

REMARKS
ON
STANDING, STATE,
AND
THE ASSEMBLY.

BY
H. H. S.

SHEFFIELD:
MARK HARRISON, BIBLE AND TRACT DEPÔT,
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THE following pages are substantially replies to enquiries on these subjects. They are now sent forth in their present form with earnest prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that they may be helpful to many of His dear children.

H. H. SNELL.

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REMARKS

ON

STANDING, STATE, AND THE ASSEMBLY.

THOSE who are perplexed in regard to the believer's standing, and as to the obligations of such as have been brought out to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be quite sure that all will be overruled for blessing to those, who, in conscious weakness, wait on the Lord and learn of Him.

We must not, however, forget that *unbelief* is very clever in the invention of difficulties, and that *faith* is always satisfied with the word of God, and nothing else; and it is surely this to which the Holy Ghost directs us as our sole authority in every question concerning "the truth." Those who have gathered their instruction from men's books, or other human sources, cannot but be perplexed in time of trial, because their faith is not founded on the authority and power of God; whereas those who draw from God and His sure word will pursue their course in peace. The times are indeed perilous, and our prayer may well be, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

STANDING.

As to the believer's standing, thank God we are not left in uncertainty. The inspired Word is clear enough on the point. Let us open our Bibles to Romans v., and read the first five verses. Do we not find in the first verse that the believers to whom the apostle was writing, having been justified, have peace with God? and in the second verse do we not see that, besides this, such are brought into a *totally new position before God* as no longer "enemies," "ungodly," and "sinners," but that they now "stand" in grace, or favour? Such is the believer's standing—"the grace" (or favour) "in which we stand." It is our present position before God; and we ask, Can anything exceed the blessedness of it? But let us not fail to observe that those here spoken of have received the Holy Ghost; for it is a point of all importance, and sometimes overlooked, when considering the believer's present standing (*v. 5*). Such have *believed God*, who raised up our Lord Jesus from among the dead, as declared by the *gospel of God*. They know the *love of God* in having delivered Him up for our offences, the *power of God* in raising Him again for our justification, *the righteousness of God* now revealed, and that their faith is reckoned to them for righteousness; so that God is "just, and the Justifier" (wondrous grace!) "of him which believeth in Jesus." The Holy

Ghost, having wrought in our souls to enable us to believe God's goodness and power to usward through Christ, now dwells in us, and sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts. We are not merely acquitted, not only have forgiveness of sins, but our faith is reckoned to us for righteousness; we are justified from all things through our Lord Jesus Christ by God the Justifier; we have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and have now a totally new standing in the full favour of God. What favour! What exceeding rich grace!

What our standing in the favour of God may comprehend is another point, and no doubt many other scriptures unfold it to the seeking soul; but when the question is raised as to what the believer's standing is, the answer is plainly given to us in this scripture; and the more we ponder it with humility in the presence of God, the more the magnitude of this new position will appear to us. There is growth in our apprehension of this, as of other revelations of God's ways of goodness to us in His word, but the standing is unalterably the same. We may have a very feeble grasp of it, but this does not alter the precious fact that we are always standing in the full favour of God.

The way of access into this standing, and the present power and joy of it, we are told in the same scripture, is through our Lord Jesus Christ. It

is therefore by faith; not by feeling, not by experience of any kind, but by faith.

Let us now read the second verse: "By *whom* also" (observe *also*) "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Happy are those who thus really have access into it, and enjoy this place of favour into which God, according to His own infinite love, has set us. What rest and comfort it gives our souls, so that we can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God!" Nothing teaches like grace.

Such was the standing of the believer as current among the apostles. We find Peter, whose line of ministry was to pilgrims on earth going on to their inheritance in heaven, saying, at the close of his first epistle, "This is the true grace" (or favour) "of God wherein *ye stand*," and he desires peace to be with "all who are in Christ." (1 Peter v. 12, 14.)

Without doubt our standing is founded on what is judicial, though it be all of grace. We could not have peace unless we knew it had been established in righteousness, so that we can, through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, be declared to be justified from all things—"justified," as Scripture puts it, "in the sight of God. Thus Paul again and again refers to the death of Christ as that on which all our blessings are founded before entering on this other blessing consequent upon it, the favour in which we stand.

