THE WAY OF FAITH

GELDER EVANGELIS
IN

AN EVIL TIME.

BY

H. H. S.

LONDON
JAS. CARTER, 13, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

SHEFFIELD:
C. STANIFORTH, BIBLE AND TRACT STALL, MARKET HALL.

[redacted]

THE WAY OF FAITH IN AN EVIL TIME:

A WORD OF WARNING AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father."—1 JOHN ii. 24.

GOD has spoken, and we have His word; but policy is not faith. Reasoning about the things of God, instead of receiving His testimony, is unbelief in activity. Faith knows no written authority but the word of God, and rests with unquestioning confidence on what He says.

The Scriptures are all-sufficient. They are able to furnish the man of God unto *all* good works; and with the indwelling, and operations of the Holy Spirit, he is enabled to pursue his way in peace amid all the confusion and strife of Christendom.

The final and conclusive authority of the written word, in every phase of the Church's history on earth, is repeatedly set forth in the writings of the apostles. Paul, in his last inspired letter, when in view of martyrdom, pressed on Timothy the authority and sufficiency of "all scripture." Peter, when tracing the fatal working of evil in the

professing Church, spoke of judgment beginning at the house of God, and enjoined us to beware of "false teachers," and to be "mindful of the *words* which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the *commandment* of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour." Jude also, who traces the course of the professing Church right on to the apostacy, exhorts us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"; while John, in the Revelation, lays it down as a mark of the faithful, even unto the coming of the Lord, that they keep His "word," and do not deny His "name."

Without the word of God there can be no faith, and "without faith it is impossible to please God." Every state of the Church on earth has been anticipated and provided for in the Scriptures, and the Spirit abides; so that we have unmistakeable direction and power until the "shout" at the Lord's coming, and we are caught up to be for ever with Him.

SEPARATION FROM EVIL.

It may be noticed all through Scripture that God's people have always been called to depart from evil, and live for the glory of God, because they are His people. In olden time it was said, "Holiness becometh thine house, O Jehovah, for ever"; and we often read, "So shalt thou put evil away from among you." And in the New

Testament, "Be ye holy"; "Be ye imitators of God as dear children"; "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity," and the like, because our relationship to God admits of no lower walk. We find that even the heathen were sometimes severely dealt with for their sinful ways, because they ought to have known something of the invisible God from the visible things which He had created. When, however, our Lord came, who was God manifest in flesh, and declared the Father, we hear Him saying, "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." But the death of the Son of God upon the tree as our Sin-bearer not only set forth the grace and righteousness of God, but His infinite holiness and hatred of sin, and His unsparing judgment of it in forsaking His own Son, who was perfectly loving and infinitely loved. Since then, the life and walk looked for from us as God's dear children is such as is suited to the Father and the Son, with whom we are, through grace, brought into everlasting relationship; so that now there can be no allowance of evil of any kind. Still, all the later writings of the apostles show how few abode in the truth; and they foresaw that the time would come "when they will not endure sound doctrine . . . and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables"; and that, through professors of

Christianity, "the way of truth would be evil spoken of." We must never forget that He who is in the midst of the assembly discerns everything, for His "eyes are as a flame of fire"; and yet is He competent to judge all evil, for His feet are "like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." His words, "If we judge ourselves, we should not be judged," have been a comfort to many. Still, on the other hand, "when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." To explain or modify evil is certainly not to judge it; and self-judgment is deeper than that.

Nothing can be more clearly laid down in Scripture, than that God looks for holiness in His people—individual holiness, and assembly holiness, or separation from evil. As to the former, we are told to "abhor that which is evil," walk as children of God, members of the body of Christ, and as indwelt by the Holy Spirit, because we have through grace been brought into those dear relationships; and duties flow from known relationships. As to the assembly, we read that we are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"; therefore it is said, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person"; "purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump"; and other Scriptures. In Joshua's time, God would not stand by His people to overcome their enemies, but allowed their adversaries

to overcome them, because of one man's sin in the congregation, until they had judged it, and cleared themselves of it. (Joshua vii.)

