity, and what is left? Besides, will the Holy Ghost put His seal on any dishonour done to the Lord Jesus, or any omission of His person, any slight of His work, any forgetfulness of His glory?

Jesus, then, makes first known to Mary that He was about to ascend to the Father, and that, therefore, bodily homage was inconsistent with the manner in which He would reveal Himself, as shown in this gospel. For John's account, if you look comprehensively at his testimony and take a general retrospect, you will find to consist of two great parts. The first is the revelation of the person of the Son of God, and of His work; the next is the revelation of another person, equally divine, who, when Christ goes away, takes His place with the disciples here below. Evidently in this you have Christianity; for you have Christ Himself the object of faith, and the Holy Ghost the power for making good the glory of Christ in the Church as well as in the Christian;

Of these it is particularly the Christian part which we have in the message Mary takes from the Lord to the disciples. "Go to my brethren." Here we find the first distinct putting of the Christian in relation to Himself. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God." Thus, besides placing us in relationship to Him (a fact itself of immense value), He assigns also their relationship to God. And this is not at all according to the ancient forms of blessing. It is not the revelation of His might as protecting His poor pilgrims upon the earth. The Almighty God is nowhere spoken of. Neither, again, is there His governmental way in the midst of Israel, where He was the Jehovah-God of that people. Here all is in relation to Christ, who is going above. Therefore, says He, "Go to my brethren, and say, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." How blessed! What the Father is to the *Son*, He is to the *sons*. What He, who was His Father, was as God to the blessed Man who had put away sin, such He is, and nothing less to those whose sins have been put away. God was not only revealed fully in relation to Jesus as God and Father, but such He is now to us by His redemption and in resurrection.

I do not speak now of any vague knowledge of God as fatherly in His ways. We know that when

Israel shall be in great distress, Isaiah the prophet says for them, "Truly thou art our Father, if Abraham acknowledge us not." This language clearly is in no respect intended to describe their relationship, but to furnish comfort, to them; just as one might say to a little ill-used orphan in the street, "My child, you have been treated ill indeed; henceforth let me be a father to you." This does not, of course, mean, nor would it be understood to mean, in the strict sense, as when there follows a formal adoption into a family as son and heir. It was only nationally Israel could claim such a place, as we see in Exodus 4, etc.; but there is more than this here. For One had come down to earth who was Son, and knew the Father as none other could know Him. One had been here who was on earth, and in humanity, as perfectly the object of the Father's delight as when simply God in His presence. For never had He said a word, never felt an emotion, never had a thought passing through His breast, or a motive that actuated Him, which was not the perfect reflection of the goodness of God Himself. Jesus alone answered morally in mind, in nature, and in ways, to all that was in God; so that He looked down from heaven to find that one Object ever for Him to delight in. There was not a creature in heaven that could detain His eyes and heart for an instant. He looked down upon this world in the midst of all its sins and iniquities, which were ever steaming pestilent vapour up to heaven, and occasionally drawing down blows of stern judgment on guilty man. But now, for the first time since the world began, there was not merely a catching, as it were, some distant gleam of His glory, and God delighting in an Enoch or a Noah, onward to that blessed One; but there He was Himself, so that heaven opens and God the Father sends down the Holy Ghost, and, mark, on Him as *man*; for how can it be otherwise? It was not a question of sending down the Holy Ghost on Him as God; as man He was anointed of the Holy Ghost. "Him hath God the Father sealed" — "the Son of man." And this is what is so blessed, that God Himself had to look upon a man to find what for the first time met His every judgment and every feeling — all the moral mind of God — all the affections of God. Of course I speak now figuratively alone.

