

## The Christian.

ST. JOHN. N. B., . . . . AUGUST, 1888.

## EDITORIAL.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Beginning at Jerusalem: Luke xxiv.-47

This article treats of the beginning of the Church of Christ. Should any object to such a discussion as this, and suggest the propriety of leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ and going on to perfection, our reply is, that we are not in favor of being driven from an extreme to its opposite. The schoolboy who is content to know nothing more than the alphabet of the language and the figures of arithmetic, and decides to go no further in his studies, is only excelled in folly by the one who imagines that he can afford to ignore these simple rudiments and advance in scholarship without alphabet or figures. Just as certain as alphabets and figures are indispensable to the most advanced scholars, so are "first principles" to the most mature Christian, nor can they ever be ignored in a successful struggle for eternal life. He needs to remember them in order to defend them against the attacks of opponents, as well as to spread them before those who are anxiously enquiring for salvation. They help himself to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, while his pure and self-sacrificing life enables him, under Christ, to use "first principles" in the manner and with the success which his Lord designed.

On the other hand, professors who are not so much concerned about justice and the love of God may be rather expert in their use of "first principles," but their influence is against their teaching while they disregard the words of Jesus: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Matt. xxiii., 23.

On the coast of Cæsarea Philippi when Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God, He told him that He would build His Church on that rock, and it is for us to ascertain when He fulfilled that promise, or, in other words, when He established His Church. The importance of knowing this cannot be overestimated. A mistake here, and an amalgamation of Jewish and Christian institutions stand at the bottom of almost all the corruptions of Christianity.

In enquiring when and where the Church began we may pass by many theories on the subject, such as its beginning being in eternity or in the Garden of Eden, or in the family of Abraham, and notice the one that locates its beginning with John the Baptist in the wilderness.

Many affirm that the Church of Christ was established in the lifetime of John the Baptist, and not a few contend that on account of its relationship to him it should bear his name. John cuts off all such ideas root and branch, by declaring to his disciples who seemed perplexed on the matter, that he was not the bridegroom, but only his friend, who rejoiced greatly at hearing the bridegroom's voice. John iii., 26-29.

The Church was not set up in John's lifetime by him or any one else. It was after John's death that Jesus said, I will build My Church. Let the following facts be considered:

1st. If there was a church built in John's lifetime it was not the Church of Christ, for Jesus said after John was dead, I will build My Church. Matt. xvi., 18.

2nd. If there was a church in John's day it was not built on "this rock," which is the Lord's divinity, for Jesus charged His disciples to tell no man He was Jesus the Christ. Matt. xvi., 20.

All this preaching and building was held over for another day.

3rd. If there was a Church in John's day they, its members, did not meet on the Lord's day, for that day was not observed till after the Lord's death and resurrection.

4th. If there was a church in John's day they had no Lord's Supper, for this was not instituted until the same night in which he was betrayed.

5th. If there was a Church in John's day they had no sacrifice for sin, for it was after it that God's Son was offered for the sins of the whole world.

6th. If there was a church in John's day they had no priest to offer for them or stand between them and God. "For if He (Christ) were on earth He should not be a priest," etc., etc. Heb. viii., 4.

It was after His death that Jesus by His own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Heb. ix., 12.

7th. If there was a church in John's day they had no Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you." John xvi., 7.

8th. If such a church existed in John's day it was never mentioned in Old Testament or New. Neither the disciples of John nor of Jesus are ever called a church until Jesus had passed into the heavens and the Holy Spirit had come forth from the Father and the Son to animate and fill His body, which is the Church.

