

THE CHRISTIAN'S LIBRARY—Vol. I.

THE
CHURCH OF GOD:
ITS PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE
ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.

BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

EDITED BY
ALFRED H. BURTON.

LONDON: JAMES CARTER,
ALDINE CHAMBERS,
13 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE importance of the subjects treated in the following pages need be our only apology for presenting to the reader this first volume of *The Christian's Library*.

Some of these valuable papers are now no longer in print, others are found in bulkier volumes out of the reach of many who we trust will welcome our effort to preserve to the present generation what has proved of inestimable blessing to multitudes who have trod the heavenward way before them.

The remarkable recovery of long lost truths some sixty years ago proved to be a veritable revival to the Church of God. Amongst these may be enumerated, besides the principles and practice of the Church of God, the believer's perfect standing in Christ through that one sacrifice whereby he has been perfected for ever (Heb. x.) ; his deliverance from the law of sin, through identification with Christ in His death and resurrection ; his union with a glorified Christ by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven ; the abiding presence of the Comforter—to say nothing of the “blessed hope” of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people, and the whole scope of prophetic truth as it concerns the distinctive portions of the Jews and all the nations of the world.

Many stop short at the knowledge of their own personal salvation. They seem to think that this is the great essential matter, and that all else is to be included

under the vague term of *non-essentials*. But can any who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ treat with indifference any truth that concerns His glory, or that is dear to His heart? And what, we may ask, is dearer to Him on this earth than that of which we read that "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it"? (Eph. v. 25).

The Church is viewed in Scripture under three different figures.

First, ONE BODY composed of many members. Here the prominent thought is that of *union*. All these many members are livingly united by the Holy Ghost to Christ the glorified Head in heaven, and to one another.

Second, THE BRIDE. Here the great thought is *affection*. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." As the Bride she loves and waits for her Lord as the Bridegroom of her heart, and Who will presently manifest her in glory as His royal Bride before the eyes of an assembled universe (Rev. xix., xxi.).

Third, THE HOUSE OF GOD.* In this aspect of the Church we are led to think of her *responsibility*—"That thou mayest . . . behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God" (1 Tim. iii. 15).

We would press these three thoughts — *union* with Christ; *love* for Christ; *responsibility* to Christ.

It is well to remember in reading the New Testament that the word "church," which occurs so often in our authorised version, may invariably be rendered "assembly." This is of importance, for our English word "church" is capable of so many different meanings.

* As the House, we find that Scripture views the Church in a double sense. First, as composed of *living* stones, built by Christ Himself—against this the gates of Hades shall not prevail (Matt. xvi. 18; Eph. ii. 20-22; 1 Pet. ii. 5). Second, as entrusted to man's responsibility, man being the builder (1 Cor. iii. 10-17). In this character she is seen in Revelation ii. and iii. as the object of the judgment of Christ.

Editor's Preface.

vii

One person talks about "going to church," meaning the *building* where he worships ; another speaks of putting his son "into the Church," meaning to make him a clergyman, &c. &c. But if we bear in mind that the word ἐκκλησία (translated *church*) really means *assembly*,* much light is thrown upon the subject.

We hear a great deal to-day about *the teaching of the Church*, but no one intelligent in what Scripture teaches *about* the Church would so speak.

The Church never teaches; it is God who teaches by His Word, and every soul of man is responsible to hear and obey Him. It is scarcely necessary to allude to the threadbare argument of those who seek to establish the authority of the Church in matters of doctrine, based upon the quotation from Matthew xviii. 17—"Hear the Church." To read the whole passage (vers. 15-20) is the best refutation of this mistaken application of a fragment of a sentence entirely taken out of its connection.

The Christian reader is urged to study the following pages Bible in hand, and to prayerfully refer to all the passages and texts quoted. He will then become acquainted with the teaching of the Word of God as to the *principles* of the Church. These principles always abide. But what of the *practice*? It may be urged that we are no longer in the days of the Acts. This is freely admitted. Our lot is cast in days that more resemble the second epistles of Timothy and John.

But however difficult the days may be, of this we may rest assured, that until the last moment of the Church's history upon earth, there will be a path in which faith may tread to the glory of the Lord. No amount of diffi-

* In Acts xix. 41, it is so translated; it would have been nonsense to say that the town clerk dismissed *the Church*! In Acts vii. 38, we should read "the *assembly* in the wilderness"; the assembly, *Christ's body*, had no existence in Old Testament times—the nation of Israel was "the assembly in the wilderness."

culty should be plea sufficient for walking in a path of disobedience to the Word.

Many are speaking about the *reunion* of Christendom ; Scripture speaks of its apostasy and judgment. We are persuaded that as the days grow darker, and the professing Church hurries on to its judgment, hearts that beat true to the Lord Jesus Christ will be drawn more closely together. While seeking to keep Christ's word and not to deny His name (Rev. iii. 8), let us follow righteousness, faith, love, and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. ii.), assured of this, that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Meanwhile it will be our privilege to gather to His name and to show His death "till He come."

ABIDING PRINCIPLES.

THE truth of God never changes. Man may fail in maintaining it, but the truth abides.

In the most difficult days faith may act upon the unchanging truth of God.

All that is needed on our part is a single eye for God's glory; an undivided heart for the honour of Christ's name; a firm adherence to God's Word, and a simple dependence upon the Holy Ghost.

Let Christ and His glory be the all-absorbing object of our hearts, and the all-engrossing purpose of our lives.

Men speak of the different churches: God's Word speaks of *the Church*. In men's churches there are many dead members. In "the Church which is His body" there are no members but those who have life, and are united to Christ the living Head in heaven.

The Church's birthday was the day of Pentecost. Old Testament saints, though truly the children of God, were not united to a glorified Christ at the right hand of God. Christ as Man in heavenly glory is the Head of the Church, which is His body, and the Church here on earth is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. i. 19-23).

All true Christians are members of that Church,

and in that Church are none who are not true Christians. Though true Christians are now divided one from the other, and scattered amongst the various churches of man's making, yet in God's sight they are one, and presently will be manifested as one in glory.

They *ought* to manifest that unity on earth. But so far as the outward expression of it is concerned *the Church is in ruins.*

It is never God's way to restore what man spoils, yet there is a path for faith in these difficult and perilous times.

Christ has promised His presence in the midst where two or three are gathered to His name (Matt. xviii.). It will be the privilege of those gathered to His name to show His death "till He come" (1 Cor. xi.). It is the duty of those thus gathered to welcome in the name of the Lord all who are sound in the faith, godly in walk, and separated from evil associations. Those gathered to Christ's name need no minister or president to take control, for *Christ is in their midst.* In proportion as the Holy Spirit is ungrieved by the individuals so gathered, and unquenched in the assembly, worship and prayer will flow and edification be given.

Scripture knows of no membership other than that of being members of the body of Christ. To exclude any who are known to be Christians, and separated from what dishonours Christ, is to adopt sectarian ground.

To attempt to restore the Church to its Pentecostal state would prove insensibility of conscience, and

Abiding Principles.

181

would lead to confusion and shame. With all lowliness and meekness, in spite of weakness, to seek to keep Christ's Word and not deny His name, will be the privilege of faith until the Lord comes.

No amount of failure in the Church should deprive us of the privilege of showing His death "till He come," nor does it relieve us of the responsibility to do this "in remembrance" of Him.

On that same night, Lord Jesus,
When all around Thee joined,
To cast its darkest shadow
Across Thy holy mind,
We hear Thy voice, blest Saviour,
"This do !—Remember Me !"
With joyful hearts responding
We would remember Thee.