And now over the Blessed One had passed an immense change. A new scene is found, and the heavens are veiled in blackness, and God Himself within that thickest darkness deals with Him. It was the very hour when man was permitted, led on by the instigation of Satan, to rise up and overwhelm the rejected Messiah; and in the midst of that scene God breaks forth against sin (charged on His holy person as an offering for it) in all His majesty and absolute abhorrence of evil. The dread reckoning time was come. The divine judgment of all iniquity and indifference, of wrongs against man, and of rebellion against God, fell on the Holy One. Thus it was not simply man's hour, nor was it only the power of darkness; but also and above all it was God's hour, when His unsparing holiness broke on the head of the Sin-bearer, even His own Son, who gave Himself up, the responsible victim, the sacrifice, to bear the judgment of our sins on the tree. The consequence was, that all that God could feel, without a single mitigating circumstance to break the force, so to speak, of His wrath and indignation, spent itself on the Son of God; and therefore is this redemption through His blood absolutely perfect. God has not a single word to say more — not an act further needed to vindicate His character, that has not already fallen on the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence it is that the revelation of God's nature, and of the Father's love, has no reserve. The holy character of God has kept back nothing. All that He feels against sin has been expended on the Lord Jesus. The consequence is, that everything that is in Him, as Father and as God, now turns to be exclusively in our favour. For our evil having been so perfectly judged, it is a question now for God, not merely as Father, but as God, to show His perfect satisfaction in the redemption that the Lord Jesus has accomplished.

Hence it is that our Lord Jesus speaks thus in the message to the disciples. They had known Him turn to His Father when there was not a single person that could sympathize with His sorrows, even while the Man of Sorrows in this world, and not yet atoning for sin. They had known how before day-

break He was with His Father. They had known, too, how, when others slept, He was still before His Father. They had known that not a single burden which met His eye, not a single grief of men that passed before Him, but entered His heart here below, and led Him out towards His Father. (Matt. 8) But another and deeper thing came out now — what God felt against our sins imputed to Him, not against Himself; for, on the contrary, He never was more the object of God's ineffable delight than at that very moment when He was bearing the judgment of our sins. Nevertheless, God's character was concerned that it should be no make-believe suffering, but as real an endurance of divine judgment on His part who entered that place before God and in behalf of us, as before it was a real enjoyment of absolute communion with the Father through all His life.

It may thus be seen how blessed is that which we have in the message by Mary. What He knew as Son of God, born into the world, He turns over, as it were, to us. It is not, of course, that we could have that which pertained to Him as a divine person. He is and was the only-begotten Son before all worlds. There clearly we could have no place along with Him, because in this He is to us simply an object of worship and loving service. But He, the Son before all worlds, was born Son of God. He was Son of God as man here below, and this among men it is the province of the evangelist Luke to trace. Alas! I, on the contrary, was a child of wrath, and so were you. We were every one children of wrath naturally. He was in His human nature, as well as in His divine, Son of God. "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

With man as he is, there was no communion possible for God. On the contrary, there was an absolute contrariety between Him and man in relation to God. His relationship was one of perfect delight to God the Father. Man, being a sinner, was in a condition of evil and wrath. But redemption delivers him that believes from all the evil and all the wrath. If it has not done this and more, how is it possible to trust the word of God? Where is the meaning of its constant and solemn warnings to faith? If it has thus testified to me of the cross, does my soul rest upon it? Am I satisfied on God's authority that in His sight there is no evil left on me as a believer in Christ — that it is all blotted out and gone? I do not speak of it as a matter of experience. Of course, all who have a conscience feel their evil, and we feel it the more because we are believers. We must detest sin the more, the more we know His love. We should judge all sin precisely because we are not going to be judged for it: if we were judged, we must be lost for it. Thus, what Christ has done puts us who believe in the position of judging it now. The Christian is responsible to pass, so to speak, God's sentence upon it now; in ourselves, of course, especially, but also when we come across it in those who bear the name of Christ with whom we are united as members of His one body. If evil be detestable anywhere, it is especially so in the child of God. Now this is precisely where we need the comfort of redemption and the power of the Spirit.

