

Preface

Were it not apprehended by me to be a duty to offer to your serious perusal the following plain and experiential observations, the reader would not have heard from me in this way.

I have often, with many brethren and sisters in the Truth, been deeply affected in viewing the great danger to which Christian professors are exposed through indifference of mind. When a lethargic stupefaction has gained the ascendancy in the heart, religion in notion and fruitless speculation satisfy a mind so depraved. Thus a true renovation of heart (without which none can be truly religious) is not sought after; and men, being pleased with the shell or form only, are not sensible that they lack the substance.

When the subtle adversary finds men in this kind of sleep or stupefaction, it is then his opportunity for sowing the tares amongst the wheat; and by this means, the field of the Christian church, in process of time, became covered therewith. That which came nearest to my heart and most earnestly engaged my attention towards this present undertaking, not without ardent desires for the lasting advantage of Christians of all denominations, was, that the descendants of a people, who a little above a century ago, were marvelously brought out of, and redeemed from, all lifeless shadows and empty forms of religion, to enjoy and be grounded in the blessed power and life thereof, might be preserved truly sensible of the way and means whereby our worthy predecessors obtained a firm establishment in the Truth, as it is in Christ Jesus; for it is evident where the means are neglected, the end cannot be attained.

That many of the descendants of the early Society of Friends, in this day of outward peace and plenty, inclining to false liberty and ease, shun the cross of Christ which would crucify them to the world, is a mournful truth too obvious to be denied. And it is in consideration of this, I found a concern to throw a few observations before them, suited to the present state of things; endeavoring, in some degree, to offer to the view of the present and succeeding generations, the means by which our worthy predecessors became a living honorable body of people, in hope that the necessity may fully appear of the same blessed power operating upon their hearts and minds, in order to qualify all to rightly succeed those valiants in maintaining the cause of God.

The objection which cast some discouragement in my way may also occur to some readers, namely, that the subjects treated of in this small tract have been many times judiciously written before by different authors. But this is no more than may be said of most religious subjects. Divine wisdom and goodness has seen fit to revive the same truths, by different instruments, from generation to generation; the Lord's servants speaking the same thing, as with one mouth. Herein God's gracious condescension to human frailty is very conspicuous, causing those excellent truths, so essential to be received that man's soul may be saved, to be frequently revived and inculcated, seeing man is so liable to forget God and his reasonable duty to Him.

I shall only add my earnest prayer to the God and Father of all sure mercies, that these truths, which I have cast into the treasury, may meet the serious reader, of whatever denomination, with the divine blessing! If such a blessing graciously attends, though what is here offered may be justly accounted as mere barley-loaves, the hungry soul may receive some strength and refreshment thereby.

—JOHN GRIFFITH

30th of Eighth month, 1764.

Section I

Containing Tender Advice, Caution, and Counsel to Parents and Children

First to parents.

Very much depends upon the right education of children. I therefore find it in my mind to make a few observations upon this subject, as it shall please the Lord to open my understanding, without whose assistance and blessing upon our labors, they prove altogether fruitless.

The people of Israel were strictly enjoined to make the training up of their children in the law of God, their constant care: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day, shall be in your heart, and you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

Exceedingly great is the trust reposed in parents and the heads of families. It is certainly their indispensable duty, as much as they can, both by precept and example, to form the tender minds of their offspring to virtue, as says the apostle, “And you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” And, “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Parents must first be acquainted with the way of Truth, and the nurture and admonition of the Lord themselves, before they can train up their children therein. That which is likely to have the greatest influence upon their tender minds is a steady, circumspect example, in a self-denying conduct before them; which will beget reverence and honorable thoughts in children concerning those whom Providence has placed over them.

Great care should dwell upon the minds of parents, to make it fully evident to their children that they are much more desirous they should possess a heavenly than an earthly inheritance; and are more concerned that their souls be adorned with the graces of the Holy Spirit, than that their bodies should appear decked with outward ornaments.

Children will be very likely to value that which they see is preferred by their parents, whether it be the things of the world, or the things of God. If this is the case (which I think will be conceded by all thoughtful persons), O then! how much depends upon them for the promotion of truth and righteousness on the earth, both in regard to the present time, and the generations to come. This fully appears by the Lord's testimony concerning Abraham; "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him." Abraham's godly concern appears earnest, even for the child of the bond-woman; where he said unto the Lord, "Oh! that Ishmael might live before You."

Constant and faithful endeavors, with secret cries to God that His blessing may attend them, may prove effectual to the preservation of children. This care should begin very early, even as soon as they are capable of distinguishing what pleases and displeases their parents. A self-willed, contrary disposition may soon be discovered in children, which is very earnest to have its own way, before they can judge what is best for themselves. This should constantly be subjected to those who are to judge for them. Children should never be allowed to prevail by a demanding and fretful temper, not even when what they crave is suitable for them to receive, were they in a submissive disposition. By this they will quickly and clearly see, that it is more to their benefit and comfort to yield an entire subjection to their providers, and that nothing is to be obtained by a fretful self-willed temper. This should be done by a firm and steady hand, which will make the work of parents abundantly easier in the government of their children, and may prove a great benefit to them, perhaps through the whole course of their lives; since by crushing their willfulness in its first buddings, it may thus die away, so as never more to gain the preeminence. This would be a great blessing, and they would owe their watchful parents far more for suppressing this and other pernicious buds in them, than for the reception of a large outward inheritance. Indeed, everything of an evil nature should be kept down in children by a careful and steady means. Oh! what a hopeful generation of youths should we have, were parents in general to exercise this prudent care in all things! I verily believe that, instead of sober virtuous youths being as speckled birds amongst the rest, the rebellious, disobedient and obstinate, would be so; and this would bring judgment upon them.

A conscientious discharge of this great duty, would bring an ample reward to such parents as have no greater joy than to see their children walking in the Truth. And even if parents should prove unsuccessful, as it sometimes has happened, they will be clear of their children's blood in God's sight, which is a very great thing; so that though the rebellion and evil conduct of their offspring may be their sorrow, it will

not be their sin.

I have sometimes been much grieved, when I have seen youth in a path of being ruined through the imprudent indulgence of their parents (especially mothers) making themselves and others mere slaves to the perverse desires of their children. These take great pains to extinguish the flame of their children's troublesome tempers by such means as add fuel to the fire; inverting the order of nature, in becoming subject to those who should submit to them. And by answering their unreasonable cravings, they make themselves more work, and that of a very disagreeable nature. Parents who are so very imprudent, have little reason to reflect upon their children for being self-willed, and not subject to them when they grow up, because they themselves have cherished, fed, and supported that selfish disposition in them from their cradles. And unless the Spirit of God is permitted to lay deep hold of them, and change the state of their minds, they are unfit to be a comfort either to themselves or others, not being formed for good servants, husbands, wives, or members of society.

Alas! when I take a view of the world, and reflect how it wallows in abundance of wickedness and corruption—which mankind possesses in a sort of succession from parents to children, like outward inheritances—I have no words sufficient to set forth to the full so deplorable a case. How sorrowful it is to observe even children, by the power of example, become like grown men in wickedness and hardness of heart! Custom and general practice have so changed the common opinion of some gross evils, that there appears very little remorse in the almost constant practice of them. Many children are brought up, like their parents, much strangers to their duty both to God and man. This almost universal infection of evil, forgetfulness of God, and wallowing in the pollutions of this world, are very alarming, and call loudly for a reformation, lest the Lord break forth in judgment upon the nations as the breach of waters. It is indeed a painful task for godly parents, amidst so general a depravity, to raise their children without receiving some stain from this pollution, which runs down in our day like a strong torrent. The safest way is, with great strictness and steadfastness, to keep them out of such company, though an inconvenience may attend this in various outward respects. But oh! the soul is the most precious part of them, and parents, above all other considerations, ought to be concerned to preserve it untainted with the defilements of this world.

There is no better rule to act by in this important task, than perfect submission to the Spirit of Truth, who is promised to lead us into all truth. If we mind this, we shall not indulge our children in anything which the Spirit testifies against in ourselves. And we shall be far from pleading that because they are young, some greater liberties may be allowed them in this or that thing. Rather, we shall feel that as they are a part of ourselves, the same divine law should be a rule for both them and us.

I have taken notice, that some parents, who seem to have learned, in degree, the lesson of humility and self-denial, as far as could be discovered by their outward appearance, yet seem to have no aversion to their children's making a different appearance; but will even introduce them into vane and worldly things

while very young, plainly manifesting they have a pride in seeing them so. Such parents, notwithstanding their outward show, exhibit great unsoundness, and that they themselves are not what they would pass for. I sincerely wish that parents, who indulge wrong liberties in their children by allowing them to deviate from that pure simplicity and self-denial into which Truth leads all who follow it, would consider the injury their children sustain thereby, being placed in a variety of difficult and dangerous situations with respect to temptations. Indeed, inconsiderate tender youth, through their aptness to crave the glittering things of the world, and their imprudent parents indulging them therein, are, as it were, prepared for ruin, unless divine mercy interpose. Some parents have been pierced through with much sorrow by this means, and have had great cause to repent when it was too late; and there has been reason to fear that the blood of their children will be required at their hands.

Some perhaps may think I am very sharp and severe upon parents, insisting that it is not always their fault when children pursue wrong things. This I have already granted, and it is true that they are frequently very self-willed and ungovernable. Such an argument has merit when children are of an age to become their own rulers, and have ability to clothe and provide for themselves. But I think it has little weight while their parents provide for them, who not only have power to advise and persuade, but also to command and restrain. Here a parent certainly may and ought to maintain absolute authority, most especially in cases where the testimony of Truth is in danger of suffering.