When, however, the assembly on earth, through unfaithfulness to the Lord, became like a great house with vessels to dishonour mixed up with vessels to honour, so that evil could not be *purged out*, the Spirit of God then admonished the faithful individually to *purge themselves from* evil by decided separation from vessels to dishonour. So fully is this, in a time of ruin, according to the Lord's mind, that great encouragement is given to the believer who is thus faithful to the Lord. "If a man therefore purge himself from these [vessels to dishonour], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Tim. ii. 21.) However fallen, corrupted, or demoralized the professing Church may be, we have here the clearest direction to separate from evil, with the most blessed assurance of God's favour; so that we may well encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. Enough, we trust, has been advanced to show the folly and uncleanness of professing to have unity among God's saints without separation from evil. Even a lady was warned by an apostle not to receive into her house, or even salute, a teacher, who brought not the doctrine of Christ, because by so doing she would be a partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 9–11.)

Besides these divinely-given instructions on this solemn subject, Scripture also distinguishes between moral evil and doctrinal evil; and, lest we should think lightly of the latter, we find it often dealt with in the word of God in the most decided and uncompromising manner. The natural conscience sometimes recognizes and recoils from *moral* evil; but to discern and repudiate *doctrinal* evil we need to be spiritual, for it is always in some way or other against the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the truth." True it is that Scripture makes no allowance for a stain of *moral* delinquency being tolerated, because of Him "in the midst" being "holy" and "true."

The falsehood of Ananias and Sapphira was a sin unto death. The Corinthian fornicator was to be "put away"; and the apostle, in spirit with the assembly so acting, would deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Saints were to keep no company with one called a brother who was guilty of moral evil. (1 Cor. v.)

When, however, *doctrinal* evil is brought before us, it is often so mixed up with truth, so pretentious, so lauded, or endorsed by "men of renown" (Numbers xvi. 2), that it needs a soul to be before the Lord over His word in dependence on His Spirit, in order to detect the uncleanness, and judge it. Evil doctrine is not discerned by our reasoning powers (which false doctrine always enlists on its side), and though its malignant character may not

be perceived at first, a God-fearing soul refuses it, because it is not "as it is written"—"not after Christ." (Col. ii. 8.)

In the apostles' days, holders of unsound doctrine were dealt with in the most decided way. On one occasion, Paul found that two teachers were "saying" what was contrary to the truth. To some it might appear to be a small matter their "saying that the resurrection was past already," but it was not so in an apostle's judgment; for he knew that "their *word* will eat as doth a canker." So foul and corrupting was this evil doctrine that we read, "Who concerning the truth have erred, saying" (observe *saying*—he dealt with what they *said*) "that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." (2 Tim. ii. 15–18.) In the former epistle to Timothy, the apostle tells us that Hymenæus and Alexander had put away a good *conscience*, and concerning *faith* had made shipwreck, whom, added the apostle, "I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to *blaspheme*." Thus we find that Paul judged them to be blasphemers. (1 Tim. i. 19, 20.)

Again, when certain teachers undermined the precious doctrine of justification by faith by adding circumcision to it, the apostle said, "I would they were even cut off which trouble you"; and again, referring to these teachers, he said, "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from

heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. i. 7, 8; v. 12.)

And more, as shewing the way in which "the truth" was jealously guarded in the apostles' days, we find, when the doctrine of justification by faith was put in jeopardy by an act of no less a person than the apostle Peter, scripture tells us that Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed"; and Peter doubtless accepted the rebuke, and repented of his act. Observe, it was the *act* of Peter's refusing to eat with the Gentile believers, thus setting up the distinction Godward between Jew and Gentile after the cross had proved both equally guilty, and putting up again the middle wall of partition which the death of Christ had broken down, which so undermined the truth of the gospel. (Gal. ii. 11–21.) Let us not fail to see how possible it is even while holding sound doctrine to undermine it by our *acts*. It is beautiful to find Peter after this commending Paul to others as "our beloved brother Paul," and ranking Paul's writings with "the other scriptures." (2 Peter iii. 15, 16.) Such Christian love should read to us a profitable lesson.