Peter also sets before us that Christ bare our sins, and suffered for sins, to bring us to God, that we are now "the people of God," that the God of all grace hath made us a royal and a holy priesthood, and called us unto His eternal glory in Christ, before he adds, "This is the true grace of God in which ye stand."

In some of Paul's other epistles, as well as some of the chapters which follow the fifth of Romans, we have every here and there something unfolded to us by the Spirit of this favour in which *we* stand. We may take a brief glance at some of them. In Rom. viii. we are taught that those who have the Holy Spirit are in such a totally new standing that it is said, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you;" and being "children," are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." In 1 Cor. xii. we are told that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," and "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." (*vv.* 3, 13.)

In Colossians we find the person of the ascended Christ brought before us as the One in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and there as "the Head of all principality and power;" and addressing believers it is said, "Ye are complete [filled to the full] in Him." (Col. ii. 9, 10.) How the contemplation of such favour and blessing fills our hearts with wonder, love, and praise!

In Philippians we are told that "our citizenship [or commonwealth] is in heaven;" not will be, but *is*; our life, interests, and possessions are there. And in Corinthians, in strict keeping with our high, and holy, and heavenly calling, it is said, "As is the heavenly, such are they also who *are heavenly.*" (Phil. iii. 20; 1 Cor. xv. 48.)

In Ephesians too the marvellous revelations of the heavenly character of our present position is calculated to fill the heart with adoring praise to the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." As objects of the Father's purpose and grace, we *are* "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" predestinated unto "the adoption of children," to the praise of the glory of His grace; sealed with the Holy Spirit; quickened together, raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; created in Christ Jesus—a new creation, a redeemed people—in whom we have redemption through His blood; all have access unto the Father by one Spirit; are members of the body of Christ; living stones of the holy temple now building and growing in the Lord; made nigh in Christ and by His blood; fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God," and "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." And besides all this, as there is One, and only One, in God's vast universe, that is rightly called "*the beloved,*" among the myriads who are

“beloved of God,” it is in Him we are accepted, yea, “in THE BELOVED;” expressive, as another has said, of “the favour or acceptance in grace which He has freely bestowed upon us.” What a standing is ours! What inexpressible favour! All flowing from God to us according to the riches of His grace and the riches of His glory. All of God, not merely as meeting our need, but according to the largeness of His heart, that we should be to the praise of His glory. Is it wise, in the face of such vast and unfathomable blessedness in which we stand, to speak of this or that blessing being the highest?

John’s line of ministry, as most know, though by the same Spirit, differs from the other apostles. His keynote is “eternal life,” and he specially sets forth the divine relationships of the Father and the Son, and the fellowship, affections, and relationships now to be known by those who have eternal life, and have received the Holy Ghost. The *person of the Son* is so before him as an inspired writer, that if he speaks of the blood he says, “The blood of Jesus Christ *His Son* cleanseth us from all sin;” that we “are in Him that is true, even *in His Son* Jesus Christ.” “God sent His only-begotten *Son* into the world that we might live through Him.” “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent *His Son* to be the propitiation for our sins.” “The Father sent *the Son* to be

the Saviour of the world." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the *Son of God*, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

John's line is eminently the divine side of the truth. He sets before us the nature of God as "love" and "light," and that divine *love* has so wrought for us by and in His Son, that we are now looked at as walking "in the light as He is in the light." Marvellous blessedness! We are to know that we are God's children; to realize that *fellowship* is enjoyed by us "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ;" and that *affections* are formed and flow from us, because divine love has brought us into this highest and most endearing relationship. It is not with John merely adoption, but children by birth—born of God—the present possession of eternal life, and that life in His Son. *Affections* formed by this life and relationship flow from us God-ward, for "we love Him because He first loved us;" and toward the "brethren," because they are begotten of God. To let slip the comfort and enjoyment of this relationship is often to slide into the world; and "if any man love the world, the love of *the Father* is not in him;" he has lost the sense of relationship. In his first epistle he shows that fellowship, affections, obedience, and practical righteousness flow from life and divinely-formed relationships with the Father and the Son, and with one another, and that God dwells in us by the Spirit

which He hath given unto us. We have not the priesthood of Jesus in John's writings, because children, as such, if they sin, need an Advocate with the Father. The High Priest is before God for us, not as to our sins, but our need. Jesus said, "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you."