It is very observable that Eli was greatly blamed for not restraining his wicked sons, even though it plainly appears he much disapproved of their practices, reasoned with them on that account, and laid before them the deadly consequences of their evil conduct. How very affecting it is, to consider the fearful calamities which came upon that house, and also upon Israel, probably in some measure upon the same account.

The neglect and imprudent indulgence of parents in training up their children is also a painful loss to the church, as the consequence thereof tends greatly to obstruct the progress of Truth, by standing as a stumbling-block in the way of serious inquirers. When people of the world see that the undue liberties which they are called out of, are indulged in amongst us, they are offended. Oh! that parents, children, and all who are unfaithful, and who easily allow the various branches of our Christian testimony to fall, would deeply consider the mournful consequence thereof in retarding the progress of Truth, and grievously eclipsing the beauty of Zion! Then I greatly hope a more living zeal and holy ardor would prevail, and that the careless sons and daughters would arise, shake themselves from the dust of the earth, and put on the beautiful garment of holiness and Truth, that she might become more and more a praise in the earth.

Now to Children

Having offered a few remarks concerning the important duty of parents, it now remains to do the same

respecting the indispensable duty of children to honor and obey their parents in the Lord, which is strongly enjoined in the holy Scriptures, and is of lasting and indispensable obligation.

The command is, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you." Read Matt. 15:4. Mark 8:10. Luke 18:20. Eph. 6:2-3. In those things which are consistent with the law of God, no child can stand acquitted before the supreme Judge for disobeying or dishonoring its parents. This obedience and honor not only extend to yielding to what they command or direct, but also to the preservation of a reverent awe and honorable esteem in the heart, arising from love, which would on all just occasions cherish and protect them. It is a sin of great weight to disregard and slight parents, as appears by Duet. 27:16: "Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt;" and Prov. 30:17: "The eye that mocks at his father, and refuses to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Chap, 23:22: "Hearken unto your father, and despise not your mother when she is old," etc.

On the other hand, very notable is the kind and watchful Providence that attended those who feared the Lord, and those who loved, honored and obeyed their parents; as Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, Samuel and David; also the Rechabites (Jer. 35). It would far exceed the bounds of my intention to particularize all those excellent patterns and examples we are favored with the account of, which are wonderfully adapted to instruct, encourage and improve the youth, as well as others.

It is a very commendable, as well as a very profitable thing, to be familiar with those sacred writings. Remember what Paul said of his beloved son Timothy: "From a child you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." But let all duly consider, that profiting unto salvation by the sacred writings, depends entirely upon the holy, living, powerful faith of Christ, which works by love, purifying the heart. It is by this that we come to see Him who is invisible, and consequently to understand the precious mysteries of His kingdom, as far as is proper and necessary for us to know them (which is all that is lawful for us to desire). There are many other good and profitable books, but none in which is contained such a storehouse of rich treasure and sublime heavenly mysteries, wonderfully wrapped up and concealed from earthly wisdom and carnal understanding. For none can know the things of God, without the assistance of His Spirit, as appears by 1 Cor. 2:10-15, and many other texts.

Great has been the concern of the spiritually-living in the church (as appears by frequent and very pressing affectionate advice, caution, and counsel to the youth), both to read the holy Scriptures and other profitable books, and to carefully refrain from all other books which have the least tendency to draw the mind out from the holy fear of God, and from a sober, virtuous course of life, or those which are solely for amusement, being entirely unprofitable. Time is very precious, short, and uncertain; it should

therefore be carefully improved to the soul's everlasting advantage. Moreover, youth should learn early to yield strict and careful obedience to the divine Monitor within, as well as to their parents and all who have the rule over them, carefully shunning the vain and unprofitable amusements, as well as the corrupt conduct of the world. I earnestly advise all to avoid everything in both dress and address, which might have the least tendency to draw them into a league or friendship with "the children of the land," or with the depraved degenerate world that wallows in pollution and great defilements, lest they should be drawn aside and defiled, as Dinah was, by going out to see the daughters of the land (see Genesis 34), and as the children of Israel were, by their woful intimacy with the daughters of Moab and Midian. And do not forget the dreadful fall of Solomon, the wisest king, who, by contracting an intimacy with those who were strangers to God and His holy covenant, had his heart drawn away from the living and true God, and so greatly debased himself as to bow down to their paltry dumb idols. Time would fail to recapitulate the mournful instances recorded in the holy Scriptures, and other authentic accounts, concerning the hurtful consequences of God's people mixing and joining with the nations. It is their safety to be separate and to dwell alone, for He says, "Come out from among them and be separate. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." (2 Cor. 6:17)

Our youth¹ have been highly favored with a living, powerful ministry, which has often reached the witness of God in their hearts. What a great favor this is when we consider that the greatest part of Christendom, almost ever since the apostles' days, have deprived themselves of this by substituting human wisdom and learning in its place. Thus the panting, thirsty souls among them could meet with little more from their ministers than the muddy waters of Babylon. Indeed, such ministers could not direct seeking hearts to the pastures of Christ's flock; but instead darkened counsel by a multitude of words without knowledge, and made void the commandments of God by the precepts, inventions and traditions of men. In what a blessed time has your lot been cast, even when evangelical light and truth has manifested itself in perfect purity! Oh! that our youth would consider and deeply ponder in their hearts, that notwithstanding the great and earnest labors bestowed in godly love and zeal for the preservation of the Society in the way of truth and righteousness, yet very sorrowful and obvious has been the declension in practice of many amongst us. A mournful flood of undue liberties has flowed in; many have made grievous advances in those corrupt, perishing pleasures and trifling amusements, which our truly pious predecessors wholly denied and turned their backs upon, having left us large and living testimonies, by way of warning and caution, to carefully avoid being entangled with such yokes of bondage. These things have prevailed for lack of abiding in the fear of God, and not duly considering that He is ever present, beholding all our words and actions, be they ever so much concealed from the view of mortals. When the mind is turned to His pure witness in the heart, we find reproof, correction and judgment, for giving way to wrong things; and as the youth abide in subjection to this, they will be afraid to transgress its pure law in the heart, which they will find to agree exactly with the precepts and injunctions recorded in Scripture respecting

1 He means the youth within the Society of Friends

their duty to God, their parents, and all mankind.

The reason why many who see their duty, fail in the performance of it, is their departing from “the perfect law of liberty,” or the “law of the Spirit of life” in their hearts. They may be informed concerning their duty by outward means and laws, but the ability to perform is only to be found arising from the inward law, agreeably to Rom. 8:2; “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has made me free from the law of sin and death.” In obedience and humble subjection to this holy law, youth would enjoy that pure peace, heavenly serenity and sweet consolation of soul, which infinitely surpass all the treasures and pleasures of the earth, and would have a well-grounded hope of a happy eternity. It is the adversary who leads to hardness of heart and a self-willed, rebellious state of mind. This is sadly observable in some of the youth, who, by their uncontrollable dispositions, administer great sorrow and anxiety to their parents and friends, being puffed up with the vain conceit that they are more capable of judging for themselves than those of far greater wisdom and experience. In this way, many, it is to be feared, have rushed on to the ruin of both body and soul.

Very great is the danger when the young and inexperienced are proud and opinionated. This naturally raises them above instruction, putting them out of the way of being truly profitable, either to themselves or others. Such, unless their hearts are mercifully turned by a supernatural power, are never likely to be fit for governing families, or to act as members in the church of God. For it often appears that, unless their unmortified wills and tempers are bowed to, however unreasonable, they will break the peace of Society and violate its wholesome order, being like the unsubjected “bulls of Bashan.” And when any of these assume the outward form of religion, and take upon themselves to be active members, without a change of heart, they prove a painful burden to the living members of the body.

I do therefore, in much affection and desire for the welfare of tender youth, caution and warn them to carefully avoid the company and conversation of all who, though under the same profession of Christianity, disregard their parents and those who have the rule over them, or who slight or speak contemptuously of their superiors, both natural and spiritual.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it is this which makes and keeps the heart clean. Learn it in a tender age, and by it you will be taught to remember your Creator in the days of your youth; and, agreeably to the injunction of our blessed Lord, you will find that in seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all things necessary will be added. Divine wisdom, as it is sought for and obeyed, will direct your steps in the course of this short pilgrimage, in the choice of a proper helpmate, and in all other affairs of importance. Watchful Providence will indeed be over you in care, guidance, and protection, if you look to Him and live in His fear.

It greatly behoves you to look diligently to the footsteps of Christ’s companions, who walked with Him through many tribulations, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Be truly contented with that low, humble, self-denying way which you see they walked in; you can never

revise or improve it. If you seek more liberty than this path allows, it will only bring darkness, pain and vexation of spirit upon you. Read the writings of Friends in early times, and observe how wonderfully the power and love of God was with them, and how marvelously they were protected amidst the raging, foaming waves of earthly powers, combined to lay waste the heritage of God. What encouraging and excellent accounts left upon record for us, concerning the powerful overshadowing of heavenly love and life in their religious assemblies, and the glory of God shining forth amongst them! This glory and power, through the mercy of God, is not yet departed;² though there have been some withdrawals of it.

