

The Middle Wall

by Elijah Goodwin

The sermon explores the concept of the partition wall, the law of Moses, and the breaking down of the wall to form a new church composed of believers from every nation under heaven.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, John 12:26, Acts 8:37, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:14, Ephesians 4:4, Hebrews 2:4

Topics: "Church Unity", "Peacemaking"

Description

Elijah Goodwin preaches about the significance of unity in the church, emphasizing the breaking down of barriers between believers of different backgrounds and the formation of one body in Christ. He delves into the historical context of the early church, highlighting the controversy surrounding the inclusion of Gentile believers and the abolishment of the law of commandments to create a new man. Goodwin draws practical conclusions, stressing that God only establishes one church at a time, gives its laws and ordinances, and accompanies its formation with divine manifestations. He underscores the importance of the church of Christ and the need for peacemaking among believers to follow the example set by Jesus.

Transcript

"He is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Eph. 2:14.

HIS text is only a part of a lengthy argument, employed by the apostle, for the purpose of settling a very unpleasant controversy which was agitating the public mind at that time. This controversy had reference to the rights and privileges which should be granted to persons who had embraced Christianity from among the Gentiles. The Jewish believers opposed their reception into the church, and even went so far as to forbid the apostles "to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved." Paul, being the apostle of the Gentiles, defends their rights, devoting a great portion of this Epistle to that subject.

In the first chapter he shows that notwithstanding God had predestinated the seed of Abraham to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, yet he had purposed "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he would gather together in [248] one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him," thus showing that the original purpose of God was, finally, to unite all believers of all nations in one body.

In the second chapter he shows that the Jews have nothing to boast of above the Gentiles on account of good works. That, notwithstanding the Gentiles had "walked according to the course of this world,

according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience," yet the Jews had had their behavior in the same way, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature [practice, second nature] the children of wrath, even as others," as the Gentiles.

He then announces the great truth that the whole gospel plan of salvation was devised and put into operation on the principle of grace, so that all who are saved, whether Jew or Gentile, "are saved by grace, and not of works, lest any man should boast," thus showing that the Jews had no constitutional rights in the gospel kingdom which did not belong to the Gentiles on the same principles. Now, while prosecuting this argument, the apostle penned the text which I have selected as the theme of this discourse: "He is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."

In the further investigation of the subject, we propose the following order: [249]

I. Show what is meant by this partition wall, and its designs.

II. Speak of the breaking down of this wall, and the purposes for which it was broken down.

III. Draw some practical conclusions.

I. According to this order, I inquire, What is meant by this partition wall? This the apostle explains in the following verse, thus: "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances." Then, the law of Moses, with all its rites and ceremonies, is what is here called a partition wall. Of this law God was the author and finisher. He counseled with no intelligent being in the universe on the subject. He advised with no man or angel, as to what should be or should not be law. He gave it from the thick darkness that crowned the smoking summit of trembling Mount Sinai.

But for what purpose was this law given? What were its designs?

1. In order that man may be saved, he must have confidence in God. He must not only believe that "God is," but he must believe that "he is a rewarder of all who seek him diligently" (Heb. 2:6). Now, in order that man may have this confidence in the Lord, it was necessary that He show himself to be a covenant-keeping God; that all that He promises He will perform. Now, God had made promises to Abraham, saying: "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" [250] (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). In order, then, to show to heaven and earth that God had kept this promise, it was necessary to keep the seed of Abraham separate from all other nations until the Messiah should come; or, as Paul expresses it, "until the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). Had not this been done, the seed of Abraham might have been lost in the ocean of human beings, and no man could ever have told whether the covenant was fulfilled or not. It might have been fulfilled to the letter, but, the lineage being lost, the skeptic would always have had the advantage. Hence, in order to keep the posterity of Abraham separate from all other people, and thus to show to heaven and earth that the Lord had kept His promise to the letter, He threw around the seed of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, the law of commandments concerning ordinances, and by it fenced them in from all the nations of the earth. This, then, was the first design of that institution.

