

THE COLONIAL CHURCHMAN.

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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From the Gospel Messenger.

"THE OLD PATHS;"*

OR, THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

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III. PROPOSITION.

Such a society (the Church) being instituted and thus organized, it becomes the bounden duty of every one who hears the gospel, if he can find access to this society, to connect himself with it.

I. It will not be denied that all who hear the gospel should 'repent and be baptized.' 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'—'Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.' Acts 2, 37, 38.

I. It is in this way 'the weary and heavy laden,' being penitent, 'come' unto Jesus Christ for 'rest.' Personally Jesus Christ is no longer upon the earth, spiritually and mystically he is present in his 'body,' the Church. His ministering servants represent him, their absent Lord. So that what they do in his name, and by his commandment, is as if done by himself. When St. Peter said, 'Repent and be baptized,' it was equivalent to 'Repent and become a member incorporate in the body of Christ's Church,' and thus you will be a partaker of the gift of the Holy Ghost. This is in effect the advice which Jesus Christ gives to all who would come unto God by him. Make known your repentance to my Church; signify your desire to become a partaker of the benefits of my redemption to my ministering servants; they will receive you in my name, make known to you the terms of the covenant, by which eternal life is assured; and what is thus done upon earth, I will ratify and confirm, as if done by myself. 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.' Acts 2, 47.

III. It will not be doubted by any who are convinced that the Church was instituted under a divine commission, for the purpose of forming those who "believed" into one 'body,' or society, or 'fellowship;' that it became the duty as well as the privilege of all those who would 'turn unto God' by Jesus Christ, while the apostles yet ministered in the Church, to connect themselves with the Church as they then found it organized; and to continue 'in the apostles' fellowship,' i. e. in the fellowship of the Church over which the apostles presided, as the servants of Jesus Christ. No one can suppose that an individual repenting of his sins, and desirous of seeking the 'kingdom of heaven,' would have then hesitated for a moment as to the line of his duty; or that having connected himself with the Church, he would have felt himself justified in neglecting communion with it.

IV. The same state of things, I suppose, would prevail as a matter of course, in the succeeding age. The Churches were now under the government of men appointed by the apostles, and the same order as at first prevailed.—Persons converted to the Christian faith, would still be told, in answer to the question, 'What must we do?'—'Repent and be baptized, every one of you.' In the act of baptism, they would become members of the Church, and ever after form a part of that spiritual society.

At this period, there was but one Church, 'as the natural body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body,' so also is the church of God. By one baptism, and one spirit, they were all 'baptized into one body.'

V. Suppose at this time, in the second century for example, separate societies had been formed, not in 'the apostles' fellowship,' nor in unity with the one universal Church, the members of which had withdrawn themselves from the 'body of believers,'

some because the church was not sufficiently spiritual for them, others because baptism was not administered in all instances as they averred it should be, and others because their women were not permitted to preach. Can it be believed by any one, that such a state of things would have been according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ?—Would not the formation of such societies have been justly regarded as a dismemberment of the 'body of Christ' a derangement of the order of his 'family,' introducing confusion into the administration of his 'kingdom,' and a pulling down, rather than an 'edifying' of the building which the Lord intended should be 'fitly framed together.'

Such a state of disunion did not prevail in the primitive church, at least not to any great extent. It however does exist in the present day. The Christian world is divided into many sects and parties, having no visible communion or common bond of union with one another, or with Jesus Christ. It becomes a question of great practical importance, with which of these several societies, all claiming to be the one Church of Jesus Christ, shall a penitent believer who wishes to seek the salvation of his soul, connect himself?

There is reason to fear that few examine this question, and yet until it is examined, there can be no hope of returning unity. The question cannot be regarded as unimportant. Since all the promises of God our Saviour pertain to his Church; his will concerning it is not secured while its unity is destroyed; and the salvation of souls is hindered by division. Instead of one way, there are many ways pointed out for christians to travel in; instead of one body there are many bodies; instead of one vine, there are many vines; instead of one city there are many cities; instead of one house, there are many houses; instead of one family there are many families; instead of one kingdom, there are many kingdoms.