Dearly beloved youth, lay to heart the great slackness of zeal which appears in too many; the dimness, flatness, and painful gloominess, which has spread over our assemblies in this day. This is indeed hard to break through, and it many times deprives us of experiencing the heavenly places in Christ Jesus our Lord! It is not of Him that we are in this condition, but it certainly is our own fault, because wrong things are allowed to prevail. Oh, that our youth may be stirred up in a godly zeal to cry out fervently with the prophet Elisha, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and be vigilant in ardent endeavors to be endued with the same Spirit, and to succeed those honorable worthies who are now removed from works to receive a blessed reward. Consider that the business of your day is to come up in a faithful succession, maintaining the cause and testimony of God, left with you by your ancestors. Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty purchased for you by great sufferings and the shedding of innocent blood. Be afraid to trample upon it, which all certainly do who turn away from the Truth as it was received, held forth and maintained by them. May Truth be very precious in your eyes from generation to generation, until time shall be no more! Those who lightly esteem it, turning their backs upon it, violating its blessed testimony in its several branches, will (unless they repent) surely be rejected and cast off, as being unworthy of so great an honor as that of holding forth a standard of truth and righteousness to the nations; and others will be called and chosen for that great and glorious work. The Lord is able to raise up those who may be compared to stones, and to make them Abraham's children, by doing his works; while those who might have been the children of the kingdom, may, by disobedience, provoke Him to exclude them.

I shall conclude this affectionate address to our youth with the words of Christ, by His faithful servant John, to the church in Philadelphia, "Behold I come quickly; hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown. Him that overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name."

² This was written in 1764

Section II

Observations Concerning the Nature and Necessity of the New Birth

The doctrine preached by our Lord Jesus Christ to Nicodemus, of the necessity of being born again, John 3:3-8., and what is delivered by John the Baptist concerning the baptism of Christ with the Holy Spirit and fire, being the same in substance as what is set forth by the prophet Malachi, under the lively metaphors of a refiner's fire, a purifier of silver, and fuller's soap, with many other similar passages of the holy Scriptures, although of the utmost importance to be rightly understood and deeply pondered by all, is by the generality of professing Christians much overlooked and neglected. That which alone can lay a sure foundation for happiness, both in time and eternity, is hardly thought of by many, at least not with desire, or with any degree of seriousness, unless it is to shun and evade the force of that power which would separate them from their beloved lusts and fleshly gratifications.

Many and exceedingly absurd have been the conjectures and dreams of mankind on this subject, but all are to the same purpose: to shun the cross, so that the corrupt self, with all its seeming treasures and adornments, might be saved. This self, in many, has been more fond of a religious kind of ornament and treasure, than any other sort; and the subtle transforming spirit has not been lacking to plentifully furnish with temptations to it, any whose minds have a religious inclination. Antichrist, as an eminent author observes,¹ can bring forth in his church a likeness or imitation of everything that is to be found in Zion. O then! how greatly it behooves mankind to press after true certainty, since nothing can possibly land the soul in a more deplorable state, than a mistake of this kind in the great work of salvation.

But some are apt to doubt whether such a thing as an infallible evidence of our adoption is attainable here; though so fully asserted in the holy Scriptures. This is not to be wondered at, with respect to those who are in the natural, unrenewed state; seeing that the natural man, according to Paul's doctrine, "understands not the things of the Spirit of God, neither indeed can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." But I am persuaded that none who have really experienced the new birth brought forth, remain doubtful or unsettled concerning this important truth. It seems to me unreasonable to suppose Infinite Goodness, who knows the fallibility and great weakness of His creature man, should leave any whose hearts are fully devoted to yield obedience to His will, under a mistake with regard to these things, or ignorant of His divine approbation, upon a careful discharge of their duty to Him. This holy evidence in faithful souls is indeed the white stone, and in it a new name is written which none know save those who receive it. Here, indeed, there is an assurance that their names are written in heaven, from which arises a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

1 i.e. Isaac Penington

A sense of the wrath of God against evil, often makes deep impressions upon the minds of many, so that in painful remorse they are ready to cry out for mercy and forgiveness of their sins. This conviction upon the mind of man, that he has displeased his Creator, neither does nor can proceed from anything in man besides the pure witness of God which He has placed there. It is therefore quite reasonable to conclude that this same divine Witness, upon our faithfully discharging the duty we owe to God (according as it is made manifest to us), will impress our minds with a sweet sense of divine approbation, agreeably to Rom. 8:16; "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." With many other passages in Scripture of like import.

When any are really disposed to follow Christ, great care should be taken in their first setting out. Many have been marred upon the wheel, for lack of patience to endure proper tempering; endeavoring to be formed into useful vessels before they have passed through the necessary operation. This has been for lack of thoroughly knowing themselves. Everything that appertains to the creaturely will, and a forwardness of desire to choose and act for itself, must die upon the cross, and there must be a remaining as without form and void, under the Lord's dispensations, until the effective Word says, "Let there be light!" This, by His own power, makes a perfect separation between the light and darkness in man, even as He did in the visible world. Until this is really experienced, man is not in a condition to be placed upon the wheel to be formed into a vessel of honor; and there must also be a time for drying, and enduring the furnace.

These wonderful operations, which I have only just touched upon in an allegorical way, make very deep and lasting impressions upon all who have experienced the nature of that regeneration without which none can see the kingdom of God. When any have come thus far, there will be no occasion to make use of dreams and uncertain conjectures in forming a judgment concerning their adoption. The divine birth which is raised in them, naturally cries, Abba, Father! And when He is pleased to appear (for which they are taught to wait in the patience), they have no room to doubt of having passed from death unto life, or being translated from under the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, which consists in "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

The great danger of man's being deceived, lies in the mysterious workings of Satan, who has a stronghold in those who, upon their first awakening by the call of Christ, have not allowed His power so far to prevail as to make them willing to part with all for His sake. There is something exceedingly reluctant in the strong spirit and will of man to fall into nothingness of self, and to be wholly given up to be guided and upheld by another. This in part arises from the excellency of his created frame, and the nobility of his understanding, finding in himself natural abilities capable of effecting great things, and thus he assumes (till his eyes are opened and enlightened from above) that he is equally capable of comprehending what relates to the world to come. Therefore, instead of wholly ceasing from his own will, and relying altogether upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he is very apt to be active, imagining that God will be pleased with his diligence in the performance of what he apprehends to be religious duties; such as praying, singing, preaching, or seeking to join others in those performances; often telling his experiences, and

hearing those of others. However, it would be abundantly more pleasing to the Almighty, and profitable to himself, to lay his mouth in the dust, silently commune with his own heart, and be still, until it pleased the Lord to send forth His light and His Truth, that the poor helpless creature may move and act in a truly spiritual sense, with his understanding informed by God. For everything that is done in religion and worship without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is will-worship and idolatry; for if the Spirit of Christ does not move and actuate us in all religious performances, we are susceptible to the influences of the spirit of antichrist.

Some perhaps, by way of excusing themselves, are ready to call it “enthusiasm” and “presumption” in those who assert the necessity of being influenced by the Spirit of Truth in their religion, insisting that there is no such thing in our time, though they readily acknowledge it was so in the apostles’ days. But these can give no good reason why the divine power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit should forsake the true church, since mankind is most certainly in the same need of it, and the nature of God’s dispensation is now the same as it was then.

Common prudence teaches us to examine carefully into the clearness and validity of our titles to earthly estates, that we may be fully satisfied we are not deceived or imposed upon by false glosses and misleading claims. Shall we be less concerned about that which is of infinitely greater importance; namely, our title to an everlasting inheritance? Man should be very watchful over his own heart, which is always apt to be partial towards itself, and through the transformations of Satan, to soothe and flatter into an apprehension that he is in the way to everlasting happiness, when in reality it is quite otherwise. The criterion by which he forms a judgment of himself may be the same as that of the pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, or rather to recapitulate his own supposed excellencies. He perhaps measures himself by himself, or by comparing his principles and conduct in life with those of others. But nothing should be received as a standard in this very important case, but the stamp of divine approbation sealed upon the heart by the Holy Spirit; agreeably to Rom. 8:14-16; “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

Having offered these hints by way of caution, that all into whose hands they come may examine themselves without partiality, lest they fall inadvertently into an irretrievable mistake respecting the salvation of their own souls, I shall now endeavor to set forth, from my own experience, a little of the nature of that new birth without which none can see the kingdom of God, and consequently none can be true members of His church. For, it cannot be supposed, that a person wholly unregenerate is properly qualified for the performance of any religious duty or service in that kingdom, which he does not so much as see.

I have, by experience from my childhood, found two spirits or seeds striving in me for mastery or rule. I have discovered them to be irreconcilable enemies one to the other; and that I could not serve them

both at the same time. I had an understanding given to me, whereby I knew one of those seeds was a manifestation of the all-powerful inexhaustible source of Goodness; and the other, which had in a manner leavened the whole lump, was of a wicked and diabolical nature. By means of this corrupt leaven, I had a strong bias to evil of many kinds; nevertheless, I often found the good Spirit striking at the evil, as an axe laid to the root thereof, agreeably to Matt. 3:10, in order to destroy that which deprived the Heir of all things of His inheritance. I was long in a kind of suspense, unresolved with which to join; yet saw all depended upon my determination, and that I had full power of choice. On the one hand, when the awakening visitations of God's Spirit were upon me, it appeared very dreadful to provoke an omnipotent Being of unmerited kindness and mercy to cast my soul into everlasting perdition. On the other hand (especially when those heavenly impressions had somewhat worn off), it was next to death itself to yield up all my sensual gratifications, and to expose myself to the scorn and contempt of the world. However, in process of time, the Lord in gracious condescension broke in upon my soul, by His judgments mixed with mercy, in such a powerful manner, that I was made willing to yield to Him, come life or death. Indeed I looked for nothing else at that time, but expected my frail body would sink under the weight of the unspeakable distress which was upon me, and that my sinful soul must be centered in a state of everlasting misery. Then my cry was, like that of Saul, with trembling and astonishment, "Lord! what will You have me to do?" Then there was no holding back or secret reserve, but whatever was called for was given up with readiness, this being all I could do. As to performing truly religious duties, I had them all to learn, though I had been trained up from my infancy in a strict religious way by godly parents. But the very best outward helps, and the most consistent set of religious principles, when only professed, cannot at all enrich the soul with heavenly grace.