2. But, in the second place, it was intended to hold that people in subjection; to govern them (Galatians 3).

The Jews are always spoken of as a stiff-necked and rebellious nation. They were constantly inclined to run away from God. Hence the Lord treated them as the husbandman treats his unruly stock; He fenced

them in. Hence the law is called a governor, under which the Jews were placed [251] during their minority, until the time appointed of the Father for them to be made free by the Son, that they might be free indeed, should come.

Peter, using another figure, calls this law a yoke, which, he says, "neither they nor their fathers were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). By a yoke he means law, government and thus shows that that partition wall was intended to hold the people in subjection to God. True, like unruly stock, they often broke over this wall, and ran away from God; but this does not disprove our last position in reference to the design of the law.

3. In the third place, the law was intended to teach that people, and thus prepare them for the reception of the Messiah when He should come.

The apostle says "the law was [not is] our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24). The Jewish nation was placed under the law as a tutor, to train, teach and prepare that people, in heart and character, for the coming dispensation. In reasoning on this subject, the apostle said: "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world" (Gal. 4:1-3). By "tutor" Paul means the law.

And I may be permitted to say that there never was a more competent teacher than was this [252] law. No teacher was ever better qualified to accomplish the ends contemplated. That law, in all its rites and ceremonies, pointed to the gospel day; hence it is said, "The law had a shadow of good things to come." The loaves of the divine presence very fitly prefigured the Lord's Supper in the Christian church; the golden altar and burning incense were fit types of the spiritual devotion arising from hearts purified by grace under the reign of Christ; their bleeding, expiring victims, that bled for remission under that law, prefigured the great atoning sacrifice which was offered in the end of the Jewish age to put away sin. Indeed, their very temple itself was a type of the Christian church, and every rite performed within its consecrated walls was intended to develop the mind, enlarge the views, direct the affections, and prepare the nation for the coming Messiah.

It may be asked, If this teacher was so competent, why was the nation so poorly taught? Why were they so poorly prepared to receive the Saviour when He came?

I answer: It is not every student that is put under a good and efficient teacher that comes out an accomplished scholar. The student must be reconciled to the rules of the school; he must have some regard for his teacher; he must submit to the laws of the institution; and, above all, he must apply his mind to his studies. All these things the Jews failed to do. They fell out with [253] their teacher; they refused to submit to his authority; they would not apply their hearts to his instructions; they added their own views of propriety to his commandments, insomuch that the Lord said, when He came, they had "made void the law by their traditions."

To this general charge there were a few honorable exceptions; and these were fully prepared to receive the Messiah. Good old Simeon was of this happy number. It is said of him that he "was just, and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." When Christ was circumcised, he "took him up in his arms, and said, Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:28, 29). Simeon saw salvation in this child for all nations; he saw, in the infant Saviour, light for the Gentiles, who had long been in darkness, and glory for the Israel of God.

Now, the only principle upon which we can account for the striking difference between this good man and the great mass of the Jewish nation is, that he studied his lessons, he obeyed his teacher, he satisfied himself with the requirements of the law, and was, therefore, prepared to enter the higher school, when the great Teacher, sent from God, appeared. And I fully believe that if the whole nation had thus submitted to that [254] schoolmaster and governor, they would all have been as well prepared for the reign of Christ as was this good man. The fault was not in the teacher, but in the students.

II. I now pass to my second head of discourse, which is to speak of the breaking down of this wall of partition, and the designs for which it was broken down.

This law stood in full force during the teaching of John the Baptist, and of Christ and His disciples, until the Lord's death. All the reformation and obedience that John required were to be performed according to that law. Christ Himself lived under that law, and hence, when He healed a man of the leprosy, He told him to "show himself to the priest, and offer for his cleansing those things that Moses commanded" (Mark 1:44).

But when the great antitype, the atoning sacrifice, expired, the law expired with Him; when He bowed His head and died, the partition wall fell. Then it was that He, who is our peace-offering, broke down the middle wall of partition, according to our text. Speaking in reference to this same matter, the apostle says He hath "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14).