Accordingly we have to weigh what the Saviour here intimates. It is not merely remission of sins, nor is it only that we are born of God. There are a great many Christians who seem never to get beyond a certain measure of blessing, the least which consists with living to God at all. But they seem never to apprehend the new relationships of the grace in which they stand. The basis and form of these relationships, both with God and Himself, we have seen in the previous message. "Tell my brethren, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God." Thus I can look up as one that Jesus is not ashamed to call His brother. I can look up and see His Father and mine, His God and mine, with the absolute certainty that I am thus brought to Himself in all the value and nearness of Jesus, and that the work He has finished and God has accepted is the moral ground of my salvation and blessing. To this work God, so to speak, is now in His grace to us doing justice. Is it too much to say decidedly that justice would *not* be done to that infinite work of the cross, unless He so accounted us according to the words of Jesus? Indeed, this was no hard-wrung return; for it is what God Himself designed. He

desired to have objects that should enter into His love; and more than this, to have these relationships, and none less established. He had beheld the Son a man on earth; and now He says, as it were, "I must have sons; I must have souls, once sinners, made children to myself. I had a people once, and they, in spite of untold goodness, were as wretched and shameful as sin could make any; but now I will form to myself, as a new people, a family not of the world, even while in it."

This is what God is now occupied with in His love through Christ the Lord — the freshly-accomplished work of the cross, and the resurrection of which it is the occasion. But these are the relationships in which those called are to stand. Jesus owns them as His brethren, and this after His death and resurrection. Why not His brethren when He was here below? Why is it that rationalism, why is it that legal religionism, opposed as they may seem, always make our relationship to be with Jesus here below? For this simple reason, that, whether it be religionism or rationalism, they know not God, and judge not sin according to the truth. They talk much about both, no doubt; but we know there may be a great deal said without the reality; whereas all thoughts of God and of sin are totally short of the truth until I bow to God's judgment of sin in the cross. Therefore it is that the only thing that makes it possible to have holy relationships with God according to His mind, is that foundation which is laid in the cross of Christ.

See this in the case of that system known as Irvingism, if I may refer to such a thing, and it may be wholesome in such days as these. It is not its frenzied movements, its false prophecies, its ecclesiastical idolatry, that ought to be so grievous to the child of God, though I need not say how pained one should be at all these things in those bearing the name of Jesus. But what is it that makes it so evil? Why, first and foremost, this — the dishonour done to the person of Christ in order to make out union and sympathy with us. We being sinful, and having actually sinned, it was supposed, in order to make Christ united to us, that Christ must take our humanity in the fallen peccable state in which it is in us. Such was Irving's fundamental tenet; and this, as it sacrificed Christ, so made redemption impossible. The direct consequence, apart from such ruinous heterodoxy, was the abandonment of God's judgment of sin on the cross as the basis of salvation. Incarnation takes the place of atonement. Jesus here below in this world was looked at as united with us, instead of seeing us united with Him in heaven, which alone is Christianity, consequent on the putting away of sin by His sacrifice.

To confound incarnation with union is confusion, and a device of the enemy. Nor is it found merely in a system so extravagant as Irvingism; but in all sacerdotalism, Puseyism, "Ritualism," or whatever persons may choose to call the system of earthly ordinances and priesthood, which is not confined to any one particular section or country either, but spreads everywhere, and will, I doubt not, lead to the final catastrophe of Babylon. What, then, is the object of *their* regarding our union with Christ to be His incarnation? Why is it that *they* should make His birth to be the great pivot which determines our relationship? For this simple reason, that, when Jesus was here below, He was under the law. He owned the temple, and went up to the feasts, and owned sacrifices, and priests, and people. Just so; those who uphold the systems I am speaking of want Christians, or the world at least, to own temples, sacrifices, feasts, fasts, priests, and people, in the present day. It is Judaism revived. They depart from the truth of Scripture, and go back to the beggarly elements of the world, which prefigured Christ indeed, but are now nailed to the cross; yet do they imagine that this resuscitated round of figures and shadows is Christian worship, and that the state before the cross is the way in which the Christian is united with Christ.