By carefully inquiring of the Lord, I clearly perceived my business was to watch and pray continually; to commune with my own heart, or the Witness of God there, that I might receive fresh instruction and help as I had need. Self-denial and taking up the cross daily was to be my constant employment; in doing which, I had much inward peace and comfort, and a well-grounded hope that I should thereby find (in the Lord's time) the body of sin so weakened, that the yoke of Christ would become easy, and His burden light.

In order for a happy progress in the life of religion, it is necessary, by abiding in the divine light, to preserve a clear and distinguishing sensibility between the flesh and the Spirit. This cannot be done without great care and a steady waiting upon the divine gift. If the eye turns from this, it is blinded by the darkness, and then man is liable to be misled by a counterfeit light, and the various resemblances which Satan will cast in his way for guidance and instruction, persuading him all is well and right. To be so misled and therein established, is a truly deplorable state; for it is very unlikely that such a person will ever be persuaded to believe they are mistaken, as they often deride whatever appears doubtful concerning their own religion and worship. This was evidently the case with a set of professors of uncommon outward sanctity and punctual exactness in the exterior of their religion, in the time of our Savior's personal appearance upon

earth; notwithstanding which, these very people were manifestly the most inveterate enemies Christ had amongst mankind.

Seeing therefore, that frail mortals are liable to such dangerous mistakes, how exceedingly circumspect and watchful ought all to be! And what frequent and strict scrutiny ought they to make into the state of their own hearts, which can be known in no other way but as the Lord is pleased to send forth His heart-searching light! This is a great favor, which none receive but those who are turned from the darkness, and are fervently concerned to put away all of its works. Very gross is the deception of those who imagine the whole work of regeneration to be instantaneous. This can be nothing else than a delusion of Satan, to settle people at rest in a state of self-security as soon as he can. Oh! what a length of time it takes to work out that rebellious, stiff-necked, backsliding nature, which was born in Egypt, before the new generation is raised up that is fit to enter the promised land!

From what is before hinted, it may be understood, that the good Seed or Holy Spirit, arising into ascendancy in us over the evil seed, and leavening the soul into its own nature, is essentially a “being born again with water and the Spirit,” or being “baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire,” or man’s enduring the operation of the “refiner’s fire and fuller’s soap,” and being purified as silver. All of these metaphors signify, in a very instructive manner, the different operations of the Holy Spirit, which, to the willing soul, is sometimes like water, to wash and bathe in, and also freely to drink of; and at other times like a refiner’s fire, to purge away the filth and dross, that man may be as pure gold, prepared to receive the image and superscription of the King of heaven; that so, wherever he goes, or whatever he does, all who have their eyes opened, may see whose subject he is.

It is very observable that the prophet Malachi, when he had set forth the nature of the new birth, breaks out in the fourth verse of the third chapter in this way; “Then shall the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years;” which clearly implies man’s unacceptable state with his Maker in religious performances until he has known the cleansing and refining operations before mentioned. What then will become of those who have intruded themselves into religious services, and amongst His faithful followers, without having on the wedding garment! These would gladly pass for His people, but they have not trodden the path of regeneration, or passed through the pangs of the new birth.

When man has, through the powerful prevalence of the Holy Spirit, obtained victory in a good degree over evil, his soul abounds with evidence and tokens of his happy attainments through the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, praise, adoration and thanksgiving are offered up as incense with acceptance. Such a one enjoys an abundant flow of heavenly love towards those who are begotten of the same everlasting Father, agreeably to 1 John 3:14; “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” It is then become his food and drink to do the will of God. He looks with indifference upon worldly enjoyments when compared with the joys and

concerns of spiritual things. His body, soul, and outward substance are offered up to the great Giver, being given up to spend and be spent for the promotion of Truth, according to the Lord's requireing. These particulars, and much more than I can set forth, are the result of a humble and steadfast obedience to the heart-changing power of the Spirit of Christ, which produces great peace and heavenly solace, whereby the true disciple is encouraged to persevere.

Oh, that mankind would come clearly to see the necessity of both beginning in the Spirit and walking therein, according to the advice and practice of the primitive Christians! Then they would no longer fulfill the lusts of the flesh, for the spirit that lusts to envy, and seeks vengeance, would be slain. Outward wars and fightings would cease in due course; for when the cause is taken away, the effect would be no more. A selfish, covetous spirit, which seeks undue advantage to the injury of others would be purged out, and here we would have power to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to do unto all as we desire them to do unto us. All of these and many more good fruits, would spring up naturally from the new creation in Christ Jesus our Lord. But those who have not experienced this groundwork in themselves, and lack the virtues of the Holy Spirit which are set forth in the Scriptures of Truth, are blind and cannot see that it is just as possible now to attain those exalted Christian virtues as it was in the apostles' days. So it is that imaginations, dreams, and conjectures abound amongst carnal Christians concerning the means of obtaining that salvation which is only to be known by being born from above. Some say, Lo! here is Christ! Others say, Lo! he is there! But alas, they still evade the cross. Indeed, were the cross not in the way, they would surely embrace the right thing, for it is so clearly set forth and described in the holy Scriptures.

The views of many, both Catholics and Protestants, concerning the nature of salvation, are exceedingly obscure and carnal, making the sprinkling of infants with a little water (which they call baptism) essential thereto. The manner of their expressing themselves on this subject in their confession of faith, seems to make this ceremony all, or the chief thing, that is intended by being born from above; or at least that the operations of the Spirit to that end are infallibly connected to the sprinkling of water. Catholics say, "We must believe that Jesus Christ has instituted in His church seven sacraments, or mysterious signs and instrumental causes of divine grace in the soul: baptism, by way of a new birth, by which we are made children of God and washed from sin: confirmation, by which we receive the Holy Spirit by the imposition of the hands of the successors of the apostles," etc.² The Protestant church of England, in their confession of faith, says, "In my baptism," by which they mean the sprinkling of infants, "wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," etc. After an infant is sprinkled, the priest says, "Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is by baptism regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks," etc. And again, "We yield You most hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it has pleased You to regenerate this infant with Your Holy Spirit, to receive him for Your own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into Your holy church," etc.³

2 Catholic Manual of Spiritual Exercises, page 4.

These are clearly mere evasions. Man hates death to self, and had rather look in any direction but that which is likely to strip him of all his beloved treasure. However, if he were not so very blind and ignorant concerning his true interest, he would easily see that his supposed loss would make way for his greatest gain. This unhappy reluctance to the true way, has put man upon straining and inventing to find an easier way to the kingdom of God; a way that includes becoming heir of two kingdoms, and serving both God and mammon, though we are assured by our Savior that this is impossible.

Many would eagerly imagine that man may be saved merely by the imperceptible imputation of Christ's righteousness; which, if it were true, would be a very palatable doctrine to a multitude of self-lovers. Some, who do not agree with this opinion, but believe that men must repent, and experience the evil purged out by the Spirit of judgment and burning, do yet put off this great work, resting in a kind of hope that they shall thereby be fitted for everlasting happiness some time before they die. These lean much upon the great mercy and long-suffering of the Almighty, catching eagerly at the sudden conversion of Paul and of the thief upon the cross. But oh, how exceedingly inconsiderate are such delays! A saying of Chrysostom is worthy to be noted: "God promises mercy to penitent sinners, but He does not promise them that they shall have so much time as tomorrow for their repentance!"

There are others who imagine that their regeneration is effected in an instant; and in order that their deception may be effectual, the false prophet causes fire (so to speak) to come down from heaven in their sight; and he that is prince in the airy region, raises vehement heats and convulsions in their passions. This they call the workings of the Spirit upon them for their conversion; immediately after which a kind of false heaven is formed, in which they take their rest with a seeming security, erroneously supposing that their calling and election are now made entirely sure, and that they can never fall from saving grace. Oh! how dangerous is such a security!

Much more might be written concerning the many false rests and visionary heavens which poor mortals (through the subtlety of Satan and their own inattention) are deluded to sit down in; all of which might be happily prevented were they to enter into the sheep-fold by Christ, the only true door and way to the everlasting kingdom, which is opened and prepared for the soul to travel in by submitting to His inward appearance. He will certainly count all thieves and robbers, who come into His church by any other way.