This subject becomes increasingly solemn as we trace in Scripture the many warnings, and the terrible effects of evil doctrine given by the Spirit through Paul, Peter, John, and Jude, and also the severe conflicts they passed through, because they

deemed it loyalty to Christ to "fight the good fight of faith," and "contend earnestly for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints." It is evident how decidedly Paul acted, that the truth of the gospel might continue with us, what conflict he had, how anxious he was on going to martyrdom that Timothy should commit the truth he had heard to faithful men, that they might be able to teach others also; and with what earnestness he commended the saints "to God, and to the word of His grace," because he knew that after his departure grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock; also from their own selves should men arise speaking perverse or perverted things, to draw away disciples after them. (Gal. ii. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 2; Acts xx. 29, 30.) Peter warns us against "false teachers" among us, whose pernicious ways *many* would follow, by reason of whom the way of truth should be evil spoken of. (2 Peter ii. 1, 2.) John bids us beware of the "many false prophets," the spirit of antichrist already in the world, and among other tests shews that God's faithful servants have the true Christ before them, and are subject to the apostles' words. (1 John iv. 1–6.) We find the Lord also, by John in the Revelation, charging the assembly at Pergamos with having some among them who were holding doctrine which He hated. (ii. 15.) Jude points out three lines of false doctrine on which the principles bringing

about the apostacy were being woven. First, "The way of Cain"—approach to God without blood; second, "The error of Baalim"—loving the wages of unrighteousness, instead of honouring God by being subject to Him, and loving His people; and third, "The gainsaying of Core," or setting up a false order of priesthood; and it is manifest that these evil doctrines are still almost everywhere at work, and will end in God's judgment of the professing church. In point of fact, it is impossible to read carefully the epistles in dependence on the Spirit, without seeing that one great object of the faithful in the apostles' days was to contend for, preserve, and walk in "the truth" at all costs.

It is evident then, however loathsome to the Lord, who is in the midst of those gathered to His name, *immoral* ways may be, yet nothing can be more resolute than the way in which *evil doctrine* was judged and dealt with in the early state of the church; nor could it be otherwise if we remember that "we are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Let a true sense of what God's assembly is—that He that is "holy" and "true" is in the midst when gathered together to His name; that we are sanctified by the Father's choice, the Spirit's work, and the blood of Jesus unto obedience, and practically sanctified through the truth; and *then* we have a sense in some measure of what suits our Lord, and what is due

to Him. It is well, too, to be reminded that both as regards *doctrine* and *practice* we are warned that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (Gal. v. 9; 1 Cor. v. 6.) The more we ponder the epistles, the more shall we realize our obligation to our Lord to maintain sound doctrine.

SEPARATION FROM EVIL NOT ENOUGH.

In the Old Testament God's people were admonished to "cease to do evil," and "learn to do well"; and in the New Testament we are enjoined to "abhor that which is evil," and "cleave to that which is good," and the like. (Isa. i. 16, 17; Rom. xii. 9.) With Spirit-led, God-fearing souls they always go together. To rest in having separated from evil would be perilous indeed, and might soon incline to greater evil, or end in cold and dry orthodoxy. It is always a critical moment in our history when we are called to purge out the old leaven, or to purge ourselves from vessels to dishonour, lest we should think too much of the act of faithfulness and be puffed up, instead of going on in all things seeking the glory of God in obedience to His word.

With regard to what should always follow separation from evil, we may profitably consider some of the typical illustrations given us in the Old Testament in time of evil, which were followed with the manifest blessing of God. We shall find that in every instance it began with separation from evil.