Scripture invariably finds our link with our glorified Head on His death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus union with Christ is in no way a connection of flesh, but of spirit. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Far from being a question of "one flesh," this very Scripture puts it in contrast

with anything of the sort. "One flesh" has got a very bad character in that chapter. In point of fact, the Lord's association in flesh was with Israel, not with us. His incarnation had also the deepest significance and most weighty ends; but union, the union with Christ as the body of our head, is never represented as its fruit. If Christ had not taken flesh, doubtless there could have been no union; but Scripture teaches that our union follows redemption, and consists in our being members of His body as now exalted in heaven.

Again, though as real a man as any other, He partook of flesh, and blood in a different condition from that of any other man. Undoubtedly, He partook of it by the miraculous interposition of the Holy Ghost, entirely apart from sin — "Tempted," it is said, "in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Not only were there no *sins*, but no *sin*. There was no proclivity, no inclination, no striving with sin in Christ — all was good and holy. I am thankful that the ordinary creeds of Christendom — such as the Athanasian, and so on — own this publicly, because, though they be only a human bulwark, the mass of men in these lands hear so far what is true. They confess that the immaculate humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ is of the substance and essence of all orthodox faith.

This, then, was necessary in order to exhibit a perfect man and divine person, the Son of God, here below; but redemption was accomplished to bring us into His relationship, as far as this could be. Nothing less than this was proposed and done by redemption. For the righteousness of God, which, without the cross, must have taken vengeance on us, now righteously puts us, as far as possible, in the position of Christ before God. How good and wise is our God! How efficacious the death and resurrection of Christ, raising believers in title (now enjoyed by the power of the Spirit) to His own position as Son of God and risen man! It is not, I repeat, that His place of Son, object of eternal worship to us, is forgotten, but He gives us to be sons as objects of delight and affection in that nearness of relation, as contrasted with being simply saints or members of a people with special earthly privileges. This is what our Lord Jesus first lays down.

But there is more than this. The same day at even our Lord finds Himself in the midst of His people gathered together. And this brings me to the point I wish to speak of more particularly tonight. The first word He utters is peace, — "Peace be unto you." Precious word! It was not remission of sins simply, blessed as this may be, but "Peace be unto you." Peace is much more than sins forgiven; and "when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side." He showed them that which was the sign and witness of the shed blood of His cross, by which He had made peace. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." But speaking to them again, He repeats the words, "Peace be unto you." Only this second time, remark, it is not now so much personal as prefatory to their mission; for He adds, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Thus the first words of peace would be for their own enjoyment, as I conceive. The second declaration comes as the introduction to their mission. It is this with which they are sent to others. It is therefore repeated to them, that in the renewed strength of this peace they may go forth. As the Father sent Him, so the Son sends them; for He always speaks as the conscious Son of God in communion with the Father.

But there is a notable sign appended. "When he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Probably there are many in this place who are not ignorant of the correspondence that has been carried on but recently on this very passage. It has clearly proved the conflict of opinion, even in leaders of the same religious system. Nevertheless, many more now present will be surprised to learn the total uncertainty of professing Christian teachers, and that they only agree in being all far from the mark. You, who are accustomed to read the Scriptures in faith of God's teaching by the Holy Ghost given to you, will hardly conjecture the aberrations of Christian men from the truth. We all know that in our day most flatter themselves that there has been a great

advance in the knowledge of the things of God. What means, then, this inability to gather and give out with clearness the revealed mind of God in a matter of such moment as these words of our Saviour? How is it that, now eighteen centuries and more since, one hears no better than the crudities of the fathers or the guesses of their children?

