

On Christian Unity

(Continued from last number)

Such being the endearing nature of the Christian union, such ought to be the manifestation of it given by every assembly of Christ's disciples. And as every assembly or church of Christ which corresponds, in some good measure, with this description, and which endeavors to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" makes Christian unity visible, so it bears a faithful testimony for Jesus and fulfils its appointed highly responsible office of giving a just representation of Christ's "one body."

It is deserving of our careful notice how frequently and with what impressive earnestness the Apostle Paul refers to the endearing nature of the Christian union, and the proper manifestation of Christian unity. In his different Epistles addressed to the churches. In the Epistle to the Romans we find him saying, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many (or rather, so we the many), are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. xii. 4, 5). When writing to the Colossians he says, "The body is of Christ... the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. ii. 17, 19). In the Epistle to the Ephesians we read, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. vi. 4, 6). And in 1 Cor. he states, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." And in what follows he draws out a comparison between the body of Christ and the human body at full length.

Familiar as we all are with this comparison, there is reason to believe that its designed meaning and many of the lessons it teaches are frequently overlooked. Why, it may be profitable to ask, is an assembly of believers, such as the assembly at Corinth to whom Paul wrote, united in faith and love to the Lord Jesus, and united by ties of love and sympathy to one another, compared to the human body? There must be a close correspondence between the two; there must be a peculiar fitness in the comparison, otherwise the Apostle would not have been led to illustrate the one truth so frequently by means of the other.

To whom, then, was this comparison designed to apply? Was it designed to apply to the mystical body of Christ, or to what is sometimes called the Holy Catholic (i.e., the Holy Universal church), which correctly viewed is the same thing; or was it designed to apply to an individual assembly of disciples? It was designed, we apprehend, to apply to both. In its highest and truest sense it applies to the mystical body of Christ—the church universal; but that it applies also to a particular assembly of believers, or, in other words, to "churches of the saints" in their individual capacity is evident from the Apostle's applying it to the church at Corinth, to whom he was writing. "Now," he says, "ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Thus are we impressively taught that as the human body is one, so also is Christ's spiritual body, the church, one. But the mystical "one body" of

Christ is no where to be seen in this world; nor is the church universal any where to be seen on earth as one body, except by representation. Where then is that representation given? It is given, Scripture answers, by every scripturally constituted church which endeavors to keep the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In such a body alone—a body which is the institution of infinite wisdom—is Christian unity manifested, and the "oneness" of Christ's body to be seen.

In the human body, while there are many members, there is perfect oneness; so is it also with the spiritual "one body" of Christ. It is at the same time one, and many. It is one, having one animating Spirit, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." It is many, inasmuch as it is composed of many members while those many members have various gifts bestowed on them for the benefit of the whole; some of this kind, some of that; some more, some fewer, some qualifying them for one office, some for another; but all, manifold as they are, designed to subserv the good of the whole body.

Christian unity in the apostolic age, we are thus impressively taught, was emphatically a spiritual unity. It did not consist in any visible union among the various churches then in existence, through their being subjected to the same earthly head or jurisdiction; but in their being all united to the same Head in heaven; in their all having the same faith and hope; in their participation of the same privileges; and in their all being animated by the same spirit, who through dwelling in them made them "the habitation of God through the Spirit." As by one Spirit they had all been baptized "into one body," so were they all privileged to drink of the same Spirit which diffused a common feeling of love and sympathy throughout all the members. The Lord Jesus foretold that his disciples should be known by their love one towards another. "By this," he said, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples; if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). In the apostolic age, we cannot doubt, this memorable prediction was truly fulfilled; for the hearts of the first followers of Jesus were so enlarged by love to their divine Master and love to each other for his sake, that it exercised extended not only to those with whom they were immediately united in the fellowship of the Gospel, but produced its genuine effects in a mutual interchange of fraternal affection and good offices through the whole Christian community.

Having thus endeavored to show wherein the oneness for which our Lord prayed in behalf of his people consists: First, as it respects Christ's mystical body, the "one body" of the redeemed; secondly, as it respects those of the human family who make a scriptural profession of Christ's name; what, let us now enquire, are some of the inferences and lessons which seem deducible from the consideration of this important subject?