We do not therefore find John use the word "stand" when contemplating our present position of favour in God's sight, for standing is a position conferred on a stranger who may be brought into certain associations; whereas relationship is connected with life and nature, producing affections suitable to the relationship. We do not therefore speak of the standing of a child. Its relationship carries with it the highest thoughts of intimacy and fellowship. From John's point of view nothing can exceed our *present* position. He says, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." "God dwelleth in us by His Spirit, which He hath given us;" we are born of God, "children of God;" "he that dwelleth in love" (God is love) "dwelleth in God, and God in him;" "love has been perfected with us, so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." "The Father Himself," said the Son, "loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." And His prayer to the

Father was, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." Well may our hearts adoringly say,

"Father, Thou lov'st me! Favour, all divine,
 Rests on my soul; a cloudless favour. There
 Thy face shines on me, as it still doth shine
 On Thy blest Son; His image I shall bear."

Can anything be conceived by us of greater favour and blessing for this present time than this wondrous position into which "perfect love" has set us? But certainly the point of all importance for us is individually to ask ourselves, How far have *I* received into *my* heart, as from the mouth of God, His own word, which reveals to us this marvellous grace? Do *I* live day by day in the enjoyment of this favour in which I stand? It is comparatively easy to *talk* about our standing, or to *admire* the magnitude of it; but to *take possession* of it, and have the *comfort and power* of it in our own souls, is a very different thing. Where this is wanting, we may be assured that nothing can be right as it ought to be. Is not the lack of personal enjoyment of *the favour in which we stand* the root of much of the present failure among us? If we were standing fast where divine goodness has set us, should we hesitate to stand up for the Lord's claims, or to be gracious to others? If we were abiding there, would not our hearts be giving adoring worship

to the Father, grateful praise to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and know the power of the Holy Ghost filling us with the hope of our Lord's return from heaven?

STATE.

Some of us have long felt that it is about our *state of soul* that the Lord has had a controversy. And we ask, How can our state be according to His mind, unless we take our true place before Him as to the standing, relationships, privileges, and obligations in which His sovereign and abundant grace has set us? And how can assemblies of saints, even if outwardly orderly, be suited to Him, if our affections and energies are not according to His word?

It is "the truth" which sets us free. It is by "the truth" we are separated practically for God. The prayer of the Son of God to the Father for us was, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." And we know that He Himself is "the Truth." But are we not warned against being turned away from the truth, and turned unto fables?

Without entering on the subject of prayer (a matter so weighty that no believer can be in a healthy state who does not cultivate the habit of prayer and supplication in the Spirit for all saints, as well as for himself), there are some dangers to

which even those who have peace with God appear in the present day to be exposed. In regard to these we may enquire, first, Do we not overrate knowledge? secondly, Are we using the written word of God as we ought for growth? and thirdly, Have personal intercourse and communion with our Lord Jesus Christ been duly cultivated by us? If not, is it to be wondered at if spiritual feebleness, and even love of the world, be the results?

1. By *overrating* knowledge we do not forget the exceeding blessedness of having the truth of God, and having it written too so that we may turn to it again and again; nor that we are enjoined to "add to our faith virtue, and to virtue *knowledge*;" but we are told there is such a thing as "knowledge" which "puffeth up," while "love buildeth up;" and it is this to which we now allude. "Though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge . . . and have not love, I am nothing." (1 Cor. viii. 1; xiii. 2.)

It is clear that when an inspired apostle had his heart turned to the care of individuals as Philemon, or to assemblies like those at Ephesus and Colosse, he first of all considered their state as to "faith and love." The divine order given in these epistles is faith, love, and knowledge. Again, when he first wrote to the Thessalonian believers he thanks God for their faith and love and hope; and finding they were deficient in some things as

to the knowledge of God's mind, communicated it to them. When he wrote them again, he thanked God that their "faith groweth exceedingly, and their love; to one another aboundeth," and again gave them knowledge of God's mind where they were suffering for lack of it. The knowledge of God's truth nourishes faith and love when used aright; but to thirst for the acquirement of Bible knowledge while our state of soul as to faith, love, and hope is neglected, tends to feed pride, to cause us to look down upon others who are not as intelligent as ourselves, and leads into the high road to Laodiceanism; whereas when faith and love and hope are rightly esteemed by us as the cardinal points of the Christian state, it will not be difficult to esteem others better than ourselves, and to count ourselves inferior to other saints. Let us solemnly lay this to heart; for perhaps few things are more withering to souls than an atmosphere of cold, dry orthodoxy, which from its boasted accuracy has a deceptive sound, but is often the clearest proof of having got off the line of whole-hearted devotedness to the Lord, if ever they were on it. Let us not deceive ourselves as to this. Apostles were wont to desire for saints that grace unto them, and peace, might be multiplied, while enjoining them that "the word of Christ" might dwell in them richly, and that they might increase in the knowledge of God. While minister-

