

Contributions.

What is the Church of Christ?

SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED IN DENISON AVENUE CHURCH OF CHRIST, BY J. R. GAFF, THE MINISTER.—ACTS II. 41-47.

I propose to answer some questions frequently asked as "What is the Church of Christ?" "Who are the Disciples?" "What do they believe and teach?"

1st. "What is the Church of Christ?" or "Who are the Disciples?" In a general way I should answer, that about 1800 years ago, ONE JESUS, THE CHRIST, proposed to found a Society, saying "on this Rock," meaning a certain foundation, "I will build my Church." This he accomplished by certain divinely inspired and qualified men, called Apostles, whom he sent into all the world to plant churches, and train them according to his direction. "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Matt. xxviii. 19. The Church of Christ is that society, and disciples of Christ are those who have thus acknowledged and follow Jesus. But that general answer would not meet the special question. What is the Church of Christ as represented in this congregation? I answer, this congregation and those in fellowship with it represent a movement to set forth and maintain the original platform and teaching in which Christ and the Apostles placed the Church at the beginning.

2. Where do you find that original position? Answer. Not in the uncertain history of the conflict of creeds, nor on the corrupted pages of ecclesiastical history, but in the original records and writings of those who founded the Church. We start with the universal Protestant consent that "the Bible is the only book of God," and therefore can be the only book of authority in a divine religion. We know not anything certainly about God, or how he regards us, or of his purposes concerning us; or how we shall worship him aright, or what we must do to be saved, or what there is of another world, save what God has told us in this book. Looking into this book we find that he does not accept the "will worship" of men. To his former covenant people who had departed from his law he said "Hear the word of the Lord. . . give ear unto the Law of our God. . . when ye come to appear before me who hath required this at your hands," Is. i. 10-12. And an apostle tells us that "commandments and doctrines of men—have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship—but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh," that is worship regulated by a human standard and not by divine authority. In truth every answer to man's inquiry for things spiritual and eternal must come from God through his word. The word declares itself to be "able to make us wise unto Salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good work," 2 Tim. iii. 15-17. Not to accept this is not to take the word of God at its own valuation. Therefore the Disciples, according to a prominent writer, (R. Richardson) "will have nothing to do with anything in religion that is not at least as old as the New Testament."

Where the word of God closes, authority closes and certainly ends. What has been added since has been

added by man, and is of man, and where man begins confusion and uncertainty begins.

3. But do not all Christians accept the Bible? Yes, but as nearly all have their man-made creeds by which they interpret the Bible, as standards of authority in faith and doctrine, if they do not make void the word, they weaken the voice of its authority. Wherever creeds, written or unwritten, are exalted to authority and made tests of communion they draw the mind away from the paramount authority of the word. Just as far as the creed is allowed to interpret the Bible the power of the Bible is lost; the creed becomes the bond of a Church, and just as far as that is a departure from the New Testament the character of the Church of Christ is lost. The more secularian may read the Bible as a duty, or for its history and literature but not to learn what he must believe and do. His creed or his church directs him in that.

It has been well said by a prominent preacher among the Disciples, (A. Proctor) "If a creed contains less than the Bible then it contains too little; if it contains more, it contains too much; if it contains anything different, it is wrong, but if it contains precisely the same it is not a creed but the Bible."

Sectarianism in its best forms is but partial, instead of being full and complete. Each party is supposed to hold some one particular form of truth or doctrine, or form of government of which it becomes the possessor and exponent. They thus become branches, as they are called, of the original Church of Christ which has become invisible, covered up by the branches. Now you can only have the Church of Christ as it is allowed to hold all divine truth; as it stands upon the original foundation, as it is allowed to receive all men on the terms of its original fellowship, as it set forth the ordinances in their original form, place and meaning, as it holds to the same glorious hope as in the beginning, and walks in the same law of love toward all men.

4. But we cannot all be of the same opinion, and therefore cannot understand the Bible alike. You are both right and wrong. We cannot be of the same opinion, nor is it desirable perhaps that we should be. The Bible recognizes differences of opinion, and still commands us to "speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions, but be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment," 1 Cor. i. 10. It is oneness of faith the Bible asks and not oneness of opinion. Oneness of faith is possible, and it is this oneness makes the Church of Christ one Church or body, Ep. iv. 4-6. The Disciples make the clear distinction between faith and opinion. What ever rests upon undeniable testimony, or is clearly revealed is to be received as a matter of faith; where this is not the case, but where there is room for inference and deduction there is room for opinion, and it may be truthfully said with a distinguished writer (R. R.) that "where the Bible speaks there is no room for opinion; and if any one holds a view which contravenes any declaration of Holy Writ, this is not an opinion but actual disbelief of so much of the word of God."