That this partition wall had now fallen, God signified by rending the veil of the temple, at [255] the death of Christ. That veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place; it concealed from public view the Most Holy Place, of the temple, and might, therefore, be considered as an emblem of the partition wall between Jew and Gentile. But now the promised seed has come; the substance of all the shadows under the law is now manifested; the Lamb of God, which had been slain in type from the foundation of the world, was now slain in fact; upon the cross on Calvary He bows His head and dies, and the partition wall is leveled to the ground, and the veil of the temple is rent in two from top to bottom, as if God would say, We have no more need of thee: Christ has opened up a new and living way, through the veil of His flesh, into the Holy Place made without hands.

But, under this head, I am also to point out some of the designs of our blessed Lord, in breaking this partition wall down. Though these may be many, I will only mention two in this discourse.

1. The first design that I will notice is spoken of in the context thus: "To make in himself of twain one new man."

Now, by this "new man" the apostle means a new church, having reference to the Christian church under the gospel dispensation. This new church was to be composed of believers from every nation under heaven; but this could not be while the partition wall between Jew and Gentile stood. Therefore, before He organized the new church-- [256] before He formed, of the two nations, one new man--He broke down the partition wall between them. Thus, we clearly perceive one of the main objects of the apostle in penning this text. The Jews, as stated in the introduction of this discourse, opposed the reception of the Gentiles into the church; they argued that the law forbade it; that that institution stood as a wall between them and all other nations; and, therefore, for them to unite with men of another nation in religious matters would be to overleap God's partition wall.

But, in answer to this, Paul speaks in the language of our text, saying: "He is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of two one new man."

From this declaration, it is clear that Paul did not believe in the modern notion that the Jewish church and the Christian church were one; that they were identical. He does not say that He who is our peace has come to reform the old Jewish church, and "enlarge its privileges somewhat." But He declares that His object was to make a new man; a new ecclesiastical organization, the like of which never existed upon the earth before.

John the Baptist, the Lord Himself, and the disciples, all taught the same doctrine. John "preached in the wilderness of Judæa, saying, Repent, [257] for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Thus did He announce the near approach of a new kingdom, or church. "And when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:7-10).

John saw that these persons expected to obtain a place in the kingdom, or church of Christ, now approaching, by virtue of their relationship to Abraham. But he lets them know that, in that new organism, every man must stand upon his own faith and obedience; that every tree, whether of the seed of Abraham or not, that does not bring forth good fruit, shall be cast into the fire.

The disciples also were commanded to "preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7). And Christ Himself "preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15); thus signifying the near approach of a new church, and [258] the necessity of a personal preparation for a place in it.

The Lord taught the same doctrine, both in parable and without a parable. On one occasion He said: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse" (Matt. 9:16); thus intimating that He had not come to mend and patch up that old garment, or Jewish church; but that He intended to make a new garment, an entirely new church.

Again He said: "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles, else the bottles break and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish; but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:17). By this parable the Lord teaches that He did not intend to pour the Holy Spirit, with all its quickening, sanctifying and miraculous power, into that old, moldy, leathern bottle, or national church; but that He was about to make a new vessel entirely--a new church--into which He would put the new wine of the kingdom, the Holy Spirit, with all its divine influences.

When Peter confessed the Lord, saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, [259] and on this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16, 17). The reader will please notice that the Lord speaks of His church as not yet built; He says, "I will build my church." Of course, when built,

it would not be the old church improved, but a new church altogether, called, in the connection in which our text stands, a new man.

Jesus taught the same doctrine, virtually, to Nicodemus. This man was a ruler of the Jews, and, of course, occupied a high place in that old national kingdom, or church. He seems to have been well convinced that Jesus was the Messiah for whom his nation had long been looking. Hence he "came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Now, Jesus, no doubt perceiving the thoughts of his heart, said unto him: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

This was a new doctrine to Nicodemus. It was not taught in the old covenant, on which the Jewish church stood, and therefore this officer in that church was filled with astonishment when, for the first time, he heard it announced. The Saviour explains by saying: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). Thus the Lord teaches him, and us, and all the world, [260] that He was about to set up a new kingdom, or church, so different from the old institution that its members had to be born over again in order to obtain membership in the new church. Flesh and blood gave a title to membership in the old church; but faith, that works by love and purifies the heart, gives a title to membership in the new. Natural birth and fleshly relationship give no privileges in the church of Christ.