First. It seems peculiarly sorrowful to the clearing of our notions on this and other important subjects, to keep the distinction taught and implied throughout Scripture between the visible and invisible union and unity of Christ's people distinctly in view. In virtue of their union with Christ and with one another, there is an invisible unity existing among all the members of Christ's mystical body; of this spiritual unity there is a visible representation given by every assembly of Christ's disciples united on their profession of the one faith, walking together in love in the observance of all things the Lord Jesus has commanded,

and practice error, which does not, cannot, benefit them for time or eternity.

Viewed in that aspect, Christian unity is much perfect than when viewed in the... Though the one is a divinely sited representation of the other, to man's failures and imperfections this mortal state, it is often, indeed at best, but an imperfect repetition. But the representation will in every case be more or perfect as different churches bear faithful testimony to Jesus, by faith their appointed function and... In visible unity accordingly, it may be much fluctuation; it is manifested much more perfectly one time than at another, or in one place more than another; but, vital invisible unity of Christ's real body is always perfect; it is making continual progress, and will continue to advance till all the faithful appear with their Head in glory. The visible union manifested by "the churches of the saints" will come to its appointed end; but the invisible unity of Christ's mystical body will continue for ever. The union of "Christ and the church"—that is of the invisible church with her Head, indissoluble. On this point the words of Jesus are explicit: "I lay down my life for the sheep;... my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple; my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God; and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." "When the church shall be glorified, she will be a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. And at the marriage supper of the Lamb" all the members of his mystical body shall be brought into the Palace of the King to behold his glory and to enjoy his society and the society of the redeemed in endless felicity.

(To be continued.)

Re Bro. Lediard's Question.

A Parable.—And it came to pass that two men desired to co-operate in work when needed. To exchange work and keep up friendship and union. John said to James, help me to sow a field with oats. James: O yes, John, let us work in union—help each other. I am ready. Ah, where did you get the seed? John: From an orthodox seedstore. Do you think it will grow? James: O, yes, let us sow the field. They took dinner together and parted in friendship. James, reaching home, told his wife, who said: James, do you not remember a saying of Jesus, called the "Golden rule"? James: I have preached from that. Wife: Then how could you help the man to ruin his farm? James: I know the seed, and what would be the probable results; but I did not like to hurt his feelings; he liked the seed so much. Wife: When John's farm is ruined, and he lies sick, and you are called to visit him, how will you feel? Can you not undo the work? James: Oh, wife, it is too late to correct my fatal mistake. "I know my duty; and did it not."

The denominations have all more or less truth. And, if tried by the Bible, more or less error. All the truth they teach and practice, we ought to cheerfully acknowledge, approve, and encourage; and for which be thankful. They also teach

and practice error, which does not, cannot, benefit them for time or eternity.

- (1) Infant sprinkling, instead of scriptural baptism.
(2) Salvation by faith alone.
(3) Faith a gift of God. (Abstract.)
(4) Faith a condition of feeling in the heart the result of a direct operation of the Spirit, without the word.
(5) A sinner is the "natural man," so totally depraved, or dead, that he cannot believe unto righteousness.
(6) That a sinner is accounted guilty of Adam's transgression, called "Original sin," "Being born in sin," etc.
(7) That one or more men may pray for the forgiveness of another, and God will grant it.
(8) That sectarianism is made by God a great blessing to the world. That divisions have been a blessing to the church. And that Union, formal or organic, among all believers, cannot be effected.
(9) That numbers of God's children live days, and months, and years, absolutely free from sin.
(10) And that the law or covenant of Moses is obligatory upon Christians. Hence we are to keep the Sabbath day, while most all of them, every week, disregard the law concerning the Sabbath, etc., etc., etc.