What an abundance of robbery is found in you O Christendom! Oh how you steal the name of Christ, and the former experiences of God's people, to live upon, and also to feed one another! What a multitude of unwholesome and barren pastors, with poor, lean, starved flocks, amongst most or all societies of Christian professors! Yes, it is their poor, low condition (with respect to religion) that induces them to put forth their hands to steal. Can the God of justice and truth delight in a stolen burnt-offering? No,

3 Catechism and public baptism of the Church of England.

such sacrifices are an abomination to Him. His regenerate ones, though often tried with great poverty of spirit, dare not steal, for they know that nothing will find acceptance with Infinite Goodness, but that which is of His own immediate begetting. Yes, this will be a sweet savor to Him, though it be but a sigh or a groan; which may be compared with the acceptable offering of the poor under the law, of a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons; or to the widow's two mites cast into the treasury. And those poor, humble, dependent ones, who are made perfectly honest by the just and upright Seed prevailing in them, and waiting the Lord's time, are often furnished with larger offerings, and do greatly increase with the increase that comes from God.

To conclude this subject, I shall thus sum up the matter—that man's great business, upon his first awakening out of the sleep or stupefaction of sin, is passively to yield himself into the hands of his faithful Creator, that He may be pleased to work in and upon him both to will and to do of His own good pleasure. He must, with the utmost care, endeavor to abide in that which enables incessantly to pray, "Your kingdom come, and Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." When this is the bent of his heart, the grace of God is a sufficient guard or defense against all the subtle attempts of Satan to beguile and deceive. The most crafty devices of the adversary can never prevail to pluck such a one out of the Almighty's hand; and by abiding therein, he is created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, having spiritual senses given, that he may continually exercise them in discerning between good and evil. His heart being made pure, in a good degree, by the sprinkling of the most precious blood of Christ, his constant care (through divine assistance) is to preserve it so, that the Lord may be pleased to tabernacle with him, and be made unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. These passive, upright souls receive from Him those qualifications which enable them to co-work with the Spirit, and to perfectly understand the proper business of their day, both as strangers and pilgrims in the world, and as living members of the body of Christ.

Section III

Relating to the Nature of True Worship; with Some Remarks on the State of the Society of Friends, both in Early Times, and Now

The nature of acceptable worship is set forth by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a manner well adapted to the subject, namely, that it is to be performed in spirit and in truth. The reason is given, "because God is a Spirit;" and therefore, "they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." This is not the ceremonial, shadowy, and typical worship of the Jews, which was dispensed to them because of weakness, but rather the more excellent worship of the Gospel dispensation, whereby man has

a “better hope,” nearer access to the Divinity, and a better knowledge of himself. Here such a brightness of heavenly glory appears, as to cause all signs, figures, and types to vanish away, and worship is to be performed in the truth, and real substance of all that was typified and prefigured by the ceremonial law of Moses; for the righteousness of that law is fulfilled in those who walk and worship in the Spirit.

The soul must bow in perfect sincerity, humble prostration, and a deep inward sense of its own frailty, lack, and unworthiness, being at the same time deeply impressed with a living sense of the Lord’s adorable greatness and goodness. From this sensibility renewed upon the mind by Him who is the sole object of worship, thanksgiving and praises ascend for the multitude of His mercies received, along with reverent prayer (either mental or vocal, according as the mind feels itself influenced or directed by the holy anointing) for the continuance of His gracious preservation in the way of righteousness; agreeably to Eph. 6:18. “Praying always with all supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

It is clearly to be understood by what our Lord said to the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4, that acceptable worship is not confined to any particular place, mode, form, or ceremony; which was a deception that mankind had generally fallen into and greatly needed to be drawn from, being then, as well as now, apt to please himself and rest satisfied with exterior performances. Although some of these outward shadows were indeed dispensed to the Jews in condescension, these were never given with the intention of substituting spiritual worship, nor were they at all acceptable without a humble, bowing of the soul. But here our Lord clearly shows that the outward worship was to be laid aside, and not to continue any longer in His glorious spiritual dispensation. But it could hardly be expected that so great a mass of outward observations could be all cast off at once; yet in the course of the apostles’ days, the church was progressively brought out of them, as appears by the very few requirements laid upon the Gentiles (see Acts 15:22-29). But alas! the Christian church (so called), instead of leaving all and becoming purely spiritual, gradually decayed as to life and power, and increased in ceremonies and outward observations, until she became as full of them as ever the Jewish church was. Then she got full possession of the outward court, having nothing to enjoy but her own inventions, and nothing to glory in but Babylon, which she had built instead of Zion, until her measure should be filled up, and her determined overthrow take place.

Paul says to the Philippians, “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Which circumcision is here intended, appears from Rom. 2:28-29 and Col. 2:11, namely, “the circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh.” That the generality of Christian professors, of every denomination, have lamentably deviated from this kind of worship, requires not much insight to discover. And though the great Author of the Christian religion has so fully expressed His will and pleasure in this most important point, yet many will not be satisfied without a kind of worship in which the fleshly part can be active, and which has something in it to amuse the outward senses. These would worship the Most High with human abilities or the work of

men's hands, and by an unjustifiable reverence for old mass houses and other places of worship, calling them churches, houses of God, holy places, etc. But such professors of Christianity maintain a doctrine quite contrary to the testimony of that holy martyr Stephen; who said "However, the Most High dwells not in temples made with hands," and that of the great apostle of the Gentiles, who told the Athenians, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things."

Most Protestants, though they have cast off much Catholic superstition, still retain some outward ceremonies and observations which are very unsuitable to the spirituality of the Gospel dispensation. In support of these things they have no divine authority or warrant, except what is patched together from the example of some in the primitive church, which, being at that time just arising out of a load of outward ceremonies, was not wholly weaned from everything of that kind at once; and therefore a few shadowy things were for a time condescended to. For although the new covenant church had a very glorious beginning, and abounded with heavenly power in order to make her way in the world, yet this was but the morning of the Gospel day; and as the Sun of Righteousness (who rules the everlasting day of God's salvation) rose higher and higher, she was to put on all her beautiful garments to make herself ready for the bridegroom, and by a gradual increase of clear discoveries, was to grow into a maturity of wisdom and ripeness of judgment.

Our Lord clearly intimates the great danger of tacking anything of the old ceremonial dispensation to the new Gospel dispensation, showing they would by no means agree, or safely subsist together (See Matthew 9:17). This the experience of many generations fully declares. Oh, what rents and schisms there have been by means of clinging to and pleading for some patches of the old garment!

Yet there has been a godly travail and an ardent labor preserved by the true church, even through the darkest ages of superstition and idolatry (though hidden from carnal eyes), that she might cast off this heavy, eclipsing mass of outward observations. There were many who, through divine power, rose up against it, especially in opposition to the grossest and most grievous errors and superstitions. But the most extraordinary of these reformations, as to its consistency with the unmixed purity of the Gospel, was about the middle of the last century [beginning in the 1650s], when evangelical light and truth broke forth without the blending of ceremonies and outward observations. And when the Lord, by His overruling power, had erected this blessed standard of simple truth and pure righteousness [through the early Society of Friends], many thousands flocked to it, and spoke the language set forth in Song of Solomon 6:10; "Who is she that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" Terrible indeed they were to the man of sin, the son of perdition, being mighty instruments in the Lord's hand to reveal him. Yes, they were a great annoyance to the merchants of Babylon, and to those who enriched themselves by her superstitious merchandise which multitudes had purchased because of her witchcraft and enchantments. These sons and daughters of light endured

a great fight of affliction; but through all, with patient but undaunted firmness, maintained their ground, and were made victorious through sufferings, as was the Captain of their salvation. The everlasting Gospel was preached by them in demonstration of the Spirit and with great power; in substance as it was to be preached after the apostasy, "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water." (Rev. 14:7)

This was indeed a coming to the substance, after men had wearied themselves with an abundance of toil, catching nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. And with those who receive this Gospel, as it is preached according to its true intent and meaning, there is no room to evade the cross of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation. There is no liberty here to retain a few ceremonies for decency's sake, but all are compelled to embrace the substance, not daring any more to touch the beggarly elements, which were so prostituted and defiled during the long night of apostasy. The virgin daughter of Zion is well assured that the Bridegroom of her soul will never more appear to her in these uncertain and polluted things, which have been, and yet will be more and more terribly shaken, and eventually pass away as a scroll; that those things which can never be shaken, may remain, agreeably to Rev. 21:1; "And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." There was no more sea; nothing unstable, fluctuating and uncertain; nothing of that element from which the beast arises, and therefore no danger of a beast rising from there any more. The second, third and fourth verses of the same chapter, wonderfully set forth the glory of the New Jerusalem coming down from above, the tabernacle of God being with men, and God's dwelling with them. Here the Lord wipes away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more crying, sorrow and pain, because the former things are passed away. There was no more sea; all is purged away which was the cause of those dreadful calamities and miseries set forth in this divine revelation, by opening the seven seals, sounding the seven trumpets, and pouring out the seven vials full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. The fifth verse says, "And He that sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I will make all things new!'" Now there is nothing of the old garment, nor any old wine, to tear and break to pieces the new garment and the new wineskins. Oh! glorious Gospel time! May the Lord of hosts hasten it more generally in the kingdoms of the earth!

Having offered a few general observations upon the state of things, it now remains to make some further remarks concerning that people who were so remarkably raised, as before hinted, in the last century, in this land. Their beginning and first progress was here in England, though many other lands were also sharers in the brightness of Truth's arising in them; and it may without vanity be said, that through them a light has extended, or at least glanced, over a great part of Christendom (so called) which has uncovered the hidden mystery of the false church more clearly than before, and given a great shake to the long continued kingdom of antichrist.

These have been, through divine wisdom, established into a compact body, amongst whom subsists the handsome order of the Gospel, which acts as a hedge for their safety and preservation from the destroyer,

and keeps out of the polluting defilements of a greatly corrupted world. Notwithstanding which, their preservation depends upon their diligently seeking unto, and waiting singly and carefully for, a daily renewing of strength and wisdom from above, whereby alone all things must be directed and ordered for their safety and perseverance.

