

THE ONE TRUE CHURCH.

"As the body is *one* and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ; for by one spirit are we all baptized into *one body*."..."There is one body, and one spirit; even as ye are all called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all."... "After the way which they [many] call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."..."Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" [If so, then,] "I have become a fool for Christ's sake." – 1 Cor. 12:12,13; Eph. 4:4-6; Acts 24:14; Gal. 4:16.

That during the Gospel age God has been *selecting* a church, is admitted by all Christians except Universalists; and that all thus selected constitute the one church, and that God recognizes only the one church, and that a membership in that one church can only be secured during the present life – during the Gospel age – is also generally admitted to be the teaching of the Bible.

And many will admit also, that our present union with Christ's body, the church, though precious, is but a *probationary* membership, which will only be confirmed and made everlasting by introduction into full membership in the church triumphant, at the close of this probationary period of the present life. – John 15:5,6; Phil. 3:12-16.

But, while we and other Christians agree that the church triumphant is to be *one* church and not many churches, there are parts and bearings of the subject regarding which we are not agreed.

We hold, that the conditions of the present trial, of all accepted as probationary members of the heavenly church, are much more severe and exacting, and that the selection is consequently much smaller than Christian people generally suppose; – a "little flock" only, is now being selected. (Luke 12:32.) Many suppose that the object of our God in

calling and highly exalting the church was merely to save them from everlasting torment. We claim, and find and produce abundant Scripture proof of it, that God's object in this selection, training, discipline and final exaltation of the church, is for the ultimate purpose of blessing all his fallen, sin-stricken creatures (human and angelic) through them; by granting to all a full perfect judgment or trial under most favorable conditions, of which *perfect* knowledge and sufficient help, will be the chief elements of favor. Thus seen, the church is being selected for the great work to be accomplished during the Millennial age, of restoring "*whosoever will*" of the fallen ones back to their former estates, and consigning the *wilfully* unholy to the second death – everlasting punishment – everlasting destruction.

Nor can it be denied, that this Scriptural view is much more elevating than the common selfish view which originated in the great Apostasy. Those called out by the hope of sharing in God's plan for doing good to others – blessing all the families of the earth – are sure to be both fewer, and spiritually above the masses, who are only moved by a selfish hope of escaping torment.

We also differ from most Christians in regarding the church in its present condition as merely in a probationary state. And we further claim that there is only one church now, even as there will be but one church in glory; that our Lord and the apostles never recognized any but one church on earth; that so far from establishing many, or recognizing many, they denounced all efforts to separate into different parties and under different names, as *schismatic*, *sectarian*, and contrary to God's will, and as injurious, and an evidence of carnality in all who consented to, or aided such divisions of the probationary church.

Paul's able and pointed reasoning upon this subject is partially obscured by the common translations, yet even in it, when the attention is called to it, the trend of the Apostle's reasoning can be clearly discerned; much more so in that valuable and generally very faithful translation, the Emphatic Diaglott. He exhorts that those teachers who

favor divisions in the flock of Christ, be "watched" and turned away from; because they are not following the Lord's will, but their own. And he adds, "by kind and complimentary words they mislead the unsuspecting." (Rom. 16:17.) He reproved the Corinthian church because of a tendency toward sectarianism among them. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; and 3:3-6.) They were dividing into Paulites, Apollosites, and Peterites, while a few rightly clung to the name Christian.

Each of these teachers had his peculiarities of manner in teaching, which caused some to esteem one, and others another, most highly. But they all had the one gospel – the one Lord, one faith and one baptism. The spirit of favoritism, which led to factions and divisions, and to the exaltation of sectarian or party names, or the name of an individual teacher, to be the *standard* around which to rally, the Apostle declared was an evidence of carnality – proof of a worldly spirit.

While the taking of different names was wrong, it was an evidence of a deeper wrong – of a selfish, party spirit. It was an evidence that those Corinthians, who took the party names, had never really appreciated the oneness of the Body of Christ; that they did not really appreciate that Christ is the only head, leader and standard; and that his is the only name by which his followers should recognize themselves and each other. Where scoffers apply a name in derision, it is not the fault of the faithful. But the true, loyal soldiers of the cross, should never own or recognize such a name. Instances of names so originating are Methodists and Baptists, both of which were first given in derision, but were afterwards adopted as party names, representing sects, factions, or divisions in the body of Christ. All true teachers are not only sent by Christ but receive their instructions from him; and any man who attempts to put his own or any other name upon all or any portion of the church is an opponent, an adversary to the true and only Lord and Head of the church. He is a misleader and evil doer, no matter what his claims or motives may be.