Now, can we, without a concession of aantage ground, which cost much work with them in the above ten items, so as to lend any countenance, approval or manifest the spirit of "Godspeed"? Can we do so without being in some degree a concealed or secret enemy? Would we not be unfaithful to our trust, and to them? Had the leading men, in the Current Reformation, pursued such an unfaithful course, would the denominations have been as far on in independent their approximation of a proper value of human creeds, when compared with the word of God? Would so many of the more intelligent and God-fearing among them be lamenting the existence, and results, of divisions? Would there be as much truth taught by tongue and pen by them to-day? Bro. Lediard would answer all these negatively. In our intercourse with them—in our work with them—we should be, we must be, kind, courteous, friendly, showing an interest in their present and eternal well-being. Recognizing, acknowledging thankfully all the truths they teach. But it likewise is obligatory, imperative upon us to be faithful to the Great Teacher, Our Master, and faithful to his word, and faithful to them. Hence we endorse no error in faith or practice. If our presence among them, our work with them, do this, i.e., endorse error, by all means keep away. Be honest. Be honorable. If our work among them; intercourse with them, will result in winning souls to Christ, building up believers and benefiting them, with no compromise or concession of truth, and in no sense contrary, in any particular, the word of the Lord, withhold not thy hand. No rule can be laid down with all details. The Master's will must be our guide. Avoid all rancor. "Let your speech be always with grace." Some of them are to be pitied. Some are to be blamed. "Do wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Remember that we will meet them before the Judge of quick and dead. Make a wise reference to that day in all that you say and do.

It is suggested that before racking our brain to find a safe and profitable course of treatment of the denominations, it might be wise to cogitate a course of action towards those who wear the same name, where there

arises a difference of judgment, on some matters. We all claim the law of liberty, independence of thought and research, and may reach different conclusions on some matters. Will it pay in the end to misrepresent—to misconstrue each other's motives? Will it pay to hurl brickbats, snakes' heads, ragged stones at each other? To meet with bland smiles all who are on our side, and pass the others without recognition? Will it pay to elbow a man off the track for whom Christ died—whom he has saved? An old book says "Let all your things be done in Love." Partiality to be avoided. When ye sin so against the brethren ye sin against Christ. How? if we study the things that make for peace! with a view to a practical understanding of the subject? Some things said by tongue and pen may be 'witnessed' by the "inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me." My soul! think of it. It would be well not to divorce love and faithfulness.

GRON.

A Simple Creed.

FACTS REGARDING THE DISCIPLES OR CHURCH OF CHRIST.

At the present time considerable attention is being given to the Disciples or Church of Christ, a band of religious workers which while of comparatively small, but growing, proportions in Canada is a large and influential one in the United States. The New York World in stating the aim of what Rev. Prof. Briggs, of that city, has called "an earnest, active, Christian people," has among other things in a recent issue the following:—

"Although less than seventy years old this religious denomination ranks fourth among the denominations of the country, numbering nearly as many communicants as both Congregationalists and Episcopals combined. This will be a surprise to many in the Atlantic cities, where the Disciples are now only beginning the work. As a church it is best known in America. It has, however, been carried to the British Isles, where it is spreading rapidly. In Australia it has had a most extraordinary growth, there being in the city of Melbourne alone twenty-eight churches of this faith. Disciples have twice filled the President's chair. The present Speaker pro tem. of the House of Representatives is a Disciple, and a very large number more in both Houses are Disciples. Governor Chase, of Indiana, is a Disciple preacher. So also is ex-Congressman Owen, now Commissioner of Immigration. Garfield was a devoted member of the Christian Church. So little is known of the faith professed by the Disciples that a word in this regard may not be out of place here. The plea for the Disciples is for Christian union on the basis which Scripture furnishes. All human creeds are rejected as the cause of dissension, and division, and barriers in the way of Christian union. Their creed is, they think, the true Apostles' Creed, the creed on which all Christians may be one: 'I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.' This is, they say, a confession of faith broad enough to admit any sincere believer into the church. They endeavor to do away with sectarian peculiarities, such as shut off Christians from each other. This is why they wear no sectarian name, calling themselves simply Disciples or Christians, and their church the Christian Church or Church of Christ."

In Canada the Disciples are thought to number about 8,000, and are represented by churches and missions in many of the principal cities and towns of the Dominion. Toronto is the