We repeat, it *began* in this way. Look, for instance, at that mighty work of God which took place in Hezekiah's time. The state of practical piety was so low, and Jehovah's order of blessing so forsaken, that the lamps were out, the doors of the temple closed, and uncleanness lodged in the holy place; thus God's centre for His earthly people was entirely lost. It is difficult to conceive such a state of things among the professed people of God, yet it typically reads to us most solemn lessons. The work of God began by opening the doors, and carrying the *filthiness* out of the house of the Lord. But did they rest in having done this? Certainly not. They went back to that which was (not from the time of Solomon, or David, or Samuel, but) from the beginning. They turned to "the law of Moses, the man of God." Hence they discovered that the Passover had not been kept for a long time "in such sort as it was written." Then they *acted on the word in faith*, as it was written in the beginning, and God's blessing was marvellously with them. "There was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem." It is worthy of notice that the Passover, the death and blood-shedding of the lamb, and feeding on it roast with fire with unleavened bread, reads to us the precious lesson, that, when the Spirit of God is in operation, there will always be the savour and ministry of

the sufferings, death, and blood-shedding of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the Holy Spirit is the Testifier and Glorifier of Him. It is vain to speak of a work of God when the sacrifice and atoning work of the Son of God, and the hope of His coming, are absent from the ministry, and the authority of the written Word not decidedly enforced. (2 Chron. xxix. xxx.)

We find that pretty much the same principles of the Spirit were at work in the great reviving in Josiah's days. The good work *began* with the judgment of what was evil in God's sight. They resolutely purged Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, the groves, the carved and molten images, and broke down the altars of Baalim, and the like. Then they turned to repairing the house of Jehovah; where, having "found a book of the law of Jehovah given by Moses," Shaphan read it before the king, and, with godly fear and brokenness of spirit, the king and others sought to *act upon it.* Having thus purged themselves from what dishonoured Jehovah, and having gone back to that which was from the beginning, "the law of Jehovah by Moses," they kept a passover unto Jehovah in Jerusalem. The Levites were commanded to kill the passover, to sanctify themselves, and prepare their brethren, that they may do according to *the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Moses.* We are further told that they did it "as it is written in the law of Moses." Thus again we find, as in

Hezekiah's time, they first purged themselves in the most decided way from evil; secondly, they went back to that which was from the beginning, as it is written in the law of Moses; and, thirdly, they acted on the word of Jehovah, and kept the passover; and we are told that "there was no passover like to that kept in Israel *from the* days of *Samuel the prophet;* neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept." (2 Chron. xxxiv. xxxv.) How these many sacrifices typically set forth the death and blood-shedding of the Son of God! And we may well ask, Was there ever a time of marked blessing in the Church of God, when the sacrifice of Christ, His sufferings, death, and blood-shedding, were not much before souls, and had not a prominent place in the ministry of God's servants?

Take another encouraging example from the Old Testament—the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, when a small remnant of Judah returned from the captivity to their own land. They were not only separated from Babylon and its evil ways, through the gracious help of God, but they stedfastly refused unholy associations, and disallowed a polluted priesthood. They returned to that which was from the beginning. They first built the altar of the God of Israel, the true connection between Jehovah and the people, to offer burnt-offerings thereon "as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God." Then they

built the house of God, the true centre to which all the faithful in Israel could assemble. At the dedication of the house of God—the temple—a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, were offered; and for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats according to the number of the tribes of Israel. It was a time of great joy.

After this, when the wall of separation had in a difficult time been built by Nehemiah, there was still the maintenance of separation from evil, and going back to that which was from the beginning, and *acting* thereon. "Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood . . . *read in the book in the law of God* distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading . . . and all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." And they found *written in the law* which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. So they made booths *as it is written;* and we are told that "since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness." (Neh. viii.)

It is well also to remember that the examples we have looked at all took place in a time of ruin. This makes them so encouraging to us. The nation of Israel had been broken up long before this, and the ten tribes had gone into captivity in God's

governmental displeasure; yet it is sweet to notice, whether in Hezekiah or others, that though they were feeble and a remnant, God's blessing was largely with them. They too welcomed all Israel to the passover, offered twelve he-goats at the dedication of God's house according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And how very encouraging also to see that, however unholy the people had become toward God, yet when they separated from evil, and turned to Him according to His word with purpose of heart, He abundantly cheered and blessed them. Even in Jeremiah's day, when the people had got so far away from God, and so degraded themselves and dishonoured Him that there was no remedy, the faithful prophet was encouraged by Jehovah to separate from evil. "Therefore thus saith Jehovah . . . if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them." (Jer. xv. 19.) Daniel, too, was a separated man in a scene of evil, and we know how greatly God's power and favour were with him. The ways of God then with the people of Israel read to us most profitable and encouraging lessons; but when we consider what Christianity is, and God's dealings with those who professedly belong to His heavenly people, His assembly, we have to do with what is spiritual, and what suits the Father and the Son as made known to us by the Holy Spirit.