The Apostle upbraiding the Corinthians, and seeking to show them their error in owning any other teacher besides Christ to be their head and standard and leader, asks, "Has Christ been divided?" Are there several seeds of Abraham now, each an heir of a promise? Is this the reason you countenance divisions into different parties? Or, is it because each of these leaders – Paul, Apollos, and Peter, have done some special favors to you and put you under obligation to them, you requite them by calling yourselves their servants and followers, bearing their names? – Was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in his name?

Nay, nay, dearly beloved; one, and only one deserves all the honor of the church, both now and forever, and that one is her true Lord and Master; and His name only she should own in any manner. He leads, he teaches, he feeds; and the various human agents used by him, as channels for his blessings to his espoused, should neither take his place in her heart nor share his honor before the world.

For a long time, in fact until very recently, Christians recognized this true principle, that there is but one body or church on earth, even as there will be but one in glory. And following this idea, each sect claimed to be *that one*, the only true church, and persecuted others. But by and by each began to see in the other certain good features of doctrine and practice, and gradually their ideas changed, until to-day they claim boldly, and in opposition to the word of our Lord and of the apostles, that sects are a decided advantage; that the human mind is so constituted that a common faith, which Paul urges upon the church, is an impossibility; and that the various sects of to-day with their contradictory diversities of faith are necessary accommodations to human prejudices and imbecility.

Yet, still clinging to the idea that somehow there should be but one church, they are anxious to reunite all the larger sects so as to make (nominally) *one church*, while each sect therein may retain its own special features of faith or disbelief as at present. All in such a union (of which the Evangelical Alliance is a beginning), merely agree to

disagree, to live and let live; and to recognize each other, in this general way, because of an increased influence and power and protection which it will bring to each sect thus associated; and because it would detract from the influence of others not so associated, and thus hinder independence of thought. This would serve to fix and establish an "orthodox" boundary line, inside of which there would be bounds to individual liberty, and yet a measure of freedom – to choose a preference among the forms and doctrines of the various sects thus acknowledged as "orthodox."

This is in fact the case now, among the so-called "liberal minds" of all denominations; and it is being urged of late that an organization of this sort, already founded in the Evangelical Alliance, be fully consummated; and that an attempt shall be made to have such a *composite* church in some degree recognized by the government.

But, even when fully consummated, this could be no more than a union in *name*, with the same divisions and differences in fact; – one church nominally, and many sects really, as now.

The first danger against which the Apostle warned the church, was sectarianism. He evidently was heeded at the time at least; for no great sect of Paulites or Apollosites developed. But, as usual, the great enemy thwarted in one direction moved to the opposite extreme, and attempted to insist upon a oneness very different from what the apostles or our Lord ever taught. This attempt was to have every recognized member of the church think exactly alike, on every minutia of Christian doctrine. This attempt finally headed up in Papacy, where every matter of doctrine was decided by the popes and councils; and every man who would be considered a church member was obliged to accept such decisions fully, and to profess that such decisions were *his* belief, *his* faith; whereas they were not his in any sense, but that of adoption. They were generally either blindly received or hypocritically professed with mental reservations.

This was not at all the oneness urged by Paul. He urged a oneness of heart, and of mind and not a thoughtless, heartless, or hypocritical profession. He urged a oneness such as naturally results from the proper exercise of the liberty which we have in Christ – to search and believe the Scriptures, and to grow in grace and in knowledge, every man being thus fully persuaded in his own mind, and firmly rooted and grounded in the one faith as set forth in the Scriptures. The oneness of faith which Paul urged, was not that elaborate faith which touches and embraces all subjects, heavenly and earthly, human and divine, revealed and unrevealed. Quite the contrary: Paul's letters, weighty with logical reasoning, do not even mention the subjects upon which sectarians do most insist, and which are generally made *tests* of fellowship by them.

Paul said nothing about an everlasting torture for sinners; he said nothing whatever about a mysterious trinity, in which three Gods incomprehensibly are *three* Gods and at the same time *one* God; he said not a word about man being of a nature such as *could not die* but *must live*, either in a place of pleasure or woe, everlastingly; he said nothing, either, about the present life ending all trial for all classes; and he entered into no entangling discussion about the bread and wine used in commemoration of the Lord's death, – as to transubstantiation or consubstantiation; yet it can easily be discerned that he was not in harmony with any of these errors.

Notice particularly, however, that without so much as *mentioning* a single one of these sectarian tests of fellowship, Paul declares, – "I have not shunned to declare unto you *the whole counsel of God.*" (Acts 20:27.) From this it is very evident, that none of these points, which are to-day regarded as the very essence and substance of Christian doctrine, and the tests of *faith*, are the "*one faith*" or in any sense or degree parts of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." – Jude 3.