There are two contradicting theories which claim to be received: one, that our Lord here establishes a kind of sacerdotal authority, by virtue of which those whom He then addressed and their successors were entitled, in His own name, to give remission of sins to every one who confessed his sins duly. I wish to put the view as fairly as possible. They all admit, of course, that there may be a failure in the conditions, and, after all, the remission come to nothing; but still, where there is uprightness on man's part, they hold that the Lord pledges His part through His servants (that is to say, His absolution pronounced by virtue of this commission through certain authorized channels to the end of time). "No," says the opposite party, "nothing of the sort. There is miraculous action here supposed. If men now-a-days profess to absolve people from their sins, why not cleanse lepers and raise the dead? why not perform the other miracles which the Lord empowered the disciples to work?" Now does it not seem amazing that Christian men should broach theories so miserably short of the truth of God as both of these? The one seems to me just as unsatisfactory as the other. Even the latter view, which emanates from the Evangelical party, really concedes what is worst in the former, while it falls into absurdity as well as evasion of the truth, by bringing the performance of miracles into a passage which alludes to nothing of the sort. For it is clear that the argument just spoken of assumes that, if men could cleanse lepers and raise the dead, they are competent to absolve sins. But I deny that it ever was the title of disciples to grant such absolution as is contended for. Thus, whether we take the Tractarian or the Evangelical theory, it is hard to say which is farthest from Scripture.

Do I then insinuate that the passage has no determinate meaning? Far from me be such a thought. But that which gives a clue to the subject is the Lord's resurrection as here presented. If men knew Christ better, and the power of His resurrection, they would understand that which is a fruit of it. Hence, ignorance of resurrection privileges leave men, whether on one side of the quarrel or another, in gross darkness as to the truth which is here revealed. For let it be observed, that after our Lord sends the disciples out with peace, He breathed on them. I am not aware of any action in the Bible to which this can be supposed to refer but one; and with this it stands in marked and instructive contrast. If we examine Genesis 2, a very striking difference on the Lord God's part appears in forming man as compared with any other animal. When He made the various beasts, birds, reptiles, etc., each became, as it is said, "a living soul" by the simple fact that it had been duly organized. But in man's case it was not so. Man was made out of the dust of the earth, as we know; but he did not become a living soul by being thus fashioned. There was an essential difference between man and every other such being then created.

It is not merely that all the rest of the animal kingdom were put under man here below, but he alone had his life direct from above. "The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." No other animal became a living soul thus. Man and man alone enjoyed the breath of the Lord God. Such is the true source of the immortality of the soul; and this is the reason why man alone stands in direct moral responsibility to God, and must give account of the things done in the body to that God who thus gave his soul and spirit. In the case of a beast, though he has a spirit, it goes downward, not to God, because God never breathed so into it. The living principle of a beast, I mean, perishes, because it is a mere question of what is connected by God's will with its material organization, Therefore an irrational animal, when it dies, perishes; but in man's case there is a soul and spirit, which abide distinct in origin from the body, having a far more intimate connection with

God Himself. Accordingly, therefore, the soul partakes of an immortality which the mere body, alive here below in its own nature, does not possess. This was a question of the will of God, but that was a thing which indelibly and intrinsically belonged to the soul and spirit; and therefore it is that the body of man will be raised up in the resurrection to be reunited to that soul and spirit, and so every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ stands before us, and in this gospel alone characteristically unites these two characters He is man, and here He is the risen man; but He is also the Lord God, even as Thomas immediately after says, "My Lord and my God." He is One who, in His own person, united both divine nature and proper manhood. He stands the risen man, "the second man," on the first day of the week, and as the quickening or life-giving spirit, He breathes into the disciples. That is, it is the Spirit of Christ Jesus risen from the dead. It is the Holy Ghost accompanying this resurrection-life, and the power of it, which the Lord, as the head of a new family, conferred upon the members of it. They had believed on Him, and had life eternal. Now they had life more abundantly.

Accordingly this is the all-important change that came in with the action of our Lord Jesus Christ. I can conceive persons reasoning upon this subject, and saying, "If people get eternal life, I do not see what great difference it makes that it should be risen life — that this life in resurrection with the Lord Jesus should so signally mark it." Very possibly you do not; but allow me to tell you, that full victory differs from life struggling with death, life struggling under ordinances, life struggling with the evil that surrounds it, seeking after what is good, though failing, striving to avoid what is bad, and constantly drawn somehow or another into it. This is precisely the state of man where the delivering power was not. But it was closed for the believer, as far, at any rate, as showing the new place into which the believer is put by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The life that I receive now in the Lord Jesus is life not under the law — life not having to do with the earth or its ordinances. It is the life of One who has brought me into perfect peace with God. It is the life of One who has put me in possession of His own relationship with God. Accordingly, it is as giving this in its most condensed form and its fullest power, that our Lord Jesus Christ thus breathes to show the new character of life, so to speak, that they had — that the life that they lived in the flesh was really by the faith of the Son Himself. "Not I, but Christ that liveth in me." This, then, was given by the very fact that He thus breathed upon them. It was a partaking of Himself as He then stood — a participation in what He was, specially in the life that was in Him, after all questions were settled, and perfect deliverance was won by Him and given to them.