Will it be objected that too much stress is laid upon this matter of the unity and perpetuity of the true Church of Jesus Christ? Will it be said, this cannot be a thing of so much consequence after all, inasmuch as we see God does evidently bless those societies which have departed from the primitive polity? Will it be argued that all the Evangelical Churches (Evangelical in doctrine I mean,) do succeed in gaining converts to the gospel; that spiritual children are born unto God, in them; and do grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore that apostolic order is not a matter of such importance?

This is specious reasoning, but certainly not sound. Let us admit the fact that God does bless the instrumentality of his word, in all the different religious societies which exist, in which that word is faithfully preached, and that spiritual children are born unto him. Does it follow that the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ is nothing? or that apostolic order is nothing? or that a divine Constitution may be set aside, to give place to an indefinite number of human inventions?

Let us not be backward, in reply to such interrogations, to say nay; not in 'strife,' but in 'simplicity and Godly sincerity.' There evidently was but one 'holy and apostolic church' instituted by divine appointment: 'the Church of God throughout the world,' within which he would have children born into the kingdom of Heaven; nurtured in the admonition of the Lord; preserved in holy fellowship; and thus enabled best to answer the ends for which the Church was instituted. Other societies calling themselves Churches, are 'all of men;' mere human devices; and though they may answer some of the ends for which the Church was designed, they have evidently failed to secure others of great importance. 'The unity' of 'the body of Christians' is destroyed; the bond of peace is broken; the moral influence of the Gospel, instead of being a positive testimony of Christ's Messiahship, seen and known of all men, has

become negative; and the division existing among christians, are appealed to, as among the most formidable evidences against the truth of our holy religion.

I may illustrate this subject by a very familiar analogy. I do not mean to employ it in unkindness, but with a sincere desire to convince and persuade. Marriage, it is admitted, is an "ordinance of God." The mode in which he would have families constituted, and children born unto men; making it the basis of social happiness, and the security for religious and moral order in the world. This ordinance, as a divine constitution, has been extensively set aside, even in christian lands. Many look upon marriage, as nothing more than a civil contract; and others regard it only as a private bargain between the parties. It may be plausibly argued, that there is no necessity why we should regard marriage as a divine institution. As a civil contract, or a private agreement, it answers the same purposes. God evidently blesses it; families are formed, children are born, the members live together in peace and happiness; nay, it may be said, there is more of domestic quiet and enjoyment in some families, where the divine authority has not been regarded in their constitution, than in others, where it has been so regarded. Would this be sound reasoning? Why not? If the divine institution of the church may be set aside, because God blesses all manner of religious societies, and accompanies his word dispensed in them, with the power of his holy spirit, if children are born unto him, and grow up in his fear. Why may not the ordinance of marriage be set aside, and families be formed according as every man thinketh in his own heart? Who does not see, that if the law of God concerning marriage is disregarded, although he may not go out of his way, to cut short the order which he has established in the natural world between cause and effect; yet that his authority is despised, and his divine power disregarded? Under such a state of things, who would be surprised to find in the lapse of ages, that the foundations of civil society were out of course; and that all the families in which such a state of things prevailed, instead of being joined together by one common tie of holy affection one to another, and to the God and Father of all the earth—had become separate, disunited centres of pure selfishness, without any common bond of union? On the other hand, is it not almost evident, that if all the families of men, in a particular nation or state, being founded on the basis of divine authority, have regarded marriage as an ordinance of God, and have conducted the social arrangements according to divine will—that in this agreement, the broadest possible foundation has been laid for their mutual affection and happiness.

Let us not be deceived; God our Saviour has ordained the form and order of his church; the mode in which he would have his great spiritual family, constituted of lesser families, and children born unto him. If this order is disregarded, he may not interpose to prevent the efficacy of his word upon the hearts of men, or disturb the connection which he has established in the economy of his grace; sinners may repent and believe the gospel, and grow in grace, and enter into eternal life. And I am free to confess, that such has been the effect, and is yet, among all evangelical religious societies. But let it never be thence argued, that the divine constitution of the church is nothing; or that it has been a matter of no importance, that christians have formed churches upon other principles than those laid down in the New Testament. We have only to cast our eye over any considerable portion of the christian world, to be convinced that the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ do not present that spectacle which he designed they should. Instead of being as 'a city which is as unity in itself,' its inhabitants bound together by one 'bond of perfectness'—living in holy fellowship—acknowledging one Father, and counting themselves all as brethren—having no separate interests, no separate

* Continued from our last number.