

Whether we regard God's purpose, the divine foreknowledge or the actual outcome of history, there rises before the mind the conception of a body, or society which includes the entire number of those ultimately saved through faith in Christ. According to the first view, it is the Society of the predestinated ; according to the next, the Society of the saved as foreknown of God ; and according to the last, the Society of believers. All these descriptions come to the same thing, and include the same persons. A Protestant can, according to his theological standpoint, select which of these representations he prefers, without varying the substance of the doctrine respecting the membership of the Church. We do not say that the abundant Scripture evidence of the Protestant idea of the Church will group itself with equal ease around any of these representations. We believe, on the contrary, that the view taken in our Standards is the strongest and the best, and that around which the Scripture testimony most naturally arranges itself.

On this we do not insist. The point of most importance is that the Church as set forth in the new Testament is not, in its widest conception, a mixed body made up of all sorts of men, good and bad. It is composed of "saints" and "the faithful in Christ Jesus." It is the body of Christ "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." It is a flock made up of sheep, which hear Christ's voice and follow him—to whom he gives eternal life and they shall never perish. There are no hypocrites and no reprobates in the Church.

Protestants admit that the word Church has, in Scripture, various shades of meaning, but so far as sacred things are concerned, they are all derived from the general idea already stated. As every part of the Church, in the sense defined, has a common nature, or in other words, is composed of those who believe in Christ and are the habitation of God, through the Spirit, it is evident the word Church may be applied appropriately, either to the entire body of Christ in all ages and lands, (Col. i. 18) or to any smaller portion of it, united by