ing for the furtherance of their faith and love, they communicated such knowledge as set them on earth more in accordance with the will of God while waiting for His Son from heaven. When we love the truth because it gives us the knowledge of God, and ministers grace to our souls, we can scarcely ponder it too much. It is one thing to see a truth in Scripture and another to mix faith with it, to receive it out of the mouth of God, and thus make it our own. There will be no true state of soul without this. It is well to see great principles of truth, but is it not much better to have the Word individually applied to our heart and conscience? We may be assured that feeding on that Word which testifies of Christ, and walking in it, and nothing short of this, will maintain our souls in health. This leads us to the second question.

2. Are we using the Word as we ought *for growth*? It need scarcely be said that, although the believer is "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," yet there is progress or growth, so that we are enjoined to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Our *state* cannot therefore be according to God's mind if there be not this growth. If we turn to the opening of the second chapter of Peter's first epistle we find him addressing God's elect, those who were "born again" and "redeemed" by the blood of Christ, on the

subject of growth. First he enjoins them to lay aside those evil things still in them as born of the flesh, not to let them come out, as "malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, and evil speakings;" for although he thinks of them as "in Christ," he well knew the flesh was in them, and they were not to let it out. They were to "abstain from fleshly lusts," which would not only hinder their spiritual growth, but actually "war against the soul." If then we are walking carelessly, and fleshly indulgences are unjudged by us, there cannot be a thriving state of soul. When the walk is fleshly the pure word of God will not be relished, because the appetite is vitiated by the careless walk; but a keen appetite for the word of God, as a new-born babe desires milk, should be known by every one who has "tasted that the Lord is gracious." Such drink in the truth in its purity and freshness from God through His word; and, observe, it is "the sincere milk of the Word," not other books, however good, but God's word. Whenever men's writings, however true, come in to separate us from the Holy Scriptures having their first place, and to check the habit day by day of reading, meditating, and praying over the pure word of God, there is cause for alarm as to our state of soul. When Paul was leaving the saints he said, "I commend you to God, and to *the word* of His grace." Beloved, what is the present state of our appetite for the word of

God? Do we increasingly desire it? Do we find that we cannot do without it? Every one in a healthy state of soul knows that he wants the Word, and delights to meditate on it.

3. But further, having got the Word, where does it lead us? Does it not always direct us to Christ, of whom it testifies? Hence the next words are, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." Is it not possible to be a Bible-reader without thus coming to Christ, without the conscience being exercised about acting on the truth? Have we not known it again and again? But we may be sure, if we are under the teaching of the Spirit of God, the Word will lead us to *the Lord Jesus Christ, where He is, for personal intercourse and communion* with Him. Is not He our Sustainer as well as our Life-giver? Did He not say, "Without me ye can do nothing"? and, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even *he shall live by me*"? (John vi. 57.) How impossible then it is that our souls should be maintained in living freshness and comfort if personal intercourse with the Lord in heartfelt need and dependence be neglected! We have to learn that He is our daily strength and sufficiency as well as the Author of eternal salvation. Occupation with His excellencies will enable us to count our best things as rubbish and loss. Beholding Him

there, and contemplating the divine satisfaction in Him there, we become morally transformed into His image. The heart going out after Him whom having not seen we love, fills us with joy unspeakable; looking off unto Him while running the race of faith, we have present supplies of grace for every step; leaning on Him, we prove the sufficiency of His grace, and that His strength is made perfect in weakness. Our minds set on things above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, we shall manifest on earth heavenly-mindedness. Gazing on Him on the Father's throne, as revealed by the written word, we shall have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith; while His personal glories, His various offices and perfections, will so fill and satisfy our hearts that we can see beauty nowhere else, and no object comparable with Him. But may we not well pause and ask ourselves how it is with us as to personal intercourse with our Lord Jesus Christ? Is He really *the* object of our hearts?