Hence it is that the apostle Paul, referring to this, says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Why? "For," says he, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." "The law of the Spirit of life," says the apostle Paul. This is the very thing, as John tells us, that was here given. It was the Holy Ghost, but it was the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of life. It was not the Spirit of power simply working miracles, or any such energies — things which to men might appear to be far greater. Much less was it anything so wanton as men taking the place of God, and professing to forgive sins on the earth: no apostle pretended to it ever. Nevertheless it is a real privilege, and as true now as on the day when Jesus rose from the dead. What the Holy Ghost then did was simply communicating life according to its resurrection power and character through Jesus Christ, the second man risen from the dead.

This, then, I take to be the meaning of the expression, "Receive the Holy Ghost;" for the Spirit of God always accompanies the life that Christ gives. It is, no doubt, Christ who is the object of faith, and who is the giver of life; but He gives life by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Whether given during His lifetime or now, it was always the Spirit of life that accompanied that life, and, consequently, this is

put forth as the power of it.

But He adds more, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Some will ask, "Well, do you believe that?" Assuredly I do; and more than this, I believe that you Christians have got the power, and are responsible to God to walk in it. Put this is a high claim, some will think — this power of remitting sins and retaining sins. Without doubt it is so. But to whom did the Lord speak on that day? Not to the apostles only, but to the disciples. "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled." Surely if it had been some restricted prerogative confined to the body of apostles, some care would have been taken to make this appear. It is thus that even a sensible man acts. If there were a special communication from the Queen to her cabinet ministers, it would not be made to the House of Commons, or to the House of Lords either. There would be no propriety in such a course. Whereas, on the contrary, if we suppose a royal message were delivered to the House of Lords, or to the House of Commons, to whom would this be understood to be addressed? If meant for the whole house, it would be addressed accordingly. And so it is here. Our Lord was speaking to the disciples; He was addressing the whole of them. The moment we take the word as it is written, we see clearly that what He said applies to all. Will any man say that the resurrection-life of the Lord Jesus Christ was only for the twelve? Shall I be told that the peace the Lord gave so solemnly and repeatedly was only for the apostles? Nothing of the sort (though, of course, the apostles shared it, and it must have had a most valued place in their souls).

There was indeed special authority from the Lord to form assemblies confessing His name, and to rule them when formed, not to speak of powers which were personal. There was a post of authority in laying the foundation; there were acts initiatory and regulative, which Scripture assigns to the apostles. But it is so little the aim or the character of John's gospel to dwell on what was official, that the very word "apostle" never occurs throughout its course. The spirit, form, and substance of it are devoted to what is intrinsic and essential, and what passes not away. More particularly, we shall have reason to gather in a moment, that this very portion is the express setting of Christianity on its proper basis, and stamps on it a very distinctive character before God and man. For various reasons, therefore, I am persuaded that we are not to look for the accomplishment of these words in anything that was personal to the twelve, or to any others who should succeed them: still less are they to be construed of the function of elders or presbyters, as if they were officially entrusted with remitting and retaining sins, as is most deliberately assumed in the standards of certain religious bodies. The truth is that the Lord Jesus has the "disciples" as such before Him, and to them He imparts the Spirit; them He thereon charges with this great commission.