Though a person, applying for membership in this new church, might prove that his ancestry for ten generations back had all been members of the church, yet he can not be admitted unless he believe in Jesus, the Son of God. He can not come in on the faith of father or mother, or god-father or god-mother. And, on the other hand, if the person applying does believe in Christ with all his heart, and is willing to submit to His divine authority, he may become a member, though his ancestry for ten generations may all have been atheists.

I will only name one other point of difference between these two organisms, and then close my remarks on this item.

The prophet, speaking of those who should be come members of this church according to the new covenant, says: "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of [261] them, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:34). Now, this could never be said in the old Jewish church. Persons were born into this church of their earthly parents, and therefore had to be taught to know the Lord afterward. Not so in the new church of which we speak; in it all were to know the Lord; they were to be taught first, and then to come in, being found worthy. Hence the Lord said to His disciples: "Go teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

2. The second design that the Lord had in breaking down this partition wall, which I will notice, was to make peace. Paul says: "He abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

When the Lord appeared on earth, division and dissension prevailed everywhere. The Jews, within the bounds of the partition wall of which we have spoken, were much divided among themselves. There were the Pharisees and Sadducees, besides other minor sects, among them. True, they had not carried their sectarianism quite so far as some professed Christians have done. They all worshiped in the same temple; they offered their sacrifices at the same altar, and presented their gifts through the same

priesthood; they did not lock the doors of their synagogues against a brother Jew because he belonged to a different sect. Still, [262] they were much divided. Every man knew to which party he belonged, and thus the peace of Zion was much disturbed. And then, outside of the precincts of Judaism, all was division. The Gentile world had multiplied their deities to over forty thousand. Every god and demigod must have his altar and his priests, and these, by their teaching and mysteries, kept the people in everlasting contention. Such was the divided and distracted state of our world when the Star of Bethlehem appeared; when the great peacemaker from the skies appeared in human form. He came to hush, to silence warring elements--to say to the raging waves of the ocean of human passion, "Peace, be still;" and to unite in one holy brotherhood those who had been long divided. Well might the angelic hosts sing: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will toward men."

But it may be asked, If Christ came to make peace, why did He say that He came to send a sword? Why did He say, "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household"? (Matt. 10:35, 36). Am I asked, How can this be reconciled with the idea that Christ came to make peace?

I admit that Christ did intend to draw one line of distinction--to mark out one division line, [263] long and broad and deep--one that should be seen and known of all men. This separation line was to be "between them that serve the Lord and them that serve him not." (I fear that this line is not as distinctly seen in our day as the Lord intended it to be.)

When the gospel was first proclaimed, some embraced it, while others rejected it; the father would sometimes become a Christian, and the son would not; the mother would embrace the gospel, and the daughter would reject it--and thus the family would become divided, until a man's foes would indeed be those of his own household. And this division was more than nominal. The unbelieving party would even deliver up the believer, though it were a father or a son, unto death. To this state of things, doubtless, the Saviour referred when He said He had come to make division. Still, His great object was to make peace, and to make it on holy terms. These terms of union were to be so well adapted to the ends proposed--namely, the union of all believers--that the manifold wisdom of God should be visible in them; not only to men, but also to "principalities and powers in heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10).

The apostle refers to these principles in the twentieth verse of the chapter in which our text stands. Speaking to those who had become members of this sacred brotherhood, he says: "Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, [264] but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."

Now, the constitution of any organized society is the foundation on which it stands. The Constitution of the United States is the foundation on which this great sisterhood of States is budded; the whole political building stands on this platform; destroy the foundation, and the whole building must fall into a thousand fragments--or, to speak without a figure, the Union would be dissolved. May so unhappy an event never obtain! Just so, the constitution of the church is the foundation on which it was organized, and on which it was to stand while sun and moon endure.