We believe it is vain to attempt to set others right if we are negligent of our own state of soul, if we are not cultivating personal intercourse and fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, through the written word, in the power of the Holy Ghost. Do we prize the sacred volume above all else? Is our cry to God, like one of old, "Order my steps in thy word"? Can we say, "By the word of thy lips have I

kept me from the paths of the destroyer"? Do we hide God's word in our hearts (not merely in our memories, but in our hearts) that we may not sin against Him? Do we find joy in meditating on the Word? for an ancient prophet could say, "Thy words did I find, and I did *eat them*" (not only admire them, but make them his own by faith, and mark the result), "and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." Oh for increasing *delight* in the word of God! Then we shall be dependent, prayerful, and godly.

But if secret prayer be neglected by us, if self-judgment be little practised, if the Holy Scriptures are not supremely loved and daily meditated on for our souls' food because they testify of Christ, if personal intercourse with our Lord Jesus Christ be not cultivated, is it any marvel that gatherings are feeble and failing, and the work crumbles before our eyes? Knowledge is not power; principles, however true, are not truths divinely learnt if held apart from Him who is "the truth." On the other hand, where souls through the Word are taken up with Christ, know the reality of being gathered together in His name, enjoy His presence, are conscious of His ministry by the Spirit, and are subject to Him, there, even in these last days, spiritual life and power are known. May we cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart.

Though we have already exceeded the limits we proposed for this paper, we cannot close without adding a few remarks on some points connected with the assembly; not that it may be a question of such weighty import at this time as our individual state, for does not collective failure usually come out of individual incompetency and unjudged sin?

THE ASSEMBLY.

When we speak of "the assembly of God," the question is, What do we mean? If it be thought to include only so-called "brethren," it is a serious mistake; for Scripture recognizes nothing less than the whole Church of God as being "the assembly." Hence we read of "the assembly which is His body," or the assembly in a city as including all the believers in that place. We must be clear as to this; so that when we speak of the assembly of God we include the whole Church of God, or, in a local sense, all belonging to the Lord Jesus in that place; so that "the assembly" in this town is nothing less than all the saints in it. (Eph. i. 22, 23; 1 Cor. i. 2.)

But almost all in Christendom have given up long ago the truth of God's assembly as the body of Christ, and have drifted into sects and denominations, spiritual adultery with the world, association with false doctrine, and such like.

Yet all believers among them as much belong to the assembly of God as we do, though they do not take their place as such. But it may be there are two or three here and there who, having judged all this according to Scripture, have come back to that which was at the beginning, and been gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the body, and Sender of the Holy Ghost, as the only centre. Now what of these? Are they not God's assembly? No; they, in the present time of ruin and evil, have taken in faith the ground of God's assembly, and therefore know the Lord Jesus Christ in their midst as gathered in His name. The Lord in faithfulness and goodness is with such, and with them in peculiar power and blessing, as they continue true to Him as the Head of the body, to keep the Spirit's unity. Then they would be on the ground of God's assembly, as divinely instituted at the beginning, if only two or three. Enjoying the Lord's promised presence, and conscious of their own feebleness, they know they have purged themselves from what dishonours Him, and are calling "on the name of the Lord." They have no thought in thus acting (for they find none in Scripture) of reconstructing, or bringing the whole Church back to its primitive state, but have one by one, in individual faithfulness, separated themselves from evil unto the Lord's name; and, as the Word says, if only two

or three, they have authority from the Lord to reckon on His goodness. "If any man 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.) How precious is this encouragement of the Lord!

When such then are truly gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are on the ground of God's assembly, and may count on their prayers being answered, and on the Lord ratifying in heaven what they do on earth, according to His mind in binding and loosing; for He is in the midst of such thus gathered together. (Matt. xviii. 18-20.) Thus they have the Lord's authority for acting, though they can never speak of their own infallibility.

