

gious opinions and practices. So far as the management of its affairs by the local church without interference from any outside ecclesiastical authority is concerned, this is true, but this is only one of our distinctive features, and *that* is not fully presented in the statement of it, which has just been given, as I shall presently have occasion to show. Besides this there is the spiritual character of the membership,—the rejection of human standards of faith and practice,—the equality of all who belong to the brotherhood, and the like. These and other features are even more distinctive of Congregationalism than the one partially delineated in the usual representation of it, adverted to a moment ago. Unitarians and Universalists array themselves in self-governed societies. So might any number of persons with the thirty-nine articles as a creed, and the prayer-book as a ritual, while rejecting the conversion test of admission, and having in the local church "*lords many*." One feature of the system has a certain value, even when taken by itself, but it is of the whole, and not of any one of its parts, however excellent, that I would now speak.

I. The "blessing" there is in it, is varied and many-phased.

1. A blessing is in our foundation-principle, that conversion is the one qualification for a place in the church of Christ

The evils of indiscriminate communion, of geographical lines of fellowship, of any and every letting down of the conversion qualification of church-membership are great and manifold. It is not, however, my purpose to advert to these, but rather point out some of the positive good that results from making the strait gate the door into the church. It is then a creed in miniature,—a sort of *multum in parvo* exhibition of evangelical doctrine. Conversion implies *depravity*: a nature *wrecked and ruined*. It implies *moral helplessness*. It implies a *power adequate* to the task of renewing a fallen being. It implies a Divine agency. It implies a *life*,—the life of God in the soul of man,—a life whose central pulsations reach to the remotest functions of the ecclesiastical form in which it is embodied.

The Bible is full of *root ideas*: ideas that like dry insignificant grains of wheat, have wonderful germs in them. Now here is one of these root ideas. If we are to have a converted membership there must be within reach the means of changing the hearts of unconverted people. There is only one power known to man by which the soul can be renewed, and the heart changed. It is the atonement that effects the new birth, and conversion is a phenomenon that can only take place under the preaching of Christ, and *Him crucified*. The Bible philosophy of conversion is given in those memorable words of our Lord, "*If I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.*" A style of preaching that explains away the atonement effects no conversions in the Scriptural sense. It may convert to a certain set of religious opinions, but conversion as a great moral change which makes the man a new creature, does not and cannot occur under a ministry that is unfaithful to the doctrine of atonement. It is the exhibition of "*Christ crucified*," as the substitute for sinful men,—as the grand expedient by which the law of God broken by us is magnified and made honourable in the sacrificial death of our surety,—and as a basis for righteous forgiveness;—it is this that transforms, cleanses, and saves. It cannot be held forth with Bible faithfulness without carrying home conviction of guilt, danger, helplessness, and need of an Almighty Saviour. Show a man that he has broken the Divine law, that his character is entirely unholy, that he can neither atone for his guilt nor make his heart better, and that God pitying him—