But what is meant by the foundation of the apostles and prophets? This must mean the teaching of these holy men of God, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Christ is called the chief corner-stone because these apostles and prophets taught as He directed. The chief cornerstone, in a literal building, is

first squared and laid--and the whole foundation is squared by it. So, all the teaching of these divinely inspired teachers of Christ was fitted and squared and dictated by the mind of Christ, as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Now, we have the teaching of these divinely authorized witnesses of Christ, in the Bible, which [265] contains the Old and New Testaments. Thus we have found the constitution on which that new church was formed. The Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, was their only book of faith and religious manners.

The apostle gives a compendium of this foundation of union and communion in the following words: "There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6). These seven points embrace, in a compendious form, the great apostolic platform on which this new church is built and organized. All who acknowledged the one God and Father of all, and submitted to the one baptism, having the one faith, confessing the one Lord, came into the one body, and enjoyed the one Spirit, and rejoiced in the one hope.

What a beautiful arrangement was this. How well calculated to unite the good of all nations! All national peculiarities were to be forgotten here; the Jew was to be reconciled to his fellow-Jew, the Gentile to his fellow-Gentile--and the Jew and Gentile to be reconciled to each other; and on these divine principles to form the one body, and all in one body was to be reconciled to God by the cross of Christ, and thus peace was not only to be made on earth among men, but peace was to be established between heaven and [266] earth, between God and man. Hallelujah! praise ye the Lord!

But in, every system there is one central idea--one fundamental truth--which may be regarded as the soul of the system, and which generally gives name to it. The sun is the central body in the system of worlds to which we belong, and from that body of light the system receives its name--the solar system.

The same is true of all systems of human government. The central idea in the Constitution of the United States is expressed in these words: "All men are born free and equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." Now, the whole Constitution is framed in reference to this one great truth; and all the national and State laws of the Government must be in accordance therewith, and designed to maintain to every citizen that freedom which this simple declaration expresses.

So, in all ecclesiastical organisms, each has its own central idea. In one, that central idea is government by the congregation, so the body is called Congregationalist. In another, the central thought is government by the bishops, and the whole polity is organized accordingly, and the body is called Episcopalian--from episcopos, translated "bishop" in the King's Version of the Holy Scriptures. In a third, the central idea is government by the presbytery, or eldership, so this body [267] is called Presbyterian--from presbuteros, translated "elder" in the Common Version.

Well, in the constitution of the new man, or church, which Christ built, there is also one central idea--one all-pervading truth--which may be regarded as the soul system. That central idea or truth is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He with unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter

answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13-18).

It is worthy of remark that, in this address to Peter, the Lord changes the gender. He says "Thou art Peter [petros, which is masculine]; and on this rock [petra, which is feminine] I will build my church." Now, the Greek word aleethia, which means truth, is also feminine. This shows that Christ did not intend to build His church on [268] Peter, but on the great truth which he had just confessed. This truth, then, is the central idea in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And hence, the one Lord is placed, by the apostle, in the center of the apostolic platform, upon which the unity of the Spirit is to be obtained and maintained. Read the seven items again, Eph. 4:5-7.

This truth is so interwoven with the whole revelation of God to man that, when it is believed, the whole system is believed with it. Hence the importance which is attached to this one article of faith, in the Holy Scriptures. When the Ethiopian desired to come into this sacred union, by baptism, "Philip said unto him, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). On this confession of faith, Philip baptized him, and he went on his way rejoicing. Why did not Philip ask him if he believed in the one God and Father of all? if he had the one faith? if he believed in the one body? or desired to enjoy the one Spirit and the one hope? Because no one could consistently acknowledge the one Lord, and reject these other items in the great platform on which Christ came to make peace.

Concerning those who had come into this bond of peace, Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Again: "There is [269] neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

Thus we have ascertained the principles upon which the Christian church was formed. But when was it organized? When did it obtain a visible existence?

The materials for this new building were being prepared during the whole of Christ's ministry upon earth. Indeed, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for this new kingdom. All before the day of Pentecost was but the work of preparation; but on that memorable day the church received a visible form--or, to speak in modern style, it was organized.