Even then it is a mistake to suppose that every failure must come before an assembly thus gathered for its judgment. There is also room for pastorship and eldership, where there are such, in caring for saints. A saint, for instance, may get into a bad state, and by the diligent care and ministry of one who has a pastor's gift his soul is restored, and the assembly as such may know nothing of it. There may be also cases of alleged disorder, which those, whom the Holy Ghost may have fitted in some degree for the office of eldership, take notice of and investigate, when it would be found there is no reason for bringing the matter be-

fore the assembly. So important is all this in God's account that saints are instructed to know them that are over them in the Lord, and admonish them, "and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." (1 Thess. v. 12, 13.) As to elders, we read, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren." (1 Tim. v. 1, 17, 19.) Words of great weight, and loudly called for in a time like this. Besides this, there is the admonishing of one another, and some are to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. iv. 2.) Besides these individual ministries for the help and profit of souls, Scripture leaves a wide margin for the activities of grace, meekness, lowliness, long-suffering, and forbearing one another in love. Instead then of striving to clear up every case of personal offence (when the offended is to tell the offender his fault alone), we are to be kind and tender-hearted, forgiving one another, so that if any should have a quarrel, or a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave us we are to forgive them. (Eph. iv. 2; Col. iii. 13.) And further, Has not our adorable Master left us an example that we should follow His steps? And did He not say,

“ If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet ”? May we deal unsparingly with our own hearts under the keen edge of these searching words.

That receiving and putting “ away from among yourselves ” are clearly and only assembly acts, no one questions. While we are called to “ depart from iniquity ” at all costs, we must never forget that Christ died that He might gather together in one the children of God, which were scattered abroad, and prayed that they all might be one, &c. Is it not, however, true now as in the apostles’ days, “ Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers ”? May we keep ourselves in the love of God!

But there is another truth which appears to be of great importance at this moment as to the practical ways of all who are really gathered to the Lord’s name; and we say *really* so gathered, because it is to be feared that some are not so gathered; for it is scarcely possible such things could occur as have occurred if they were thus solemnly and holily gathered around Him who is the “ holy ” and the “ true. ” The point we refer to is, our being besought by the Lord, through His apostle, to be using diligence “ to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ”

Among not a few the matter seems to be little considered as that which calls for *continual* practical exercise, but regarded rather as a principle

only to be called for on few and specially great occasions. Such, however, is not the case. It is the first precept set before us in walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. It is the first line of exhortation as to our ways touching the assembly in Eph. iv. Every failure as regards our fellow-saints, as to holiness and truth, is a failure in keeping the Spirit's unity. Have not many of us to be deeply humbled before the Lord as to this? It is impossible then to be right as to the maintenance of the ways of the assembly, if we are not using diligence to keep the Spirit's unity, and the need of it comes before us daily. Oh that souls were stirred by these words of the Holy Ghost, "Endeavouring" (or using diligence) "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and that too "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." If such truths were borne upon the hearts of saints, instead of quickly taking themselves off from those gathered to the Lord's name, because of some personal offence or failure in others, nothing would induce them to withdraw, until long-suffering, forbearance, and patience had had their perfect work, and every long-tried means, with earnest prayer, entreaty, and perhaps tears, had failed to show them that they had corporately abandoned the ground of God's assembly. On what principle of divine truth could a believer take himself away from the Lord's table because

some one else is faulty? Would it not be "endeavouring to keep the Spirit's unity" to deal with the erring one according to the truth? Even when known and flagrant evil abounded in the assembly of God at Corinth, both doctrinally and practically, we see with what patience, wisdom, grace, faithfulness, and many tears, the apostle laboured for their recovery, until he had the joy of knowing they had fully cleared themselves. How entirely opposite these ways of the Spirit of God are to the present tendency of exposing and magnifying the faults of others. May we have more of the Lord's mind as to these things!

Those who exclaim against the refusal to hold intercommunion with gatherings where, after patient, gracious, and faithful entreaty, they still persist in holding, or upholding, what is manifestly for the Lord's dishonour, cannot have a true sense in their souls of the ruin of the Church, and what is involved in keeping the Spirit's unity, which is always according to holiness and truth. We are to show the Lord's death till He come; and the one loaf on His table plainly shows that He holds us accountable to Him to express the "one body," and to keep the unity of the "one Spirit" all through the time of His absence. The difficulty is, while diligently seeking to keep the Spirit's unity at all costs, to do so in His way. To "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" is the duty of all the

faithful; but we have the most solemn warning found in the whole compass of Holy Scripture as to smiting our fellow-servants. Sincerely looking for the Lord's return will set us right as to this and many other things.

