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"GO . . . SPEAK . . . TO THE PEOPLE ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LIFE."

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THE Canadian Evangelist

is devoted to the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ; and pleads for the union of all believers in the Lord Jesus in harmony with his own prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, and on the basis set forth by the Apostle Paul in the following terms: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."—Eph. iv. 1-6.

Churches of Christ, Independent and Dependent.*

T. D. KNOWLES

In the sublime utterance of Jesus of Nazareth, "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it," we find the first mention of the church of Christ in the New Testament. And here, coupled with the assurance of its divine origin, growth, and final triumph over death and the powers of darkness, is clearly expressed the idea of its oneness. This unity of the church we also find the apostles constantly emphasizing in their preaching and letters to the churches. They speak of but one foundation: "According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I laid a foundation; . . . For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. iii. 10, 11). And that the saints are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, growth into a holy temple in the Lord" . . . "for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 20-22). They, "as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (1 Peter ii. 5). The saints everywhere constitute the "One body," as there is "one Spirit," "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," etc. (Eph. iv. 4-6); "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one spirit" (1 Cor. xii. 13).

Thus the church, founded upon the one divine truth, "Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God," was a unit in faith and worship, and observed the "all things" commanded by the Lord. For "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts ii. 42). It became necessary, in carrying out the divine commission to "make disciples of all the nations," to form numerous congregations as churches of Christ, purely as a matter of convenience, however, it being quite impossible for all of the disciples to worship in one place, or meet at Jerusalem, the birth place of the church.

But the forming of distinct churches of Christ was, in no respect, a separation of the "one body" into unsympathizing fragments. Nor did it constitute the churches wholly independent one of another; rather their individuality became a part of the divine plan and purpose for the wider spread of the Gospel and more rapid growth of Messiah's kingdom. In all this their unity was still preserved, in the "one body," united to the one divine "Head." And let us note, also, the important fact that, notwithstanding the far reaching mission of the Gospel and its constant contact with every sort of influence—political, religious, philosophical, social and moral—yet it ever maintained its original purity and unity of faith and doctrine. It gained nothing and lost nothing. No new Gospel was preached at Samaria, Antioch, Corinth or Rome; nothing that in any sense differed from that first proclaimed at Jerusalem. Nay! the apostles, everywhere, spoke in the strongest terms against any attempt of that sort. "If any man preacheth unto you any Gospel other than that which he received, let him be anathema" (Gal. i. 9). "If any cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting" (2 John 10). Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). "That ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. i. 10). Such were the united and authoritative instructions of the apostles as they sought to maintain the purity and unity of the Gospel, and cultivate the Christ-like spirit of love and sympathy in the churches. And it is clear that from the very first the disciples were fully imbued with the unity idea. All selfishness was minimized, as the apostle says, "The love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth" (2 Thes. i. 3). And the sacred historian records that, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts iv. 32). Nor was any sectional feeling allowed to separate the churches. The broadest charity was inculcated by the apostles and practised by the churches. Of this we have such examples as the following: "I go unto Jerusalem ministering unto the saints. For it hath been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem. Yea, it hath been their good pleasure; and their debtors they are" (Rom. xv. 25-27). "For according to their power, I bear witness, ye and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord," etc. (2 Cor. viii. 3). Now, notwithstanding all this, and much more that might be presented here touching the unity idea, that the churches are one, and therefore dependent, it is freely granted that there is a sense in which the churches of Christ are independent of each other, namely, in the management of their own affairs. In such questions as purely relate to

its own finances, choice of preacher, kind and style of house of worship, hours of worship, management of cases of discipline, and a thousand other matters pertaining to each local congregation of the disciples of the Lord, and for the management of which no specific laws have been given, requiring uniformity of action on the part of all the churches. Each church is perfectly independent of every other, and must be governed largely by its own peculiar surroundings in such matters. But while the churches are individually honored with the right of self-government they are held responsible for the use they make of this power, and are expected to make the wisest use of sanctified common sense, that all things be done "decently and in order," and that God, in all things, may be glorified. For this purpose each church is under the government of its own elders, who are placed over the flock of God by divine authority, and to watch for the souls of all as those who must give account to the chief Shepherd at His appearing. All are thus "under law to Christ." But, in no sense is either a church or an individual member amenable to any ecclesiastical court of pope or presbytery, or mere human authority whatever. Hence, any alien to the kingdom of Christ, the believer in Jesus as the Son of God, and yields obedience to Him in baptism, is entitled to immediate membership in any church of Christ without being asked to subscribe to a human creed or set of fossilized opinions of men.

We have already seen that the principle of independency does not release churches from the responsibility of carefully maintaining the welfare of one another, and thus of the church at large. Indeed, each church should so feel its responsibility and guard its liberty with the view of making its moral power felt for the largest amount of good, both local and general. It must be "a city set on a hill," that "cannot be hid;" a "golden candlestick," throwing afar the light of divine truth to direct the souls of men over the dark sea of life, toward a resting place in God's love.