This fact gives to this day an unusual importance. On this important occasion, the first additions to this church, the new church, that ever obtained, were made. This maybe regarded as the birthday of the church of Jesus Christ. This is reason enough for any people, desiring to stand on apostolic ground, to be often found referring to that day. If all the mighty reformers that have arisen in the last three hundred years had taken their first lessons from Pentecost, and remained longer in the school of the holy Twelve, the multiplied divisions which have marred the work of God, and defaced the glory of the church, could never have obtained. [270]

III. I now proceed to my third head of discourse, which is to draw some practical conclusions from the facts which have been developed.

1. My first conclusion, drawn from the premises now before me, is that God never had two churches, diverse one from the other, at the same time. That many individual congregations were organized at different points, for the sake of convenience, in the days of the apostles, is true; but these all belonged to the one body--they all had the same constitution and laws; namely, the teaching of the apostles and prophets of Christ, and that alone. This joined them all together, so that our one conclusion remains true. The Lord did not organize two different churches, on different constitutions, to be called by different names, and governed by different laws, and both to stand at the same time. He did not make the one new man while the old one lived. He did not organize the Christian church by the side of the Jewish, and tell the members to maintain their distinct and separate organizations, but still to love one another, and be as friendly as possible! No, verily! Before He organized the new church, He tore down the old one; He took its constitution out of the way, nailing it to the cross, that all legal barriers to an entire union of all believers might be removed, and that all necessity for two separate church organizations might be done away. Thus did God show [271] to heaven and earth that He intended to have but one church standing at the same time.

2. My second conclusion is that, if ever God determines to make a new church, He will give the constitution and enact all the laws for it, and appoint all its ordinances.

I come to this conclusion from the fact that He always has done so. When He was about to organize the Jewish nation into a church, or congregation, He did not tell Moses to assemble the elders of Israel together for the purpose of legislating for His people. He reserved all the legislative power to Himself. The only matter referred to them was, whether they would keep the law. "And they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7).

So, when He made the new man, or Christian congregation, He gave it all its laws. He assembled no general council, either of men or angels, to draft a constitution and enact laws for His church. He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. He consulted His own will alone on the subject, and gave just such laws and ordinances as he saw would be best calculated to perfect the man of God, and thoroughly furnish him unto all good works. Now, judging the future from the past, is it not reasonable to conclude that if the good Lord should ever propose to organize another church, He will still hold all the legislative power in His own hands That He will frame its [272] constitution, enact its laws, and appoint all its ordinances? Most surely He will, as long as He reigns King of kings and Lord of lords.

3. My third conclusion is that, if God should even give organic laws for a new church, He will accompany the giving and promulgating of those laws with such miraculous gifts and divine manifestations as will leave no doubt as to their divine origin.

When He gave His law to His ancient people, He did not require them to receive it on the mere testimony of Moses. He did not leave the elders of Israel to guess or imagine, from secret impulses, what was the mind of God as to legal requirements. But the Lord communed with Moses from the thick darkness which overspread the mount of God; while the earth trembled, and the voice of words was heard, and the sound of a trumpet waxed louder and louder, until the affrighted hosts of Israel withdrew from the trembling, burning, smoking Mount Sinai, and entreated that the words should not be spoken to them any more. (See Heb. 12:18, 19.) These awfully grand and terrific scenes were intended to show that it was none other than God who gave that law; it was Jehovah's testimony to the divine authenticity of the law.

And when the constitution and laws of the new man, or Christian church, were given, they were attended by divine power. Even the [273] Messiahship of the Lord Jesus was proved by His doing such works as no other man had ever done. And after He was crowned Lord of all, and the time came to organize the New Testament church, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." Thus did the divine power testify as to the sacred origin of this new church. And then, during the entire ministry of these prime ministers of the kingdom of Christ, God "bore them witness, by signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his will" (Heb. 2:4), so that there was no room left to doubt the truth of what they preached. All who would reason honestly were bound to say:

"The work, O Lord, is thine,

And wondrous in our eyes."