I have often accounted it a great favor and blessing, that my lot was cast in a time when primitive Christianity, in its power and purity, is restored in the world; and that I was so happy as to have my birth and education amongst the before-mentioned people. For though this did not make me a real and living member of their body, yet it happily put me more in the way of being so, than if my lot had fallen in some of the foregoing dark ages, and it afforded me greater means of restoration than if I had been educated amongst superstitious and prejudiced persons. And truly, for this favor, enjoyed by me and many others, there must be proportionate returns of thankfulness and obedience, or it will surely add to our condemnation; for where much is given, much will be required.

Before I had quite arrived to man's state, I was, through merciful goodness operating upon my soul, brought into a better knowledge of, and a nearer intimacy and fellowship with these people, in a spiritual sense, to my unutterable consolation; for I found that the glorious Lord was their king and law-giver, and that He had indeed become to them a place of broad rivers and streams, as it is written: "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our king, He will save us." This was the blessed language that sounded within their borders. My spirit has many times been reverently bowed and prostrated in great awe before the Lord, in beholding the beautiful situation and safety of these His people; in a humble sense whereof I have been ready to say, "Happy are you, O Israel! who is like unto you, O people saved of the Lord! For He is the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency! Your enemies shall be found liars before you, and you shall tread upon their high places!"

It may be objected that the foregoing contains high accolades for a people, amongst whom we cannot discover these excellencies, but have looked upon them as a low, contemptible body, who affect a kind of awkward singularity. Moreover, we observe many amongst this people to be as eager after the world, and who love it as well as any people whatever; and there are others who take fleshly liberties, are as deeply involved in the pleasures and festivities of life, and are as much strangers to self-denial as people of other persuasions. And it is further to be noted, that when we go to their places of worship, and observe the manner of their sitting in silence, a Laodicean lukewarmness is very apparent in many of them, by the easy, careless condition they seem to sit in, at the same time they profess to be waiting in silence of body and stillness of soul for the descending of the Holy Spirit, that their spiritual strength may be renewed. Surely, this must be a mockery and deception of the most contemptible and provoking nature in the sight of the all-seeing eye.

Now, in order to open a little the state of the case, and to answer the foregoing objections, I shall now make some observations upon the defection in practice that is to be found amongst us as a people,

especially of later years, which has caused an abundance of pain and heart-aching distress to the living members of the body, who fervently travail that Christ may be formed in those who are members of our Society by natural and not spiritual birthright.

As to the first part of the objection, I may say that this people have always been viewed by carnal professors of Christianity as a low and contemptible people, even from their first rise, which manifests the same undistinguishing blindness that has ever deprived the children of this world from seeing any beauty or comeliness in the children of light. I have before noted, that though educated in the same religious society, I did not see that the Lord was amongst them, until He was pleased to open my eyes, agreeably to Matt. 16:16-17, where our Lord pronounces Peter blessed, in that the Father had revealed the Son to him. He elsewhere said to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." And it is through the same blessing that my eyes are yet preserved open to see, that notwithstanding the great declension which prevails over many of us, the glory has not departed from amongst us. Indeed, the King is known by the upright-hearted to be still reigning in His beauty. Princes do yet rule in the Spirit of judgment given to them by God. My faith is, at times, greatly strengthened to believe that it will never cease to be so amongst this people, but that they will be preserved by the Almighty power, through all generations, a living body; and that the principles of Truth, as held by them, will yet spread far and wide in the kingdoms of the earth. This, I believe, was the blessed end for which they were first raised and marvelously supported. This glorious work has been in degree going on, though very much impeded by the unfaithfulness of many amongst us, who, like the foolish woman in Proverbs 14, are in some measure pulling down what the wise woman has built up. Oh! that all who take upon themselves our holy profession of the unchangeable Truth, would deeply consider the weight of obligation which they take upon themselves!

Because of their disregarding or lightly esteeming this weighty responsibility, and resting in the bare profession of truth, we find many under our name more insensible, and harder to be reached and awakened by a living powerful ministry, than people of other religious persuasions. This may seem strange to some, but I know it to be lamentably true, having frequently felt it in my Gospel labors. To me, this is not hard to account for, when it is considered that amongst us there have been dispensed greater spiritual favors, of various kinds, than amongst any society of people that I know of—which has not proceeded from any partiality in the Almighty towards us more than others, but only to enable us to keep our covenant with Him in the discharge of that great work to which He has called us. Where any are so inconsiderate as to disregard and neglect such opportunities of lasting benefit and improvement, they become more hardened and impenitent than those who have had less opportunity to receive heavenly impressions. The portion of such, unless they in time embrace the gift of repentance, is very dismal, as in Prov. 29:1; "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." And Heb. 6:7-8; "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and

briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.”

Great indeed has been the bounty of heaven to us as a people, both immediately, by the solacing influences and guidance of the Holy Spirit to all that would receive it, and also by the abundant flowing of a truly evangelical ministry, raised up and continued for the greatest part of this last hundred years. But now the Society is much stripped of a living skillful ministry; though it is not yet, and I hope never will be, wholly destitute. This, through the divine blessing, has been a means of our being gathered and preserved a people. But many amongst us have leaned and depended too much upon the outward ministry of others, and therefore it may be consistent with divine Wisdom, to try how the Society will stand without so much outward help in that way. It looks, at times, as if the Lord desires to make His people still more inward and spiritual, showing them plainly, that Gospel worship does not depend upon outward means.

It is quite obvious that abundant preaching, praying and singing, do not bring a great part of mankind any nearer to heaven, nor more acquainted with God and themselves, than they would be without it. Thus it may be truly said, and indeed lamented, that these spend their money for that which is not bread, and bestow much labor without real profit to themselves. With respect to us, the approved ministry has abounded with heavenly bread, and refreshing streams of living water have flowed through the conduits to the plantation of God; and although many have not improved thereby, yet some have indeed grown and flourished. But the Lord of the vineyard cannot be confined to any particular means for the help and preservation of His church, not even such as He has made use of in time past. Yet upon the whole, it appears to me something like a chastisement that so many worthy valiants have been removed by death, and few have raised up in the ministry to succeed them with equal brightness. This may prove a great trial, which, to discerning eyes, may fully distinguish between the bare professor and the true possessor of the Christian religion.

A holy, awful, silent waiting before God is the way that spiritual Israel abides in her tent, where no divination nor enchantment can prevail against her. This is exceedingly beautiful, reaching, and convincing to all whose spiritual eyes are in degree opened; as is set forth Numbers 24:5-7; “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the riverside, like aloes planted by the Lord, like cedars beside the waters. He shall pour water from His buckets, and His seed shall be in many waters.” Oh! what encouragement do the Lord’s chosen people have to abide faithful in that station wherein He has placed them, whether in silence or speaking, in doing or suffering, in prosperity or adversity. There is not the least occasion to be ashamed of silent worship, unless we are so naked as to be void of a right sense of what true worship is. Then indeed it is exceedingly contemptible, and cannot fail to render us even more despicable in the eyes of mankind than those who have an outward form, decorated with man’s curious inventions and adorning. This state of insensibility to the nature of true worship in those who profess to be spiritually minded, is set forth by our Lord under the metaphor of “Salt that has lost its savor, which is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the

feet of men.” Therefore all professors of spiritual worship should greatly fear being found in this dreadful state—holding the outward form which Truth leads into *without* the life and power.

In my travels for the promotion of Truth, which I have been engaged in through most parts of our Society, I have seen and painfully felt much of this sorrowful idleness and insensibility, which has caused me many days and nights of mourning with sackcloth, as it were, underneath. I have seen that this proceeds from various causes, but principally from an over anxiousness in seeking after earthly things which are lawful in themselves, but the pursuit of which is idolatry when they have the chief place in the heart, and are made the heart’s principal treasure—which they certainly are, when they are most delighted in and thought upon. Can it be supposed that idolaters can worship the true and living God in any way besides a mere form? With such as these, the several branches of our Christian testimony are regarded for no other reason than for outward decency’s sake, to keep up the form and appearance in the sight of men. There is a dead form and an insipid fruitless preaching which can never truly beget unto God, though perhaps it may sometimes beget into the form. But this brings no increase to the Lord’s people, except of pain and distress. Visible disorders and immoral practices in particular things have indeed wounded us and hurt the cause of Truth, but not in such a dangerous manner as a lifeless ministry; because, wherever sound judgment and the spirit of wholesome discipline have been preserved, sin and disorder have been quickly judged and cast out of the camp. But the greatest wounds we have received have been in the house of our seeming friends, by their unsanctified endeavors to maintain our worship, ministry, and discipline (or at least what they have liked of them) in the outward form only. Antichrist has always made more havoc on the church by transforming himself into something plausible, than by any direct violence and opposition.

Let it be ever remembered what Paul says, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” None, I think, will deny that it would be equally true if the word Christian were substituted in place of the word Jew. If so, we are warned that the form, appearance and character may be attained without the heart work. Indeed, we read of some who “had the form of godliness, yet denied the power.” These perhaps did not deny the power in their words, but, to me, the most emphatic denial of the power of God is to live and act in the form without it. Such as these declare to mankind by their practice (which speaks louder than words) that there is no need of the power, seeing they can do without it. And most certain it is, that all who inordinately love this world and the things of it, will not know the power of godliness while they remain in that state; as the apostle says, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

I do earnestly entreat all, into whose hands these remarks shall come, to seriously pause and examine their own hearts without partiality, that they may see (before it is too late) what state they are in. If, by

a narrow and strict scrutiny they should find that the religious structure, which some have been building for many years, was not erected by the ordering and direction of divine Wisdom, it would be much more safe and prudent to have it all pulled down, that not one stone is left upon another; and so lay the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of living and powerful faith towards God and our Lord Jesus Christ, in a conscience purified by His blood.