THE ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIANITY.

It has been truly said that there are two prominent essentials of Christianity which could not have been known and enjoyed by any before the day of Pentecost, neither will any on earth have the same blessings after the saints have been taken up to meet the Lord in the air. We refer to the blessed facts of the Man Christ Jesus being glorified at the right hand of God, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, which He there received from the Father, and sent down to form the Church on earth, to indwell every believer, unite all to Christ in heaven and to one another, making us members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Before this, forgiveness of sins, being accounted righteous, being born again, children of God, a people taught and moved by the Spirit, no doubt were known in measure; but till the Son of man was glorified there was no church or assembly on earth.

Till the Lord ascended, and at God's right hand had had a name given Him which is above every name, and He was given to be Head over all to the assembly, which is His body, there was no Head for believers to be united to, and no Holy Spirit sent down to unite them to the Head. It is impossible, therefore, to enter into God's mind about His assembly, or His present work on earth, until the soul has grasped by faith the precious

fact that the Son of man glorified is the "Head," and believers on earth united to Him by the Holy Spirit sent down are the body—"one body." Hence our present relationships are children of God, crying, Abba, Father, members of the body of Christ, and our body the temple of the Holy Spirit, by whom we enjoy these wondrous and most blessed relationships. And if they are not apprehended and enjoyed, how can there be the walk and conduct suited to such exalted blessings? For do not duties necessarily flow from relationships? Then it is happy to serve the Lord, and watch for His coming.

True practical Christianity flows from intercourse and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ where He now is on the Father's throne crowned with glory and honour, in the sense of our new relationships, and consequently owning the presence, operations, and power of the abiding Comforter whom He has sent down. Cleaving to the Lord marks the true heart. Indifference to Him marks the corrupted state of the professing church in its closing days on earth. It has been well said—

> "What think ye of Christ? is the test
> To try both your state and your scheme;
> You cannot be right in the rest
> Unless you think rightly of Him."

It would lead us far beyond the limits of this paper to even take a brief view of the essential characteristics of Christianity; but we cannot

refrain from calling attention to two or three points which bear especially on matters at this moment, and are always of the deepest interest to such as desire to live for the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. It is the Person of the Son, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us, and is now in the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, of whom Scripture testifies. Any error as to His most glorious Person is fatal, and ruins every aspect of divine truth; for He is "the life," "the truth," "the light of the world," "the light of men," "the true light . . . which, coming into the world, lightens every man"—"the true God and eternal life." It is of Him, who finished the work which the Father gave Him to do, that scripture speaks; and we read that "these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." (Observe the connection here between "believing" and "having" life through His name.) Again we read, that "as many as received Him, to them gave He power [or privilege] to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name." The more we contemplate the infinite glory and perfections of the Son of God, the more He becomes the satisfying and commanding Object of our hearts. We

have nothing to dread more than heeding our own thoughts about Him, instead of hearkening to what God has revealed in His word concerning Him, for "no man knoweth the Son but the Father."

It is on His finished work that all our hopes are founded. We could have had no way of approach to God, but by the shedding of His precious blood. Our hopes then are founded on a work which has been done, a work which has glorified God about our sins, a work of eternal efficacy *because of the eternal glory and worth of the One who did it;* so that God can speak of us who believe as "perfected for ever" by that one offering, and "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Blessed ground of approach to God, and of abiding in His presence! Apart from Him we have no life. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." (John vi. 53.)