Now, from all these facts, we conclude that if God should ever propose to build a new church, different from the one that was set up on the day of Pentecost, He will accompany the organization thereof, and the promulgation of its laws and ordinances, with such miraculous attestations as will prove its heavenly origin, and thus point it [274] out as His church, in contradistinction from every other ecclesiastical organization on the face of the broad earth.

4. My fourth conclusion is that the church of Christ is no mean affair.

If the whole Jewish economy was only a preparatory work for this church; if all the ancient prophets and seers of God spoke and taught in reference to it; if the whole ministry of John was only intended to prepare the way for it; if the partition wall, the law of commandments concerning ordinances, which had stood for fifteen hundred years, was broken down to make way for it; if Jesus died to blot out that old covenant which stood in the way of the Jews coming into the new church, and which was, therefore, contrary to their best interests; and if He sealed and ratified the constitution of this church with His own heart's blood--it must surely be an institution of no small importance.

I awfully fear that many who profess faith in Christ have not a proper regard for the church of God. I fear that many look upon the church about as they do on any human organizations, gotten up for mere worldly purposes. Hence, we hear men talk about "the church of their choice," or of "selecting the church whose polity they prefer." Is not this treating the church of Christ as we do State governments and human organizations? Men choose to live in one State in preference [275] to another, because of their difference in State polity. So, one man chooses to be a member of the Free Mason fraternity, but another prefers the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. And how many choose their church about in the same way. Now, my dear reader, all this is well enough in reference to mere human organizations, but when we speak of the church of God, the subject is too awfully great to admit of any such conferring with flesh and blood. In reference to His church, God has given no such volition; He organized it through the ministry of divinely inspired apostles and teachers, and the only choice left us is to adopt its constitution, submit to its laws, and become members according to gospel terms, and thus enjoy its blessings; or else to reject it altogether, and risk the consequences.

Reader, ponder these things well. Remember, we must all account to the great Judge of the living and the dead, for the manner in which we treat the "church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

5. I conclude, in the fifth place, that it is the will of God that all partition walls, or human laws which tend to divide the people of God, shall be leveled to the ground. That the will of the Lord has not changed since the days of the apostles will not be denied; and that it will not change during the whole lifetime of the gospel dispensation must be admitted by all. Then it follows [276] that, if He broke down the old partition wall which He Himself built, even the law of commandments concerning ordinances, for the express purpose of making one new church, that He might thereby make peace, then is it contrary to His righteous purpose to have His people divided and subdivided into contending sects and parties, and kept apart by laws and usages which He has not ordained.

If these laws have not been attested by miraculous power, they are not of God, though they may have been enacted by the most august council ever convened since the days of the apostles; and if they are not of God, they should not be regarded as authoritative in His kingdom. And if they tend to divide and keep His people asunder, they should all be broken down, so that God's will may be done by His people on earth, as angels do it in heaven.

6. My sixth conclusion is that every disciple of Christ ought to be a peacemaker. Christ was a peacemaker, as we have seen; and He says: "If any man will serve me, let him follow me" (John 12:26). To follow Christ is to imitate Him. Then, as He made peace, so let His disciples endeavor to do.

When the Lord would make peace, He did not omit any duty for that purpose; He compromised no truth for the sake of peace; He made no league with sin; He broke down all legal barriers which [277] stood in the way of the peace and union of believers of all nations, and then laid down a holy platform of union--a platform composed of a few plain, but mighty, truths--truths which permeate the whole volume of inspiration, giving life and power to the whole system of human redemption. Upon these sacred principles He formed a holy brotherhood, in which all was peace and love and joy, through the Holy Spirit.

Now, if we claim to be the disciples of Christ to be learners of Him--then should we labor to make peace on the same principles. We should endeavor to impress these principles upon the minds of all over whom we have any influence, both by precept and example, so that all may see their beauty, feel their power, and be converted by the truth as it is in Jesus; that the peace of God may rule in the hearts and lives of all His people both now and for evermore. [278]

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