It were strange if in a book like the Bible with such rich and varied contents there were no room for opinions, but the Disciples hold the unique position that we are not to pitch separate tents on the little hillocks of opinion and throw the shot and shell of opinion into each others camp, but to camp together in the great camp of Faith in the Lord Jesus "who loved the Church and gave himself for it," and storm the camp of unbelief. We do not reject

creeds because of the opinions they contain, but because they are made tests of fellowship and exclude men whom the Lord has received. We say "in Faith unity, in opinion liberty, in all things charity." Let him who holds an opinion hold it as to himself. Therefore the Church of Christ, rejecting theological and dogmatic creeds as of authority and as tests of communion, exalts the Scripture above all, and on the basis of Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed therein, pleads for the unity of the people of God. Or in other words to restore the order and teaching of the Gospel as it was in the beginning.

5. What do the Disciples teach about the Trinity, regeneration, saving faith, baptism, etc.? Here are questions too numerous to answer now. I will simply say, in many things we agree in substance with other evangelical Christians, but it is our rule in speaking of Bible things to do so in Bible words. We just believe and say what the Bible says about them, no more, no less. Men, in common theological terms to express their ideas, have built up their *doxies* and given a meaning to Scripture it never had before. "If men cannot express their ideas in the language of the Bible, it is pretty good evidence that their ideas are not in the Bible." If the Scriptures are not plain enough in the all important things of salvation, who can make them plainer? Who has authorized uninspired men to make plainer, or put in better language, what inspired men have given us? I may say here, without taking time to develop them, that we accept and teach the following things: "The Divine inspiration of the Scriptures of both Testaments. The revelation of God in the New Testament in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The alone and all-sufficiency of the Bible as a revelation of the Divine character and will, and of the gospel of grace; and, as a rule, of faith and practice. The Divine excellency and worthiness of Jesus as the Son of God; his perfect humanity as the son of man; and his official authority and glory as the Christ, the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King—who is to instruct us in the way of life, redeem us from sin and death, and reign in and over us as the rightful Sovereign of our being and disposer of our destiny. The personal and perpetual mission of the Holy Spirit, to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and to dwell in believers as their Comforter, Strengthener and Sanctifier. The alienation of the race from God, and their entire dependence on the truth, mercy and grace of God, through Jesus the Christ, and revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the gospel for regeneration, sanctification, adoption and life eternal. The necessity of faith and repentance in order to the enjoyment of salvation here and a life of obedience in order to everlasting life. The perpetuity of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as divine ordinances to the end of time. The obligation to observe the first day of the week as the Lord's day, in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by acts of worship such as the New Testament teaches, and by spiritual culture such as befits this memorial day. The Church of Christ, a divine institution composed of such as by faith and baptism have openly confessed the name of Christ: with its appointed rulers and ministers for the edification of Christians and the conversion of the world. The necessity of righteousness, benevolence and holiness on the part of professed Christians. The fulness and freeness of salvation offered in the gospel to all who accept it on the terms proposed.

The final punishment of the ungodly by an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." (Abrev. from "Our Position.") In conclusion, the Disciples do not claim that they are the entire Church of Christ. They who everywhere love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ are his. But we advocate not only the possibility and desirability but the necessity of the Church restored to the original ground of its unity and to its first love in order to meet the purpose of its Lord to bring the world to faith. Blessed is he who finding the path that leads to Zion will walk therein. Who will stand on the Lord's side?

"While the Days Are Going By."