2. "The man Christ Jesus," "the Son of God," "Jesus"—Jehovah the Saviour, who deigned in such marvellous grace to take the place of a "wearied" One at Sychar's well, who "wept" at the tomb of Lazarus, who "died" at Calvary, has been raised from among the dead by the glory of the Father, and set in "righteousness" on His throne. *There* given to be Head over all to the assembly which is His body. *There* having received the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, He sent Him down as the seal to every one who has

believed the gospel of our salvation, to form the assembly on earth, and care for and minister to all saints during His absence. *There* He is still carrying on in faithfulness and mercy His blessed offices on our behalf. *There* too He sits as having accomplished eternal redemption, till He descends to meet us in the air, before His enemies are made His footstool. One mark of a spiritually-minded person, is his enjoyment of our Lord's present offices in heaven on our account.

3. The gift of the Holy Spirit to those who now have remission of sins (not a measure of the Spirit, but the Person of the Holy Spirit), His indwelling and abiding presence, is entirely new, and consequent upon the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His going back to the Father. The new relationships into which believers are brought; the new and heavenly order of things, as united to Christ in heaven by the Spirit, and to one another; the new character of worship, which "must" now be in spirit and in truth; the new kinds of gifts from Christ in ascension for the building up of the members of the one body; the gospel of the grace of God, and all the administration and ways of the assembly on earth, are among the things which occupied saints "from the beginning." The effects on those so occupied were marvellous; for by being consciously by grace brought into these new and heavenly associations, they became detached from the world, and from

that religiousness which kept men outside the veil at a distance from God; and this principle is equally true to-day.

THAT WHICH WE HAVE HEARD FROM THE BEGINNING.

Occupation with evil is most damaging to our souls; and we get deliverance from it by being occupied with the good. By the truth we resist and overcome error. Enjoying by faith our new and heavenly position, relationships and blessings, we are delivered from false associations. It is by the glorious truth of the unity of the church of God we get separated from all human confederacies. It is by the positive truth of divine revelation that we are set free, and are kept free. Almost all the attacks of infidelity are negative; they give nothing to the soul. But the testimony of Scripture is concerning Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—filling our souls with present blessing, loading us with His gracious benefits, and giving us the prospect of fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. John was inspired to set forth the positive blessings of Christianity, and in a day of evil to urge us to go back to that which was from the beginning, and stedfastly refuse what was not according to Christ.

There can be little doubt that John's epistles were written many years after Paul had departed, who had prophesied that grievous wolves would

enter in, not sparing the flock. Some of these the aged apostle lived to see committing their ravages in the church of God. He saw there were "many antichrists," "many false prophets," teachers who presented a false Christ, not the doctrine of Christ. All kinds of speculations had been advanced as to the person of our Lord, and Unitarianism was evidently coming in. Now what do we find the inspired ministry to us by the apostle was? We may reply, Throughout his epistles he plainly distinguished between true and false, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, in order that faithful souls might judge the evil doctrines, and thus clear themselves of them. Then we find he bids them consider what they had heard from the beginning. "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." Therefore the aged apostle begins his letter with the Person of the Son—"that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." He touches on the all-cleansing virtue of His precious blood, our Lord's perfection in heaven as "the Righteous," His present ministry there as "Advocate with the Father," our present relationship to the Father as His children, the purifying hope of our Lord's coming, and of being with Him and like Him. These are some of the things that were from the beginning, and which

should remain in them. And the promised blessing to such is, "Ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father." Present blessedness indeed! What encouragement for our hearts in such a time as this! Much of John's first epistle occupies us with the divine certainty of our having the present possession of eternal life, a new life "given to us," and this life in His Son; and that the manifestation of it in us, is, in practical righteousness, obedience, and love—to walk as He walked.

In the beginning of Christianity, saints were gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, either to remember Him in showing His death, or for prayer, or for worship and edification, or for discipline, owning the presence and *authority* of the Lord in the midst. (1 Cor. xi; Acts iv.; 1 Cor. xiv.; 1 Cor. v. 4; Matt. xviii. 18–20.)

THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST.