These lines are principally intended by way of an alarm and warning to the careless, lukewarm, and formal professors of Christianity. As for the sincere, upright, humble seekers and worshippers of God, they will be established upon the Rock of ages, which the gates of hell shall not prevail against, and shall reap the blessed fruits of the painful travail of their souls. And in due time, if they faint not, their parched ground will become a pool, and their thirsty land springs of water. Yes, through generations to come, they will enlarge and become as a fountain of gardens, wells of living water and streams from Lebanon. The beloved of their souls will call, saying, “Awake, O north wind! and come you south, blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out.” Then will they say, “Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.”

Section IV

Remarks Upon True and False Ministry

The prophet Joel, in a remarkable and excellent manner, sets forth the true spring of Gospel ministry in these words: “And it shall come to pass afterward, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” What sort of prophesying is here intended is clearly expressed in 1 Cor. 14:3; “He that prophesies, speaks unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Indeed, a great part of this chapter is excellently employed in setting forth Gospel ministry, and that Christian liberty in which all may operate, according as they are rightly called thereto. But let it be observed, that the daughters were to be engaged in this ministry as well as the sons, by Gospel law and rule; which was accordingly allowed and practiced in the primitive church. But where the learning and wisdom of man have been introduced in the place of true Gospel ministry, it has (directly contrary to this Christian liberty) wholly excluded women therefrom. What pride and arrogance must men have who exclude all from the ministry but themselves, often for the sake of filthy profit, assuming the name clergy, and calling others laity—a distinction to which the true church and the holy Scriptures are entirely strangers. For the Scriptures say, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it

as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

Here is the precious and comfortable language of truth indeed, and the perfect Gospel liberty which excludes none who have received a gift; that is, none who are immediately called of God thereto, as Aaron was. Exodus 28:1 and 1 Chronicles 23:13 show at large how Aaron was called, and how he, together with his posterity, were separated by the immediate appointment of God Himself. The manner of their qualification, and how they should conduct themselves in the priest’s office during that dispensation, are also recorded with that exact clearness and punctuality which was always used by the Almighty towards His poor, dependent creature man, when He was pleased to require the observance of any law or ordinance. Therefore no man ought to receive anything as an ordinance of God, unless it appears indisputably clear that God has indeed commanded it; nor should any receive such men as have taken a ministry upon themselves, unless they appear to have better authority for their undertaking than being taught by human means at schools and colleges.

But, alas! the powers of the earth allow many such ministers to take the fleece, whether or not they truly feed the flock; and having learned this trade, they appear as eager as any others to make the most of it. Their great unhappiness seems to result from allowing personal interest to blind their eyes, making them believe it is much to their outward advantage to keep mankind from receiving the “true Light which enlightens every man that comes into the world,” lest their trade should be endangered by this Light’s arising. Here the blind lead the blind, which exposes both to the utmost hazard. Nevertheless, such leaders frequently despise and deride those who, from the constraining power and love of God, testify against their blindness. To these, the answer of our Lord to the learned rabbis may not be inapplicable: “And some of the pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, ‘Are we blind also?’ Jesus said unto them, ‘If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now you say we see; therefore your sin remains.’”

Wherever men have allowed themselves to be swayed by personal interest to embrace a profitable craft whereby they get wealth, they have frequently been found very hot and fierce in supporting it, and in endeavoring to suppress whatever rises up against it. Thus the experience of many generations can testify, that ever since preaching became a gainful trade, by which to get money and worldly honor, the clergy (so called) have always been the greatest stirrers up of force upon conscience, and persecution against any who differ from them in matters of religion; for which they have not the least shadow of example or precept either from Christ or His apostles. All that Christ’s ministers were allowed to do, with respect to those who would not receive them and their doctrine, was to shake off the dust from their feet, as a testimony against them. These had received the gift of the ministry from Christ, and they had it without money and without price; for His command to them was, “Freely you have received, freely give.” But mercenary preachers do not receive their ministry freely; alleging that it was costly to become properly qualified for it, and so now they must make a gain of it, or they should be great losers. The plain truth is, these do not receive their ministry from Jesus Christ; neither can they produce any evidence to prove

that they have received divine commission for what they take upon themselves. Their using the words of Christ and His apostles affords them no authority from Him; for the very worst of men, yes the devils themselves, may do the same. Oh! what a pity it is they should pretend to be sent of God, as ambassadors of Christ or as the apostles' successors, when they are so manifestly unlike Him and them, bearing the marks of the false prophets and hirelings we read about in the holy Scriptures.

Let us take notice what Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, says upon this subject; "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." This plainly shows, that ministers in the Gospel times are to minister in the quickening Spirit of living and heavenly virtue, agreeably to Matt. 28:19-20; "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in [literally *into*] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." That this baptizing teaching with the Holy Spirit was the kind practiced in the primitive church, appears by many passages in Scripture; particularly Acts 10:44; "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word;" also 11:15-16; "And, said Peter, as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" And seeing that the dispensation of God to man is the very same now as it was then, and that mankind is as much involved in sin and estranged from God as they were then, and that the Lord has graciously promised to be with His ministers always to the end of the world, no good reason can possibly be given why the same powerful, efficacious means are not now as essentially necessary for man's recovery, as at that time. Indeed, there can be no ground for a denial of this truth. And though there is a consciousness in many that they do not have the assistance of the Spirit in their ministry, yet it seems to their interest, and for the maintaining of their credit, to persuade mankind that there is no such thing to be attained now. This, with many other instances which might be adduced, plainly shows these to be no other than ministers of the letter; and that, we read, only kills, whenever the life-giving Spirit does not accompany their preaching.

Very judicious are the distinctions made between ministers of the letter and ministers of the Spirit by William Dell, in his book, *Trial of Spirits both in Teachers and Hearers*; he being himself a man of literature, and well acquainted with the nature of university education, as he was master of Gonville and Gaius college in Cambridge. I shall make a few quotations from him, and recommend this tract, and his treatise on baptism to the reader's serious perusal.

"And first, let me note an objection. Some will object here, if a man preach the word in the letter, even good, sound and orthodox doctrine, there is no doubt but that such a man is to be heard, and he may do much good in the church, though he lack Christ's spirit. This I have heard from very many who have thought they have said something. But to this I answer, that they who lack Christ's Spirit, which is the Spirit of prophesy, though they preach the exact letter of the word, yet are false prophets, and not to be heard by the sheep. Again, they that preach only the outward letter of the

word without the Spirit, make all things outward in the church; whereas in the true kingdom of Christ all things are inward and spiritual, and all the true religion of Christ is written in the soul and spirit of man by the Spirit of God; and the believer is the only book in which God Himself writes His New Covenant.”

He further says,

“They that preach the outward letter without the Spirit, can, notwithstanding that, both live themselves in all the inward evils of corrupted nature, and allow others to do so too. Wherefore, to conclude, let us understand that that church that has the word, if it lacks the Spirit, is antichrist’s church; and that ministry that uses the word and lacks the Spirit, is antichrist’s ministry; and that all works, duties, praying, preaching, fasting, thanksgiving, etc., without Christ’s Spirit, are nothing but the very kingdom of antichrist, and the abomination of desolation.”

Of what importance it is for mankind, of every denomination of Christianity, ours as well as others, to deeply ponder these weighty observations in their hearts, especially the last. And upon that statement of Paul in Rom. 10:15; “How shall they preach, except they be sent?” Dell further observes thus: “So that true preaching, comes from a true sending, and this comes from the grace of God.” It is not, I say, from the sending of universities, bishops, presbyters, or any other man or set of men whatsoever, or from man’s intruding himself into ministry in his own will without a proper call; but from the constraining power of the everlasting Word of God laying a necessity upon the individual, as Paul expressed, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” 1 Cor. 9:16

It is of the utmost consequence, towards promoting truth and righteousness upon the earth, that the ministry be preserved according to its original institution, namely, under the immediate direction of the eternal Word of God, speaking as the oracles of God. Ministry is properly God’s speaking by His instruments to the children of men, such things as He (the Searcher of hearts) knows they stand in need of; and at the same time opening their hearts to receive the truth. Nothing but the unparalleled love and power of Christ can bring forth and support such a ministry. It is impossible, in the very nature of things, that those who are rightly exercised in such a ministry can have sinister views of making temporal gains thereby. Wherever this appears, we may be assured that the Lord has not sent them; and they therefore cannot profit the people at all. And even though a person may feel good-will to mankind flowing from the love of God shed abroad in the heart, in which strong desires may arise to do good, free from lucrative goals of all kinds, and though much beautiful Gospel doctrine may open to their view, which is thought suitable to help and edify his or her fellow-mortals, yet all this is not sufficient ground upon which to proceed, without the call and real gift in this weighty undertaking; for indeed, this may be no more than the natural consequence of the operation of pure love in a saint’s mind, even in those who have never had a call to the ministry.