S. M. D.

The familiar lines under the above heading contain wise words of admonition and exhortation. They remind us of the necessity of working now if we would work at all. The "lonely hearts to cherish" and the "weary souls who perish" are here to day, but we say, "So busy to day—no time to spare—to-morrow we will visit and help them." Are there not still twelve hours in the day? Surely some one of those we can give to the work that the Master left to our hands when He returned to take His seat on the right hand of God. While here on earth He gave all His time to just such work as this. He went about doing good, thus leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. But many of us are so filled with daily cares and duties within our own homes that we feel it to be impossible to reach beyond these. Well, the exhortation is

Let your face be like the morning
While the days are going by

This may seem to be hardest of all, and we ask how is it possible amid the petty worries and annoyances of daily life, that jar so upon our feelings always to wear a face like the morning—a morning without clouds. Only those who sit at the Master's feet, with their faces ever toward the light, can continually reflect the serene brightness of His presence. Mary chose that blessed place, but there was room for Martha, too, and I have often thought that Martha needed it even more than Mary, for she had taken up the burdens of life, and was troubled about many things.

It is true that the "world is full of sighs, full of sad and weeping eyes." It always will be so while sin has dominion over our race. But if we would "help our fallen brother rise" we must wear upon our faces the brightness of the joy and hope that fills our own hearts. I have sometimes met people upon the street—strangers to me—whose faces were so full of peace and light from their perfect faith in God, that I caught the reflection, like a gleam of sunshine after rain, and went on my way feeling that I had received a blessing for the day.

It is our privilege to honour our Lord by showing to all that *He is able to fill us with all joy and peace in believing.*

There are so many—Oh! so many—who need help. The victims of intemperance, and those who suffer from the curse through others, need our daily help. The millions who stretch out their hands to us from the darkness of heathenism, and the thousands around us who are neglecting the great salvation, all need our ceaseless efforts to help them. As followers of the Lord we cannot, we dare not, live to ourselves for a single day. If the Spirit of Christ be in us we will constantly seek to know

The good we all may do
While the days are going by.

"Christ Died For Us."

W. M. C.

Paul says that we are all dead, Rom. v. 12; II. Cor. v. 12; I. Cor. xv. 22. Now, I do not intend in this article to enquire into the nature of the death inflicted upon us, on account of the sin of our first parents, or of the nature of the atonement, but rather to bring out a few thoughts on what we may call substitution. Why were sacrifices offered before the death of Christ? They prefigured Christ's death. They atoned for sin. But chiefly the animal died and man lived. And that is substitution. We will cite a few cases. Our first parents sinned a sin unto death; "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,"—Gen. ii. 17. Did they die on the day they ate of the forbidden fruit? No, not in the sense in which we all die on account of that sin. Why? Because substitutes were provided, no doubt, in the animals slain to make the coats of skin for Adam and Eve. Lives were taken, but they were the lives of animals. They died and man lived. Of course it was but a temporary provision of a temporary substitution for a temporary relief for man; but it was the dawning of a plan to be afterwards developed in the death of Christ, and man was clothed in coats procured by the sacrifice of innocent life.

Again, Abraham was commanded to slay his son Isaac. Did he actually do so? No! At the last moment, just when the last act in the drama was about to be finished, and the curtain would fall God stopped him and provided a substitute in the ram caught in the thicket by the horns. The ram died and Isaac lived.

When Israel was about to leave Egypt, the last of the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians was the death of the firstborn; but, in the paschal lamb, God provided a substitute for the firstborn. In the families of Israel the lamb died and their firstborn lived. God then claimed the firstborn, but made a provision, so that by complying with the conditions annexed to it, the firstborn of man and beast might be redeemed. The substitute died and the redeemed lived. God has declared that "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Yet, in the law sin-offerings were provided, and the sinner was to place his hands upon the head of the sin-offering and confess his sins, then the animal was slain and the sinner lived.

Christ has died for us, as our substitute, as our Passover, or Paschal Lamb, as our Sin-offering, as the Firstborn of the Father; and no substitute was permitted in his case, no ram caught in the thicket, no paschal lamb was ready to die. No sin-offering to take his place. Man laid hands upon him, but they were not hands of Faith, of Penitence, of Confession, of humble Obedience, but cruel, bloodthirsty, wicked hands, and he must suffer that most cruel death at the hands of cruel men. Christ died and man lives. As the sacrifices lived again in the redeemed lives, so Christ, who is risen, is to live in us, "That they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again."

It is an old saying, and one of fearful and fathomless import, that we are forming characters for eternity. Forming characters! Whose? Our own or others? Both; and in that momentous fact lies the peril and responsibility of our existence. Who is sufficient for the thought? Thousands of your fellow-beings will yearly enter eternity with characters differing from those they would have carried thither had you never lived. The sunlight of that world will reveal your fingerprints in their primary formations, and in their successive strata of thought and life.