

the fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Other things are recorded of this congregation distinct from those cited, such as their having a community of goods, and for this purpose selling their possessions of houses and lands. But these are as peculiar to them and as distinct from the instituted order of worship, as was the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Their being constantly in the Temple is also added as a peculiarity in their history. But it may be correctly inquired, How are we to distinguish between those things which are as peculiar to them as their vicinity to the Temple, and those things which were common to them with other christian congregations? This must be determined by a comparison of the practice of other congregations as recorded by the same historian, or as found in the letters to the churches written by the apostles. From these we see that no other christian congregation held a community of goods; no other sold their possessions as a necessary part of christian religion; no others met constantly in the Temple. Indeed, Luke, from his manner of relating the order of worship and means of edification practised by this congregation, evidently distinguishes what was essential from what was circumstantial. For after informing us, verses 41 and 42, of the distinct parts or acts of their social worship, he adds in a separate and detached paragraph the history of their peculiarities. "Now," adds he, "all they who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods," &c. This, too, is separated from the account of their social acts of worship by a statement of other circumstances, such as the fear that fell upon every soul, and the many wonders and signs which were done by the apostles. From a minute attention to the method of the historian, and from an examination of the historical notices of other congregations, it is easy to distinguish between what was their order of worship and manner of edification from what was circumstantial. And, indeed, their whole example is binding on all christians placed in circumstances similar to those in which they lived at that time. For though the selling of their possessions is mentioned as a part of the benevolent influences of the christian religion clearly understood and cordially embraced, as a voluntary act suggested by the circumstances of the times and of their brethren; yet were a society of christians absolutely so poor that they could live in no other way than by the selling of the possessions of some of the brethren, it would be an indispensable duty to do so, in imitation of him who, though he was rich, made himself poor, that the poor, though his impoverishing himself, might be made rich. But still it must be remarked that even in Jerusalem at this time the selling of houses and lands was a voluntary act of such disciples as were possessors of them, without any command from the apostles to do so. This is most apparent from the speech of Peter addressed to Ananias and his wife; who seem to have been actuated by a false ambition, or love of praise, in pretending to as high an exhibition of self denial and brotherly love as some others. Their sin was not in selling their property, nor was it in only contributing a part; but it was in lying, and pretending to give the whole, when only a part was communicated. That they were under no obligation from any law or command to sell their property, Peter avows in addressing them, and for the purpose too of inculcating them more and