Does the inspired history, then, do the epistles give no light how the apostles understood, and how we are to interpret, Christ's words? Take, for instance, those converted on the day of Pentecost, and others whom the Lord added from time to time: by whom were their sins remitted? They were not satisfied with individually believing the gospel; they submitted their confession of the Lord's name to those who were Christians before them. And a most important thing this is. I am not entitled to set up to be a Christian on my sole opinion of myself, on my judgment of the faith I confess. I am bound to submit my pretensions to those who have been in Christ before me. Miraculous as may be the call of St. Paul, even he was not exempt from this; he was baptized by a certain disciple; he was subsequently received by others. This is full of comfort, and it is real presumption to shrink from or weaken it; because the more really a man has faith, the more willing he is to let others examine it. Even the apostle Paul had to taste the bitterness of this at first, for some were in doubt of him. Surely if this most honoured of Christ's servants had to bear with a little that was trying to him, it is not for any of us

to count ourselves too sure confessors of His name to yield for a little our own importance, and, at the same time, to submit to that which is the Lord's will, and of vast moment for the blessing of the Church of God. Think how the enemy might take advantage if you supposed it was a question of setting up to be a Christian on one's own sole and independent warrant. It is good to be subject to one another, and this from the first, in the fear of God, who is wiser than men, and has laid down His will through these words of the Lord Jesus.

This, if we accept the apostolic writings as a comment, is the manner and practical working of it. When one professes to turn to God in repentance and faith; when he believes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not enough that he should rest upon that blessed Saviour for the salvation of his soul. I must "confess with my mouth, as well as believe in my heart." This confession may and should, of course, go out as a testimony to the world; but it belongs to those who are the confessors of His name to judge of it. I may admit something that is derogatory to Christ; I may overlook that which is injurious to my own soul, and offensively evil to others. Then comes in the all-important function of those in the faith before, to which scripture attaches no small weight, and regulates it for God's glory, as we find the apostle Paul doing in Romans 15. I affirm, then, that the disciples, as the assembly of God, did warrant the remission of sins in certain cases, and did retain sins in others. Since they received heartily and simply, owning as the brethren of Jesus those that before then had been wallowing, perhaps, in sin of every kind, and suddenly (it might be, in an hour) turned to God, was it not of exceeding moment that there should be a body in this world constituted by the Lord, having distinct authority, as well as possessed of His own life, even the Spirit as the power of more abundant life in resurrection? And that they should endorse the confession of the true, while examining the pretensions of all who professed? It is not, of course, that this could possibly be injurious to a real child of God, but, on the contrary, be a great comfort, and an additional joy to his heart — the welcome of others in owning him here below, as the angels, instead of man here, rejoice over the repentant in God's presence. But it would be a serious check where there was any reserve, or where anything evil lurked underneath, or where a desire might appear to bring in things privily.

We find that in this spirit, accordingly, the assembly of God did act. They remitted and they retained sins I speak not now of the solemn case where a man was struck dead on the spot, but of instances in which there was a putting away of those that sinned, and their public restoration on their repentance. There was the other case also, in which a man who had been received, and had his sins thus publicly remitted, was put away as a wicked person. (1 Cor. 5) Thus the two epistles to the Corinthians illustrate both sides. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was indicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." (2 Cor. 2: 6-8) In these we have the cases of remitting sins on the one hand, and of retaining sins on the other; and I have no doubt that one of the reasons why Christians have failed to carry out their separate place in this world, and thus to walk in their own joy and delight, and as a rich means of blessing to others, is, that they have lost sight of this responsibility, treating it as either ministerial, or as a power long passed away.

Alas! the cause is as obvious as it is humiliating. The Church has not kept its place of being a separate people, endowed with the love and glory of the Lord Jesus. They have taken in all the world in the judgment of charity; but no judgment of charity can avail unbelievers, nor is it in question for believers. Thus the great public landmarks of grace and holiness have been broken down; and, consequently, the very pretension to retain or remit sins, except for superstitious people as a sacerdotal act, is scouted with contempt, if not wholly ignored.

