

OUR SECT.

Webster defines sect to mean "A part cut off," "Hence a body of persons who have separated from others by virtue of some special doctrine, or set of doctrines, which they hold in common."

Since we hold to a set of doctrines delivered to the saints by Jesus and the Apostles, and since we separate and cut ourselves off from all other religious jurisdiction and control, therefore it follows that we are a SECT. We "separate from sinners" and "have no [R538 : page 3] fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." (Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:17). Because there is no concord between Christ and Satan, nor between a believer in Christ and an unbeliever in his ransom and Lordship, therefore we obey the Lord's command, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17,18).

In doctrine we hold firmly to the glad tidings preached by Jesus and explained by the Apostles, and will receive none other, even though it should be delivered by an angel from heaven. It is briefly stated by Paul thus: "I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received [first of all], how that Christ died for OUR SINS according to the Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:3). This is the basis; and built upon it, is our realization that we are justified and cleansed from all sin in God's sight, by his offering or sin-sacrifice who "died the just for the unjust." Realizing this, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Eph. 1:7). All who accept of their share in this atoning sacrifice are properly termed Christians.

But while divisions were objected to in the true church, while all the apostles taught that there was one Lord, one faith, one

baptism and one body – church of Christ – yet this church was a sect itself – a split off from the Jewish church – which was cast off and left desolate, and it was also separated from the world. It was "the sect everywhere spoken against." (Acts 28:22). Thus, we see, that Christians are a sect or separated class – separate from the world – separate from sinners – separate from all others, in that they accept of Jesus, and salvation through his blood. But there should be no schism or division of this sect; all who are of it should be one. There is one fold and one Shepherd. (1 Cor. 12:25).

It is not remarkable that Satan should seek to divide and separate the sheep and to put up fences, such as the denominational creeds prove to be, which would hinder some of the sheep from following the Shepherd into green pastures of fresh and living truth. This would be but wisdom on his part. But it is strange that he should be able to fetter the reason of so many, that they should think it a mark of spirituality to say, I am of Luther, a Lutheran; I of Calvin and Knox, a Presbyterian; I of Wesley, a Methodist, and so on; while Paul, on the contrary, to some of his day, who were in danger of this spirit of sectarianism, said: While one saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Peter, are ye not carnal? Is it not in direct opposition to the spirit of Christ to think or act thus? "Is Christ divided?" Did Paul or Peter or Knox or Calvin or Wesley or anyone else than Christ die for your sins and redeem you? They, as servants of Christ and the church, should be esteemed very highly for their works' sake, but to name the Bride after any other than the Bridegroom is manifestly improper.

Oh, that all could see that in God's sight there is but one church – whose names are written in heaven – and that God cannot and does not sympathize with or recognize any split in the real church. He does not recognize the narrow creeds in which so many of the sheep are confined and starving. As we have shown, he has placed but one

fence around his fold. Inside of it there is plenty of room, both for the lambs and the fully matured sheep of Christ, to feed and grow continually.

A PARABLE.

Fix in your mind a picture of a fine large pasture surrounded by a strong and high fence – the Law of God – which surrounds and keeps all the sheep within, but which recognizes no means of access to that fold – justified condition – except Christ, the door, faith in whose sacrifice for sin is the only way into the fold. All climbing into the fold by any other way are thieves and robbers. This is the pasture provided by the Good Shepherd for his sheep, for whom he once laid down his life. Into the true fold of Christ quite a flock of sheep have entered. They belong to the true Shepherd; but as we look before us at the grassy slopes, only a few sheep, a little flock indeed, seem to be enjoying the liberty of the fold – the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free. Where are the others? We look and see inside the door, on either side of the pathway, small enclosures. Over each is written its peculiar name – Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Second Adventist, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, etc. Looking at these pens we find them to differ. Some are built like prisons with iron frames and bars and chains, others less strong, and some are merely marked out "dead lines" over which the sheep understand that they must not go.

These pens are full of sheep, but they are weak, delicate and sickly for lack of proper exercise and fresh, nourishing food. They are regularly fed, but only upon husks, with occasionally a little milk, but they eat without relish and get no good from it. Many of them are leaner and poorer than when first they entered the fold, and some have become blind. Strange to say all seem to be perfectly satisfied, each with his own pen, and very seldom does one attempt to escape.

Perplexed to know why these should thus submit to be penned, we watched to see how they were induced to enter the various enclosures. As the sheep entered by faith the fold of Christ through the only door, under-shepherds who had been appointed to help the sheep to find and appreciate the pastures of the entire fold, had conceived that they knew better than the Chief Shepherd how to manage the flock, and accordingly they had constructed these various pens. Each class stood at the door of his own, and as the new sheep came in, they tried to impress upon each, both by manner and voice, first of all the necessity of getting into some of the many pens; and secondly, each one tried to show the superiority of the one he represented. As a consequence, nearly all the sheep which entered got penned, and only a few passed on to enjoy all the liberty of the fold. The under-shepherds sought continually to impress upon their sheep that the free sheep were heretics and en route to destruction.

This was the faith of the early church. True, they progressed beyond these first principles to the use of the "strong meat," and to a comprehension, with all saints, of the deep things of God; but the "babes in Christ," and those "who, by reason of use, had their senses exercised," were all one family – "all one in Christ Jesus." The more advanced in grace and doctrine bore the infirmities of the weak, each and all seeking to grow in grace and knowledge more and more. Where this apostolic rule was observed there could be no sect, no division in the body. It was only when error began to develop in the congregations that Paul wrote to some: I hear that there are divisions (sects) among you, and I partly believe it; for it is evident from what I learn of the worldliness and error coming in among you, that there would of necessity be divisions; for those true to the Lord could not have fellowship with such unfruitful works of darkness, but must rather reprove them. (1 Cor. 11:18,19).

We watched to see what would be the end of this matter, for we learned that the Chief Shepherd was expected by some, and we knew that his coming would soon demonstrate whether he approved of this dividing and imprisoning His flock. The under-shepherds mostly claimed that he would not come for a long time yet.

Presently among the free sheep we heard great rejoicing. We looked and found that the Chief-shepherd had come quietly, unobservedly ("as a thief"), and was now recognized by some of the sheep, and hence the rejoicing. Some of those imprisoned heard the Shepherd's voice; they looked and listened, yet could scarce believe. It was indeed, the voice of the shepherd as he tended and ordered his flock. All who were his true sheep seemed to hear his voice condemning the penning process and saying unto his sheep: "Come out, my people."

Some leaped the fences and gained liberty and food from the Shepherd's hand. But some were so weak and faint for lack of nourishment that they trembled with fear and dreaded the under-shepherds too much to come out. We noticed outside the fences that some of the free sheep brought food to the bars, and thus some of the weak ones were strengthened and then came out. The under-shepherds, meanwhile, were alert with redoubled vigilance, and by varying policies sought to keep the control of their (?) flocks. Some denounced and scoffed at those without, and threatened the sheep within; and others redoubled the customary exercises, the "forms of godliness."

We waited to see the outcome, and saw the unfaithful under-shepherds bound and beaten with stripes, the prison pens all destroyed, and the fold used as designed – the flock one, its name one, and its head Christ Jesus.