We must never forget that a meeting of an assembly gathered to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ includes sisters as well as brothers. Though it is quite true women are not to speak in the assembly, yet they are members of the body of Christ, and often on such occasions have discernment as to the Lord's mind, and help greatly by their faith and silent prayers. Again, when so gathered, is it not even as to a case of discipline to wait on the Lord? Surely it is not to express opinions, or to raise unprofitable questions, but to wait on the Lord, to gather through His word and Spirit what *He* would have us do in the matter. It is not then a question of even *unanimity* of judgment, important as it is to be of one mind, provided it is in the Lord; for the Corinthian saints were unanimous to keep the evildoer in, and when he was put away, it seems they were not unanimous about it. (2 Cor. xii. 20, 21.) Neither is it a question of *majority*, or of *minority*, in determining our true course; for on one occasion Paul was in such a *minority* that he says, "No man stood with me." And again he says, "All in Asia turned away." Yet he could add, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and

strengthened me." Nothing on earth can be more solemn or more simple; for in conscious helplessness and insufficiency we wait on Him who is in our midst, to know His mind, and to do His will. In ordinary cases we are acquainted with His mind; but we are now supposing a most difficult and perplexing case, in which we shall surely find the Lord's sufficiency if really gathered together in His name, and we wait on Him for His mind. (1 Cor. v. 4.) We may *then* expect a definite and clear judgment. Have we not noticed how decided and simple the conclusions on such occasions were as we have them recorded in scripture? Look at Acts xv. 28, 29; 1 Cor. v. 3-13. Even when Paul used his authority as an apostle in the way of discipline, he says, "Whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to *blaspheme*." (1 Tim. i. 20.)

In the first epistle to the Corinthians we have three kinds of judgment—self-judgment, the judgment of the assembly, and the Lord's judgment; and we are taught that if self-judgment be diligently attended to, there would not be need of either of the other judgments. "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged," has been a comfort to many of the children of God. (1 Cor. v. 4-13; xi. 30-32.) Oh that we might have grace to judge ourselves unsparingly!

There is another point which is of all importance in connection with this solemn subject; it is

“holding the Head.” Much of the failure among the Colossian saints was traced to their not doing so, and we may be quite sure it is true of us to-day. By “holding the Head” we do not mean holding Christ as Saviour or as Priest, or even holding the doctrine of His headship; for who among us is not clear enough as to these things? To be really “holding the Head” in His precious relationship and activities to “the body” is a very different thing. Is it not being experimentally in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ as to His thoughts, affections, and ways of grace and truth toward all the members of His body? And when this is so, how is it possible not to have our hearts’ interests, affections, and prayers going out on behalf of every member of His mystical body? Without thus “holding the Head,” we may be quite sure that nothing can go on as it ought in the assembly, even if the outward form be kept up; and when hearts and consciences are true as to “holding the Head” things cannot go far wrong. It is impossible to overrate the importance of this great truth at this moment. When we are really “holding the Head,” are we not near enough to be made channels of blessing to others? And are we not conscious that living blessing flows from Him to every member of the body so dear to His heart? We read, “From which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of

God." (Col. ii. 19.) How many of the hundreds of saints among whom we move give us the impression that they are really "holding the Head"? Might we not expect rich and abundant blessing to be the result, if souls were more drawn out after our Lord Jesus Christ, and were experimentally holding Him as the Head? When we are taken up with Him as "Head of the body," and "Head over all to the assembly which is His body," we have His mind about His interests; and if we find He leads us into a narrow path for our feet, it will be unquestionably clear, and He will keep our hearts in the large circle of the welfare of the whole Church of God, as well as in fellowship with "the glad tidings preached to every creature under heaven." We then find we have to do with Him who "loved the assembly and gave Himself for it," who "nourisheth and cherisheth it," and who tells us that "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren;" so much would He have our hearts in communion with Himself. He also bids us keep His word, not to deny His name, and says, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Notwithstanding the failure of the Church on earth, we may peacefully confide in God. He will never leave us, and His compassions fail not. He waits to be gracious; He cannot deny Himself; so that, like one of old, we may encourage ourselves

in the Lord our God, who "giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." Amid all the conflicting statements of the day, we shall surely hear our Lord's voice if we listen for it; only let us never forget that His very last words addressed to His failing assembly on earth, were, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the assemblies."

H. H. S.