We have only to look into the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians to see the place of prominence given in the beginning of Christianity to Christ as Head of the body. It was "not holding the Head" which exposed the young believers at Colosse to be led astray by the false doctrines of worshipping of angels, ritualism, and philosophy or rationalism. To hold the doctrine of the Headship of Christ is one thing; but to hold the Head in the faith and affections of our souls, and thus be in communion with Him, is another. If the

Lord Jesus Christ occupied our hearts as the Head of all principality and power, and that we are complete or filled full in Him, how could we think of worshipping angels who were created by Him, and made subject to Him? If we are in the enjoyment of our new place in Him of acceptance, nearness, and our present blessings of life, righteousness, and peace, how could we trust to any practice of ritualism or ordinances to bring us nearer?

> "So near, so very near to God,
> Nearer I cannot be;
> For in the person of His Son
> I am as near as He."

But He who is "Head of all principality and power" is "Head of the body," and "Head over all to the body," so that the resources and supplies of all edification to the body are in Him and from Him. (Col. ii. 19; Eph. iv. 16.) It is impossible then to be on the true ground of Christianity, or to be right with the members of His body, without "holding the Head." Few, we believe, are really doing so as in the beginning; and this accounts for much of the present failure and lukewarmness. Some do rise to the thoughts and affections of brotherhood, but this even Jews will know in millennial days; but "head" and "members" belong only, as far as we understand Scripture, to the church or assembly of God. It is only by "holding the Head" that we can look at the members of His body, as it were, with His

eyes, and consider them according to His heart and mind. As we have seen, the body is formed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, "for by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body." And a glance at the epistles is sufficient to show that the practical ways of saints toward our Lord, and toward each other, are largely moulded by the precious truth of Christ in heaven being Head of the body on earth. (Rom. xii.; 1 Cor. xii.; Eph.. i., iv., v.; Col. ii., iii.) If then we would be Christians, practically and scripturally, how can it be unless we go back to that which was from the beginning? Is it not clear that we can only be right according to the Lord's mind with the members of His body, or separate from much that is false by faithfully "holding the head?"

THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Look at another essential of Christianity, the presence of the Holy Spirit come down from heaven to be with us and in us, to lead, teach, comfort, and it may be rebuke us, during our Lord's absence. How we treat this other Comforter is a serious test of our state of soul. If we are going on without the conscious need of His help in prayer, His ministry of the truth, His leading, and without fear lest we grieve Him, does it not plainly show that we are walking in self-confidence, whatever pious garb it may assume? But we must never forget that it is the Person of the

Holy Spirit that is given unto us, and is God's seal to the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ. Not a measure of the Spirit, not merely an emanation from the Godhead, but God the Holy Spirit, by which we are sealed and anointed, who is also the power of unity, and the earnest of the inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory.

Another point to show the unity of the Persons of the Godhead, is, that the Holy Spirit testifies to us of the Father and the Son; and our Lord Jesus acts in us and by us through the Spirit. We find that to some who ministered *to the Lord* and fasted the *Holy Spirit said*, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts xiii. 2.) Again, in the letters to the seven assemblies *the Lord* is the Speaker, and yet He says seven times, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what *the Spirit saith* unto the assemblies." From these and other scriptures it is clear that, if we are occupied with our Lord where He now is, we shall be led and taught of the Spirit; and if we are in dependence on the Spirit, He will occupy us with our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, and with what is for His glory. We read of our Lord having led captivity captive, and received gifts for men. We read also of "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," and all for the building up of the body of Christ.

A truth never to be forgotten is, that "to every

one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ"; so that each member of the body has a place, like a limb in the human body, and a measure of service to fill up, which no one else could do for him, and is needed too for the health and welfare of the body. "The body is not one member, but many"; that is, it is composed of several limbs, so that no one can truthfully say that he does not need all the members of the "one body," as we need all the limbs in their several functions for the health of our natural bodies. This is eminently practical. It is the Christianity which was in the beginning, and is entirely opposite to independency and selfishness. We hesitate not to say that a believer who is not thus honouring the grace and gifts of the members of the body of Christ, not merely in the assembly, but generally, is not *practically* walking as he ought on Christian ground. Much sorrow and many grave mistakes arise among Christians from not being subject to the Lord in availing themselves of the benefit of His aid through His members, as one having "the word of wisdom," and another "the word of knowledge by the same Spirit." In olden time it was said, "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety." How much more now, when Christ the Head in heaven is one with His saints on earth, to every one of whom He has given grace and the gift of the Spirit, consequent on having accomplished

redemption for them. What wonderful blessing there would be if all saints were "holding the Head," and thus caring for the members of His body in the power of an ungrieved Spirit.