It is true, therefore, that there is no such thing as absolute independency of the churches. As in the material universe, the grand forces of nature are but the union of elements, which taken alone seem antagonistic to each other; so in the church, the principles of independency and dependency unite and co-operate in the missionary spirit and purpose of the Gospel, and in the highest purposes of church discipline—"the edifying of the body of Christ," that each individual may come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 13, 14). Like the vine and its branches, the churches of Christ have a life in common, both with Him and each other. Isolate one branch from all the rest, and it is severed thereby from the source of life as well. So, let a church become independent and isolated from all others in respect to Christian sympathy and co-operation in missionary work, and it hastens to a spiritual death, and the fate of the Laodicean church.

In the matter of church discipline, the principle of dependency holds the higher and more important position. It is admitted that all cases of discipline come under the general law given by our Lord in Matt. xviii. 15-17. But it must also be admitted that there is no set of rules given that will apply to every individual case that may come up for trial. Since each case has its own peculiarities as to facts and circumstances, it is evident that each case must be managed and decided by itself. And each church has the right to manage her own cases of discipline according to her best judgment, feeling under obligations to use every proper effort to keep the church pure and to save a soul—even to the strict fulfilment of the injunction: "Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 Thes. iii. 6).

Let us suppose, then, that a church has, to the best of its wisdom, given a disorderly member a fair trial and withdrawn from him, is every other church at liberty to carry its independency so far as to disregard the action of that church? No. Right here we find that the two principles meet, and a common interest unites both independency and dependency in one. For it is acknowledged that every church is under obligation to Christ the Divine Head to maintain the honor and purity of His kingdom.

The action of any one church in matters of discipline is entitled, therefore, to the respect and support of every other church. No church can treat the authority of a sister church with disregard in matters of discipline, since the proper maintenance of purity of life in the churches, and the integrity of the institutions of the Gospel, is an obligation from which no church can free itself. The responsibility rests alike upon all to "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2). It follows, therefore, that if any church continues to recognize a member from whom a sister church has withdrawn, and allows him to sit at the Lord's table, and otherwise holds fellowship with him, that church so doing openly violates not only all principles of Christian courtesy between churches of Christ, but also the positive command, "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others" (Phil. ii. 4). Furthermore, it works an injury to the impenitent one by encouraging him in lawlessness and sin, instead of inciting him to repentance. Churches, as well as individuals, are commanded to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace" (Eph. iv. 3). But certain it is that this requirement is openly disregarded whenever the action and authority of a church in matters of discipline are treated with disrespect by another.

The principle of dependency recognizes the right of appeal to the member withdrawn from. Were churches absolutely independent of each other, the action of each congregation in any given case would be final, and the accused could have no redress. But no church can rightfully refuse to accede

to the request of a disfellowshipped member to be heard before a committee from other churches when reasonable objections are urged against its ruling. Such an appeal is simply from the ruling of a local church to that of the church at large. Should any church, therefore, refuse to recognize the right of such an appeal, it would manifest thereby a very arbitrary spirit, and assume that the wisdom and ruling of its eldership, whether wise or otherwise, must not be called in question, and that the accused must have no redress. And, furthermore, it presumes to say that the interests of an individual church are paramount to those of the church at large! But, since it is possible for the eldership of any church to be at fault in judgment, though honest in purpose, the churches are dependant upon each other for help in counsel, and for mutual support in maintaining good order and righteousness in the churches everywhere. Hence, a proper committee from sister churches, one free from all mere local influence, and with the welfare of the cause in general at heart, such a committee becomes a court of equity, whose action is considered final, and the judgment of the church at large in the case.

Let us suppose a church has fallen a prey to false teaching, by a "wolf in sheep's clothing," it may be, or through unwisdom discipline, and loses its power for usefulness, and disgraces the cause of the Lord, would the principle of independency forbid that any kindly effort should be made by sister churches to save that one from death and the cause of Christ from disgrace? Surely not. While no ecclesiastical authority can be used by either one or many churches over another, yet the principle of church dependency demands that assistance be offered in the spirit of brotherly love, by way of counsel, exhortation, admonition, and even rebuke. Such a course is in accordance with the apostolic injunction, "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good" (1 Cor. x. 24).

Thus, like the diverging rays of light, while they spring from one common source, each performs its individual work of beauty upon the flowers, with tint and shade, or enriches with delicate flavor the countless varieties of fruit; yet all co-operate in replenishing earth's generous store for her variant tenantry. So in the divine economy, the churches of Christ, while working along the line of independency, each filling its mission of love, and making the desert places to "rejoice and blossom as the rose," all co-operate in the grand accomplishment of the divine purpose in the glorious redemption of the human race.

It is the cross that makes the peace so sweet. Amid the tears of grief, peace keeps her silent place like the rainbow upon the spray of the cataract. *H. Bonar.*

Labor, not enjoyment, should be a present thought with Christian people. It was delightful to the disciples to behold the glory of the transfiguration, but they were sent back to work. Spiritual delight should stir the fire of zeal and make us the more anxious to serve others.—*Standard.*

* Read at the Annual Meeting in Toronto, and published by request of the Convention.