The one faith which all should hold, was a very simple one; one so simple that all, the learned and the unlearned alike, could grasp it and

comprehend it, and be [R1074 : page 4] "*fully persuaded* in their own minds" concerning it. It was not a dose of incongruous mysteries, inconsistent with themselves and inharmonious with reason as well as with the Bible, to be swallowed by the ignorant with credulity, and by the learned with hypocritical mental reservations; but it was so simple, and clear, and reasonable, that any and every honest follower of Christ could be *fully persuaded in his own mind* concerning it.

What was this *one* faith? The basis of it is stated by Paul thus: "I delivered unto you *first* of all, that which I also received [first of all – as a foundation truth or doctrine, upon and in harmony with which all other doctrines must be built], how that *Christ died for our sins*, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:3,4.) "There is *one God* and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

This in a word, confesses sin and utter helplessness; it acknowledges God's loving plan for our redemption; it owns that our Lord's death was our ransom price; and that forgiveness (justification), and reconciliation to God, and the restitution of man, come as a result of *faith* in this Redeemer, when in due time it is made known to each and all.

These brief statements contain the whole gospel, in the same sense that an acorn contains an oak tree. Without this gospel kernel, the true gospel can never be possessed; hence *this must be insisted on* as a test of Christian fellowship. This must be received else the gospel is not received. When it is received the gospel is received. Then a work of growth begins – a development of *this* gospel; it may vary in rapidity of growth according to the temperament and surroundings; it can develop into a twig, a sapling, a sturdy oak successively, but if developed from the one sort of seed the nature of the seed will appertain to it in every stage of its development. So is faith – the true faith; it must begin with the *one kind of seed-faith* in all, no matter what stage of

development each may attain. This *one* gospel acknowledges man's fall and sinfulness, and God's mercy and love manifested through Christ's great *work* of redemption, forgiveness and final restoration; and all theories which omit any of these items are spurious: and they are many.

Some deny God's love in the matter, and claim that all the love was Christ's and that he *interposed* and thwarted the Father's original plan; but the one faith is guided by the Apostle's testimony, that God so loved the world that he devised the plan as it is being carried forward, and sent his only begotten Son to do what he has done and is yet to do for the world. Others deny that any *redemption* was accomplished by the death of our Lord Jesus, deny that his life was substituted as a corresponding price or "*ransom* for all," and claim that the Father does *all* by simply *pardoning* the sinners. But again the *one* faith is clearly pointed out by the words of Paul "There is one *mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a *ransom* [corresponding price] for all." – 1 Tim. 2:5,6.

When received into honest hearts this simple gospel, the true gospel, will gradually open up and spread its roots of reason and its branches of hope in every direction, feeding upon the promises of God and building itself up as He designed, grasping the "one baptism" [See, May '88 TOWER], and every other feature of the gospel in its fullness as it progresses.

Note the difference between this, God's test, on the simple first principles of the gospel, and the wrong course of men who attempt to enforce upon all an entire system of faith, and that when they are the merest babes in Christ; so fettering them then, that they are hindered from growing. To ask babes in Christ to assent to thirty or forty articles of faith arranged by fellow-men, and to agree to take those as the infallible truth, and to promise never to believe either more or less than they contain, is like as if in an orchard one gnarled and crooked tree were selected as a *standard*, and all the other trees were required to be

padded out to make them look as thick and as gnarled as the sample and bound with iron bands that they might never grow larger or straighter.

This true gospel, this simple faith, easily understood and confessed by the weakest babe in Christ, must also be, and always, and equally, the faith of the most developed sons of God. *This* one faith (and not the endless ramifications and details of faith which lead out from it) Paul placed as a standard or test of all claiming the name, Christian. All the consecrated who agreed on this one standard, or foundation truth, Paul counted as in and of the one church. While each member was to grow in grace, knowledge and love, if all growth were kept in line and harmony with this foundation truth, there would always be harmony and oneness in the faith and fellowship of the church.

Here was a perfect basis of union which allowed for all the various stages of individual *development in the truth*; and which guarded against errors most effectually. For if this simple creed were made the standard by which all doctrines would be tested to-day, it would speedily lead to the discarding of every error and to the true union of the church in the "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism."

The endeavor to compel all men to think alike on all subjects, culminated in the great apostasy and the development of the great Papal system; and thereby the "gospel," the "one faith" which Paul and the other apostles set forth, was lost; buried under the mass of uninspired decrees of popes and councils. The *union* of the early church, based upon the simple gospel and *bound only by love*, gave place to the bondage of the Church of Rome – a slavery of God's children, from the degradation of which multitudes are still weak and suffering.

The Reformation movement of the sixteenth century, came as an effort to regain liberty of conscience; but deluded by the idea of an *elaborate creed*, insisted upon for so many centuries, the reformers and their followers formed other systems of bondage very similar to that of papacy; with slight modifications, giving liberty to fuller ideas on some subjects. And so it has been ever since, each new reform

movement has made the failure of attempting to make a creed just large enough for its prime movers.

