

## WHAT CONSTITUTES A CHURCH

SINCE the appearance of the article, "The One True Church," we have received several communications inquiring as to the right or privilege of a portion of the congregation to split off and hold meetings by itself as a separate and distinct Church. As already pointed out in the article referred to, our Lord's words inform us of his willingness to recognize any two or three of the faithful, consecrated ones when they meet together in his name, and that the presence of the Head with such members constitutes a Church, in the Scriptural sense.

But while this is true it is also true that the teachings of our Lord and of his apostles and the practices of the early Church all agree with the thought that the New Commandment, "that ye love one another as I have loved you," implies such a close fellowship of spirit amongst all of the Lord's dear people as will lead them to desire to come together rather than to disintegrate into smaller groups. We should notice carefully the words, "As I have loved you"; that they signify a very deep, earnest love and not a mere tolerance. The Lord loved us to the extent of giving his life for us, and the Apostle points to him as our example and declares, "We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." This is the love wherewith he loved us. We are to remember, too, that this is not a sectional or sectarian love for class or party in the Church, but is for all, because they are his. True, it is not possible to love all to the same degree of appreciation, but all are to be loved to the degree of a willingness to lay down our lives for them; because even the humblest of the Lord's little ones has a claim on the noblest of them, for does he not belong to the same great army of the redeemed, enlisted under the captaincy of Immanuel in the fight against sin and with a covenant agreement with his Master to lay down his life in his service? How could we help but love

those who have devoted their all to the same Master whom we serve – and the fact that the Master accepts of such and is not ashamed to call them brethren is the best of reasons [R4252 : page 293] why we also should accept them and not be ashamed of them, but on the contrary love them and be glad to serve them, even to the extent of laying down hours or days of life itself in their assistance.

Everything connected with the Spirit of the Lord and the instructions of his Word seem to antagonize the thought of division amongst the members of his Body. A beautiful illustration of this is found in the fact that the dear friends everywhere, as they grow in grace and knowledge, seem to become more and more imbued with the desire to come together – in the one-day conventions and still more so in the general conventions; and in these the thought is often expressed that our longings and fellowship for one another will not find complete satisfaction until we gather with our Lord and all his faithful in the General Assembly of the First-born, "whose names are written in heaven."

We all remember the Apostle's arraignment of sectarianism; and it is well that we take note of the fact that he attributes it to a partisan spirit with which he had no sympathy and to which he refers as an evidence of carnality, fleshly-mindedness, indicating an immature development along spiritual lines. He says, "While one says I am of Paul, and another I am of [R4252 : page 294] Apollos, and another I am of Cephas (Peter), are ye not carnal? Is Christ divided?" (I Cor. 3:3,4.) He goes on to say that none of these redeemed us, but Christ alone, and that we are all baptized into his Body and therefore are related to each other, because we are related to him our Head; and he proceeds to say that there should be no schism in the Body; that is to say, no split, no division.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, dear friends, it is doubtless true that a spirit that favors a division of the class, where such a division would not be due to distance hindering a proper gathering at one place, must be a spirit of sectarianism or partisanship. Sometimes this is a result of a brother desiring to be leader and wishing for a fuller opportunity for the exercise of his talents as a servant of the Church. At other times, as in the case the Apostle mentions, it is due to partisanship on the part of a portion of the Church who are desirous of following leaders, even when the leaders themselves do not desire it, as in St. Paul's case cited. In any event it would do us good in this connection to scrutinize our own hearts individually rather than to judge one another in this matter. Quite possibly in some places where there is a disposition on the part of some to split off and hold separate meetings there may be some real cause or reason; but the better way would be to correct that difficulty and remain united. Unconsciously sometimes the Lord's people become too narrow and control Church arrangements too much along the lines of the will of the majority, rather than endeavor to arrange such a programme as would as nearly as possible please, profit and happy all.

The Apostle's exhortation is that we "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works." This signifies not merely that we should consider the tastes and preferences of the better educated or the naturally more noble or rich or refined, but that we should seek to consider all the dear members of the Body. It is easy comparatively to love the refined, the educated and the well-developed spiritually, and to love these is in harmony with what our Lord suggests that even the Gentiles do, "If ye love them that love you what thank have ye? do not even the publicans and sinners the same?" The brotherly love to which the Apostle refers, saying, "Hereby we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" – this love is not merely the love of the refined and elegant and accomplished and noble-

minded. Many people love those who have not passed from death unto life. But it becomes an evidence of our having passed from death unto life if we love the brethren, of whom the Apostle intimates that many are ignoble; yea, even saying that "God hath chosen the mean things of the world." It is when we come to the place of loving those of the brethren who are naturally mean that we may consider it an evidence of the new nature being in control of the mind. We love them not for their meanness, nor for their ignorance, nor for their stupidity, nor for their poverty, but because they are his and because all his are ours, because they are enlisted under the same banner in the same fight with ourselves; because the Father hath acknowledged them as his children in the begetting of his Spirit. These reasons call for our love, for our sympathy and our help one for another in climbing Zion's Hill.

Our Lord intimates that our love for him will be gauged by our love for the brethren, and the Apostle points out to us that as the Lord's compassion and grace are given to each of us in proportion to our needs, so our sympathy and love should be manifested to others according to their needs. To seek chiefly the company of those who are of our own plane of development, mental or spiritual, is to please ourselves, and the Apostle points out that we should love one another or serve one another and not please ourselves, pointing out further that even Christ pleased not himself. Furthermore he points out that as in our physical bodies we sometimes bestow more care upon a deformed hand or foot to cover the deformity than we do upon one that is natural, so we are to do in the Body of Christ; those who are most in need of our sympathy and assistance and fellowship should receive it, that the whole Body of Christ may be edified, built up and knit together in the bonds of love as the members of Christ under him who is the Head.

We need each member of the Body, as the Apostle intimates, and as the trying times before us become more strenuous we all

more and more need the actual cooperation and assistance and sympathy and love of each other. Let us, therefore, avoid schism as well as "ism" and let us have that spirit of oneness appropriate to the Body, for we are all one in Christ Jesus and members one of another. Let us seek more and more to see eye to eye in all these matters.

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**Question.** – Is it proper to choose as an Elder one who has not participated in symbolic water baptism?

**Answer.** – While we urge that all of the consecrated and all who profess faith in the ransom and a full consecration to the Lord be accounted and dealt with as brethren and members of the Church, irrespective of their obedience to the water symbol, we would not think it either wise or in harmony with the Lord's teaching to select such a one to the eldership of the Church. We could not consider such a one sound in "the faith once delivered to the saints." We could not consider him as well developed in the Truth, even though we accept him as a brother. We could not, therefore, consider him a proper person to be specially chosen to instruct others respecting the divine plan, etc.

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