

THE GOSPEL TRIBUNE,

FOR ALLIANCE AND INTERCOMMUNION

THROUGHOUT

Evangelical Christendom.

VOLUME I.

AUGUST, 1854.

NUMBER 4.

"One is your master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren."

The Topic for the Month,

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

Having occupied the third part of the last number of the *Tribune* with his own observations, the publisher will have little to say in the present. Most earnestly, however, would he here solicit the reader's deliberate decision on each of the several questions raised in the following *admirable* paper from the pen of the Rev. John Harris, author of "Mannaon," "The Great Teacher," &c., &c.

THE SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

BY THE REV. JOHN HARRIS.

As schism is a relative term, it is natural and proper that we should begin with an inquiry into the nature of that to which the term relates—the Christian Church. And in every inquiry relating to Christian doctrine or duty, our first concern should undoubtedly be to ascertain the mind of God as revealed in his word.

The term (*Ecclesia*.) in the New Testament which our translators have rendered by the word *church*, is one which originally denotes a popular assembly, or gathering of persons into one place, without any reference to the character of the persons convened, or to the object of their meeting. In this general sense it is employed, Acts xix. 32. But as a religious appellation, it invariably denotes either the whole body of the faithful, or some one assembly of such persons associated together for the worship of God. In the former sense, our Lord affirmed, "upon this rock will I build my church,"—Matt. xvi. 18; contemplating the majestic assembly—the number which no man can number—who, in all the ages to come, should form the great Christian community: and in the same sense it is affirmed, that "he is the Head over all things to the church, which is his body." When the church is employed in the latter sense, it is always accompanied with a specification of the place where it was accustomed to convene:—as, "the church which is at Corinth." "at Ephesus," or, "at Rome:"—so that it differs from the former, only as a part differs from the whole; while the idea of *unity* essentially pervades them both.

The collective oneness of believers, appears to have been designedly taught by each of the series of types pointed from the beginning to adumbrate the nature

of the Christian Church. He who "sees the end from the beginning," saw fit to sketch an outline of his ultimate and most comprehensive purposes on some of his earliest and minutest works; impressing on the first stone the figure of the complete pyramid—and on the atom the laws of the globe. He who "made all things for himself," appear to have so made them, that the *least* should contain a prophecy of the greatest; and that the *natural* should mutely prefigure and promise the spiritual. Thus, the earliest social relation, and that which is the appointed source of every other—the marriage union—reflects, in "a mystery," the union of Christ and his church. And the creation at first of only one woman, and the Divine permission ever since of but one contemporaneous wife, appear to have been divinely intended to denote the collective oneness of "the bride, the Lamb's wife." Eph. v. 25—33; Rev. xix. 8.

As a family is the natural result of a marriage, so the next great type in the series appointed to denote the unity of the church, was the *oneness of a family*. This appears to have been the pervading idea of the patriarchal dispensation; of which Abraham was the principal person. And hence it was, according to the Apostle Paul, that Ishmael was cast out; in order, partly, that the typical family might remain at peace and unity within itself. Gal. iv. 28—31.

As a number of families form a nation, so "the church in the wilderness"—the "twelve-tribed" Israelites assembled at the foot of Sinai, and afterwards at the festivals on Sion, were a *national emblem* of the collected church. "Ye are come," saith the Apostle, "unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God."*

Like the Jews, but in a sense superior, you have one common centre, in which you not merely meet, but where you habitually reside—in God's only palace upon earth, his Church. Like the tribes resorting from all parts of Judea to Jerusalem—like the *Panathenaica*, or great convention (*Paneguris*) of the Athenians—you form one "general assembly" (*Paneguris*)—one glorious *concessus* of all orders. All of you are equally "first-born;" having equal rights on earth, and the prospect of the same inheritance in heaven. And being all alike *civitate donati*, made free of the Church, you are enrolled in the same

* Schoettgen has amply proved in his dissertation on this subject, that by this phrase is to be understood the Church of the New Testament.