On the day of Pentecost, after that the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and as the Spirit gave them utterance they had declared unto the people that God had made that same Jesus whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ, and three thousand souls believed and obeyed the Son of God and were added to the disciples; they were first called the Church. (Acts ii., 47.) Ever after that this was their constant designation. The disciples were never called the Church till these three thousand were added to them in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and they were always called the Church after that event. This makes the time and the place of the establishment of the Church of Christ plain and positive to those who set to their seal that God is true. Jesus once told His disciples not to tell men that He was the Christ, but now everything was ready to proclaim the glorious truth. Even after he had risen from the dead and when he gave them the gospel, he told them to wait at Jerusalem till they should be endowed with power from on high. But now everything was ready; the great atonement was made. Death was vanquished. The Conqueror had taken His seat at God's right hand. The Holy Spirit had come, had filled the Apostles and qualified them to address in their own language all the Jews assembled from the different nations of the earth. The divinity of Jesus, which was the rock, had endured every trial unmovable. The gates of hades, or death, the last enemy, had not prevailed against the rock. When the Apostles preached this the people were, by the Holy Spirit, convinced of sin; they were drawn to Jesus, and Jesus built them as His own Church on that rock. They were united to Him, the Son of the living God, and thereby became partakers of a divine nature. They had the Spirit of Christ and the hope of glory.

How different from this is the imaginary church built before the death of Jesus: 1. It is built before Jesus built His Church. 2. It had not "this rock" for a foundation. 3. It was without a proper worshipping day. 4. Without the Lord's Supper. 5. Without a sacrifice for sin. 6. Without a high priest. 7. Without the Holy Spirit. 8. Without so much as a name in the oracles of God.

We will now notice some passages which seem to favor the existence of the Church in John's day. The Church is often called the Kingdom of Heaven; and Jesus says, "From the days of John the Bap-

tist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Matt. xi., 12. This, with like passages, such as: The Jewish teachers neither entered the Kingdom themselves nor suffered those who desired to enter, and the Kingdom of Heaven is preached and men press into it, etc., etc.

These passages at first sight seem to intimate that the Kingdom had come in John's time, and that men were actually entering it, or joining the church, while others were trying to prevent them from becoming members.

Now, the burden of the preaching of John and of Jesus and the twelve was this, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Jesus told of certain things that would not occur till the Kingdom of Heaven should come, and told His disciples to pray to God, "Thy kingdom come," all of which shows positively that the Kingdom was still future, but near at hand. How, then, could it be said that men entered it, pressed into it, etc. This is very plain indeed, when we consider how the near approach of a greatly desired object affects men's hearts and life. They are won over to the object, and live and act for it. It enters into them, and they into it, even before its actual approach.

Should a number of farmers and mechanics in one of these Provinces become dissatisfied with "the dull times," and wish for a change, a leading man among them called James tells them of a grand prospect in the North West—a fine climate, good crops, and a growing trade. They often meet to hear James describe the country, and he urges them to sell out and prepare to go and form a colony as soon as practicable. Friends at home are greatly opposed, and neither go themselves nor suffer those to go whom they can prevent. Still James persuades the people; they hear him, believe him, sell out and prepare for the new colony. Although they are here in person, their hearts and hopes and energies are in the North West; for it they live and plan and work. How natural it is to say of those who thus plan for the new colony, that they enter into it, though it is yet so far away, and that their determination is so strong that all opposition is unavailing, for they take it by force. But should James die before the company gains the colony, then it could be said that the least in the colony is greater than James. Not a better person, nor a greater or more influential worker, but he enjoys greater privileges. What James worked for he enjoyed. The joy of anticipation is swallowed up in the joy of possession.

The Jews were long expecting a Messiah to set up His Kingdom on earth. John came to tell that He was now here, and His Kingdom was at hand. He called upon the people to repent and believe the gospel of the Kingdom. Those who did so were baptized by John with the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. They renounced their former lives and former leaders, and looked to John, under God, to guide them. They believed the Kingdom was at hand, and they hoped and lived for it, and thus it could be figuratively said they entered into it even before it came. John preached and suffered for that Kingdom, but died before it came. Some of John's disciples survived him and lived till the Kingdom did actually come and really entered into it. The least one of these was greater than John. Not that he was a truer man than John, nor a more faithful worker, but that he had a greater privilege. He held a seat in the Kingdom, which John did not hold. Let every one who now holds this position remember that "To whom much is given, of him will be much required."

REMEMBER our Annual at Lord's Cove, Deer Island, commencing the Friday before the first Lord's day in September.