

Each man is called to do his own *thinking*—to exercise his own opinion—to give every man who asketh him, a reason for the faith within him.

Critical questions come up before a church. These are to be settled by the judgment of this company of Christian men and women—under the guidance of God. Each member is to bring his or her stock of wisdom and experience, that the whole church may be strengthened and enriched thereby. Many Christians lack in this matter—continue “babes” in Christ. A Christian must *grow*. I knew a woman, who, from a disease she had in childhood played with her *dolls*, and acted as a little child, at the age of fifty-five. So there are “children” in religious experience. The New Testament is continually talking of such; but always advises them to grow out of it; and it is because Congregationalism is likely to minister to such needed growth, that I recommend and practice it.

3. Because of the spiritual family-life there is in it. One is our Teacher—our Father—our Master. And the church is just an enlarged *family*. When the Lord gains possession of people, he does not keep them to Himself! He passes them over, as it were, to the church—“adds” them to the church; as on the day of Pentecost.

Above all other necessity is the necessity of giving ourselves to the Lord! And so there is no room for any priest to have dominion over your faith—no room for selfishness—or for faction. A man must not say “I’ll join the church, because it will do me good;” but rather that he may *do* good! and promote the welfare of the whole church.

4. Because it inculcates in our churches self-government. For a *nation*—for every nation—self-government is the highest political ideal. An Autocrat, if a good man, might give a good government: or a noble and pure aristocracy—but none of these can be equal to a grand self-government; learning from its very follies and mistakes, and daily growing better and purer. So in the church. Possibly a “Bishop” or a “Conference” might give good rule. But still *something* would be wanting. We hold to self-government, and the Divine Presidency of Jesus Christ. Our churches are necessarily Democracies; all the members with equal right and power. And we thrust it

upon the whole church, that it shall govern all its affairs according to Christ’s will: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” I venture to think that that is the higher ideal of church-life; and as such I commend it to you.

I have been assuming throughout, that our churches are composed of Christians—converted men and women, else the churches will perish—as indeed they would deserve to do. Nowhere is a better description of A CHURCH, than is found in Article xix of the Church of England:—

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men [*faith-full*, that is “full of faith,”] in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

Get to the heart and core of the Article; and you will see that it is the very basis of what we hold, and on which we take our stand, as to the constitution and formation of a CHURCH. We, as redeemed men and women, say to the world around us, “come with us, and we will do thee good!” Christ has left powers and privileges to His Church, but till a man gives himself to Christ, and becomes *his*, he has no such rights and privileges.

You may say I have been in the clouds—giving only some beautiful *ideal*. An Irish cabman got a “fare” by recommending his nag as “a poetical horse!” When the gentleman found that the horse could hardly be made to move on at all, he asked the driver to explain. “Your honor,” said he, “I call him a *poetical horse*, for he always goes a great deal faster in imagination than in reality!” Yet our ideal is all right: the question for us is, “how can our ideal be brought about?” Only thus—by each member trying, day and night, to represent Christ, on the earth. Your friend is far away—or dead. But to you his *photograph* speaks, as it does not to another: you dwell upon the portraiture of your friend. The *church* is a photograph of Christ before the world—for the world to study—to admire, and copy. Franklin recommended a man to practice some particular *virtue* every month. By our liberality of *giving*, for example, we can represent to the world the liberality of Christ in giving himself for the world. A recent millionaire died, who had few or no claims upon him of relatives, and who was greatly admired