As we have seen, "the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? . . . But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. . . . That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." (1 Cor. xii. 14–26.) Wondrous workmanship, and precious grace and truth! But who is practically in this circle now? Where are those who are habitually and earnestly contending for it as the faith which was once delivered unto the saints? Time was when saints were so living in these things as realities, that even the word "independent" would have shocked the sensibilities of many. The truth was firmly grasped, that "to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit," &c.; so that members of the body exercising dependence on the Head, and owning these ways of the Spirit, conferred with one another about steps they were about to take, in order, it may be, to have the Lord's true guidance

through them. And observe here how repeatedly it is said, "By the same Spirit." (1 Cor. xii. 8–18.) For members of the body to walk and act independently of each other is then practically to set aside God's present order on earth for His glory and for our blessing. Independency is not Christianity; it neither knows Christ the Head in heaven, nor the ways of the Spirit whom He has sent down.

The present offices of our Lord Jesus, so faithfully carried on by Him in heaven, also occupied the hearts of saints in the beginning of Christianity, as the epistles fully show. And there cannot be a doubt that much of the present weakness and declension among saints may be traced to the lack of apprehension and enjoyment of our Lord's present activities in heaven on our behalf. The contemplation of His various offices for us sets our minds on things above, detaches us from this present evil age, and fashions us to live for His glory. We ought to be able to say at all times, "Our citizenship is in heaven"—our life, our righteousness, our peace, our inheritance, our resources, our blessings, our home, and our springs are *there*. And when this is so, we may then truthfully add, "From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His body of glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all

things unto Himself." These are some of the blessings we should enjoy, if we were taken up with that which was from the beginning, in occupation with Him who accomplished eternal redemption for the glory of God, and whom God hath consequently set in righteousness at His own right hand.

From what has been advanced, it is manifest that many of the truths which had such power in the beginning of Christianity have practically been dropped; and we may be sure that faithfully returning to them, and acting on them as unto the Lord, is the path of faith. Our Lord's encouraging words to us still are, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And when our souls are ready to faint because of the suffering and present loss which thus acting in faith may involve, His word of cheer is, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." He bids us to "go forth *unto Him* without the camp, *bearing His reproach*," and still says, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to *suffer for His sake*." (Rev. ii. 10; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Heb. xiii. 13; Phil. i. 29.)

No one can be in a true position now who does not humbly own the ruin of the Church or assembly as God's witness on earth. The manifestation of its unity on earth is gone, never more to be restored, though the faithful are responsible

to act on its principles as far as a remnant can. This involves the consciousness of much being lost which was in the beginning, and the grateful acceptance of what through God's mercy still remains. Though we have not apostles and prophets, nor sign-gifts as tongues and miracles, yet the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, Christ in His present offices, and gifts for building up, as in Ephesians iv., remain, blessed be God! And those who have owned what remains, and reckoned upon the mercy and faithfulness of God, have always had special tokens of His power and blessing.

But an assembly *position*, however scriptural, unless accompanied with that *condition* of faith and love and hope suited to our Lord, is a poor thing, and soon glides into formality and dead orthodoxy. About this we cannot be too watchful. But we may be sure that if our *position* in these last days be according to God's truth, and our *condition* one of cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, there will then be *testimony* to Him (and we know no other testimony), even if things corporately were more broken up. God looks for reality. The great question for us all is, Are our hearts set on pleasing Him by walking in the truth? How soon we may be caught up to meet our Lord in the air! Are we aiming to get His precious commendation of "Well done"?

H. H. S.