I maintain, on the contrary, that the Lord's words make it to be of the essence of the Christian congregation in this world to stand forth as publicly owning what grace has done, by receiving those whose confession satisfies, and as publicly refusing what does not approve itself to their conscience. Let me, however, press with decision, that what we receive is not a certain amount of intelligence. It is not for me to make light of spiritual understanding any more than others. Unquestionably it has its place, season, and value; but of this we may be assured, that what Jesus breathed on the disciples was not merely intelligence, but His own resurrection-life. This, then, is what He would have us own; this is what we are bound to recognize in those that come forward. "You hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." I do not mean thereby that we are to sanction what is sinful along with life in Christ. But we are bound to accept the sheep and lambs of Christ, and to be very tender in dealing with mistakes, the fruit of a wrong position and of bad teaching. Let us beware of playing into the enemies' hands by even seeming to mix up the ground of reception with points of attainment in practice or in doctrine. Hold fast the grand, simple, but infinite fact, that Jesus breathes the Spirit of His own resurrection-life on the disciples. We are to treat the feeblest as a part of the Christian assembly. But if we receive on the one hand, let us not fear to reject on the other, according as the confession may or may not be suitable to the name of Jesus. If a man really has the resurrection-life of Christ, look for holiness with a purged conscience; but also for another thing, that Christ should be the standard of all his judgments, as He is the source of all his blessings, and withal the object to be kept before his soul. And, therefore, the name of Jesus, which is the sole and sufficient passport to the simplest possessor of eternal life in Him, is the same name by which we can reject the loudest pretension that compromises His glory. Let the Lord Jesus be for us, as in truth He is, the perfect and only standard. If Christ is owned and honoured, it is well and safe and blessed. The attempt to unite Christ with sin is fatal. All thought of having Christ and playing fast and loose with His name be far from us! What can be more offensive to God? Therefore, it is of all- importance that we should steadily hold Him before our eyes, and avoid the snare of building up the ecclesiastical plans and theories we have left behind. I believe that all ecclesiastical theory is false, when in any measure allowed to shroud the value of Christ; and I utterly refuse to treat ecclesiastical mistakes as calling for such dealing, as would be demanded were it a question of Christ dishonoured or positive known sin allowed. If there be so much as the connivance at the holding of what is not of Christ — if one bring not the doctrine of Christ, it is ruin. The man might appear to be as sound as an apostle on ecclesiastical truth, and have every other New Testament doctrine at his finger-ends. But what is the value of anything where the name of Christ is put to shame? And where Christ is the object of the soul, though His confessor may be uninformed, Christ has breathed His life there, and our course is clear if we be subject to Christ. Let us welcome such a one to the heart in His name. It is the Church's business to take all such up, and to foster them; for how are they to acquire more light, and where can they get the crooked joints adjusted, if it be not in God's Church? But if we hold aloof till they get all right, this is alike an impossibility on their part, and to forfeit our own place of help and duty. Methought that the Church of God was the pillar and ground of the truth, and that there only can the truth be truly learnt where it is lived in; and that those I have described, having received Christ, have Christ within and Christ without. Do I want or boast of more? Why, then, should there be the smallest hesitation?

The Lord enable His own to be thorough in removing difficulties, and hearty in welcoming souls where there is no question of ungodliness in faith or ways. I do not say where the doctrine of justification by faith is held. There is many a wickedness that consists with holding and preaching even that doctrine. These words of our Lord Jesus Christ are a standing rule, and we are responsible for acting on them. If we are met together in His name, let there be a plain unswerving expression of our place and privilege. Our action, our corporate action, should be as firm for the truth as our

individual walk — that we have and value Christ — that along with Christ we are bound to remit sins, and, whenever there is anything inconsistent with Christ, to retain sins. We disown the pretension of doing either as between God and man: the Church never claimed such a right; the apostles never aspire to such an action. But Jesus clearly called the disciples to discharge the retention as well as the remission of sins; and this, as we have seen, was verified in the Christian assembly which exercised both, not as an eternal question between God and the soul, but administratively as a duty to Christ, of receiving the true or rejecting the false, of putting away or restoring before men.