Yet to some, these blessed operations, influences and openings, may be given in order to prepare them for that work, and they should wait patiently under the forming hand of the Potter until the full time comes. This will be clearly seen, as the eye is kept single to Him. But there is great cause to believe that some have launched out in their public ministry before a true foundation was settled, when still under the preparing hand of the Lord, whereby they have (in a sorrowful manner) brought darkness upon themselves, and sometimes upon others. These too prove only ministers of the letter, though perhaps they pretend much to have the impulses of the Spirit, and so have been instruments of much anxiety and distress to the true church, who can savor nothing with delight, except that which comes from the power of the Word of life. It may be difficult to bring true judgment over such ministers as these, in the present low state of our society, especially when they have a fair outward appearance, and nothing to blame in their morals. But it sometimes has happened, that something has been permitted to manifest their unsoundness, and thereby to relieve the painful sufferers who sit under the blasting wind of their ministry.

Inconsiderate, weak persons have intruded themselves into this great work; who, not duly waiting for the Lord's judgment to try their spirits and all that presents to their minds, have been beguiled by the enemy to run out in a false heat, without the holy dread and fear of God upon their hearts. These have taken advantage of the Gospel liberty again restored among us (which must be preserved, lest the Holy Spirit be quenched), namely, that all who are called to the work of the ministry, whether male or female, may prophesy or preach one by one, that all may be edified.

It has been a painful, suffering case to the living members in some places, when they have seen that both the matter and manner of some could have no other tendency than to display themselves, and to burden the religious society that allowed such to assume an office for which they were in no way qualified. Certainly the church has power to order and regulate her own members; and doubtless she has the right to wholly refuse and reject a ministry which, upon trial, she has no unity with. Moreover, substantial members of the church, who have stood their ground well, and have large experience of the Lord's dealings, whether ministers or others, ought to have great weight with such who have not yet made full proof of their ministry, nor given satisfaction to the body in general, though they may to themselves, and perhaps to a few others of little judgment. Neither should any go abroad to exercise their ministry, until they know there is a general satisfaction with it at home. Some such have been very confident and resolute, hard to convince of their mistakes, and critical of those of deeper experience, much evincing that sign of depravity set forth by Isaiah 3:5; "The child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable."

Good order and decency are to be preserved in the church of God, especially among the leading members, as way-marks to all. The reason and nature of the thing demands a proper regard and preference to age, gifts, growth and experience; which will always be carefully observed and paid by those of a right spirit. When this is not the case, it is a sure token of a false birth, and a proof that pernicious self is not yet slain. And where self predominates, it cannot fail of mixing with all religious services.

Now, that the hearers have a right to judge, appears from 1 Cor. 14:29; “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.” It is therefore very presumptuous for any to take upon themselves the sole right of speaking and judging too; or to impose something upon an auditory or church by which they are not edified, believing it does not proceed from the right spring. For the word preached does not profit, unless it is mixed with faith in those that hear. Heb. 4:2

I know of no way to evade the force and weight of what is above mentioned, unless it be by supposing that the auditors in general are so void of spiritual understanding, as not to be capable of judging; which would be very uncharitable, and savor much of arrogance. I am fully persuaded, if ministry does not reach the divine Witness in the hearts of the hearers, and cause them to assent to it in some measure, it will never profit them. The right ministers have a witness to the truth of their ministry in the hearts of even the rebellious; how much more so then in the honest-hearted.

The danger which arises from the low, languid, unskillful state of many in our Society, has induced me (feeling my mind in degree moved thereto), to write the more strongly concerning the nature and pernicious consequences of a false ministry; being fully persuaded that the more formal and superficial we become as a people, the more danger there is of such a ministry rising, and finding encouragement to grow and prevail. For the lifeless, formal professors of Christianity had rather have almost any kind of ministry than all silence. On the other hand, a right ministry cannot have a free course, nor be exalted, where there is nothing but worldly spirits, clothed with a form of religion. Here true ministers must be like the holy prophet Ezekiel, where it is said; “I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be one to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious house.” And, “Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time.” Amo. 5:13

These remarks upon the false, as well as the presumptuous and unskillful ministry, though plain and strong, I hope will administer no hurt or discouragement to any who are rightly concerned in this important work; and these comments may, if duly observed, be lessons of caution and instruction to those for whom they are intended. I hope these observations will also prove an encouragement to those who are painfully burdened by unskillful intruders into the work of the ministry (whether because of weakness or willfulness), that they may not be slack in their endeavors to regulate such things by plain dealing, yet with true judgment, love and tenderness, justly applied wherever it may be called for. This task may sometimes be heavy and discouraging, as it is hard to turn those who have taken a wrong course, and who imagine themselves right, when it is really quite otherwise. Sadly, these have been observed to be the most confident of all in their pretended sight and sense. Nevertheless, let the weight of truth, which is the strongest of all, be laid upon them from time to time, that the church may not suffer hurt and loss by any omission on the part of the living members. I know it is those who are alive in the Truth, of good understanding and judgment therein, and no others, that are qualified to help and direct such as have missed their way in a spiritual sense; agreeably to Gal. 6:1; “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.”

It is not the censorious, critical, or worldly-wise that can restore a brother; for these have nothing to do in the church of Christ until they are first subjected to and taught of the Lord themselves.

The main issue, in my apprehension, is to be able to form a true judgment of the source or spring from which ministry proceeds. If it is found to be right in the ground, originating from the true Fountain, then a great deal of tenderness is to be used, and much childishness or weakness is to be patiently borne with. For although some through fear, and a deep sense of the weight of so important an undertaking, may, at first, speak very stammeringly, and with considerable awkwardness, yet the sweet efficacy of the quickening powerful Spirit, which is felt with them in their service by those who are circumcised in heart and ear, far exceeds the finest eloquence without it. Such should be prudently encouraged, yet allowed time to find their own feet. There are but few children, however hopeful, that can bear much recognition and applause. Great hurt has been done by the forward, affectionate part of some, laboring to bring forth ministers before the right time, and pushing others on too fast, who in their beginning were living and very hopeful. Oh then, what caution and care should be exercised, to clearly see in the true light what to lay hold of, and what to discourage in this important respect.

I intend to conclude this subject with some plain, honest hints, which have arisen from my own experience and observation, concerning the true ministry, as it has been restored again, through divine mercy, for about this last hundred years, in greater simplicity and purity than has been known, as I apprehend, since the apostles' days. This ministry has not been conducted with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in such a demonstration of the Spirit and power of God, as has (though much despised by the learned rabbis) been a great blessing to this and other nations. Indeed, many thousands having been thereby turned to Christ their true and saving teacher, whom they embraced joyfully as the only beloved of their souls, and a great number of churches have been gathered to sit down as under the shadow of the wings of the Prince of peace. Great was the Lord God in the midst of us, in the beginning of this society. Our ministers were clothed with salvation, and their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Many then ran to and fro, and the true knowledge of God increased. The Lord gave the word, and many, both male and female, were mighty publishers of it. And through divine mercy it may yet be said that, though the declension in practice is great in many, there is still a considerable body preserved to bear the ark of the testimony of the Lord their God as upon their shoulders, in the sight of the people, with their feet standing in the bottom of Jordan; and a living, powerful ministry is yet continued, though far short of the number formerly engaged in that work. For many have grown up amongst us, who have become more superficial and easy about possessing the substance of religion than their ancestors were. These have relied too much on the outward ministry, and have not truly profited in religion thereby. Instead, they have greatly declined in practice, under abundant favors of this kind, the ministry becoming to many as a pleasant song. They hear the words with pleasure, but do them not; their hearts still following after covetousness of one kind or another. Therefore the Lord has seen fit to strip our Society very much in this respect; and also to engage many of those who are true ministers, frequently to lead the people, by example, into silence. O blessed will all those servants be, who are preserved in discernment and

true judgment, administering proper food in due season, whether in silence or in words, in doing or in suffering with and for Christ! This doubtless all will do, who look with a single eye to God's honor above all things, attending upon the measure of their gift received, which in its operations and requireing is self-evident. None that wait aright upon God will ever be confounded; but peace and infallible certainty will be known through all the borders of Zion. Everyone who knows Jerusalem to be a quiet habitation, is at no loss to understand his proper allotment of service therein, unless he falls into conferring with flesh and blood. Then he comes to confusion and uncertainty, in which he may fret and toil in vain. But in the holy, diligent waiting upon God in a sanctified heart (which is the temple wherein Christ dwells, and our house of prayer), Satan can never come to deceive us, or endanger our safety.

Section V

On the Nature and Usefulness of Christian Discipline

And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense.

—Isa. 4:5

That God intended to establish an excellent government, order, and discipline in the church under the Gospel dispensation, appears from several passages of the prophets in the Old Testament, who saw into and wonderfully described the Christian state. I shall instance just a few: "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment." (Isa. 32:1) "The Lord is exalted; for He dwells on high, He has filled Zion with judgment and righteousness; and wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of your times, and strength of salvation." (Isa. 33:5-6) "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the remnant of His people: and for a spirit of judgment to him that sits in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate." (Isa. 28:5)

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in Matt. 18:15-18, clearly directs His followers how to proceed in the exercise of discipline and good order, both with respect to individuals and to the church. He assured them that whatsoever of this kind is done under divine direction upon earth, shall be ratified and confirmed in heaven, chap. 19:28, and promises such who have followed Him in the regeneration, that they shall be exalted in His kingdom, sitting upon thrones to judge and govern His people. We find among the eminent gifts of the Spirit, Paul mentions helps in government, 1 Cor. 12:28. In chap. 5, he blames that church very strongly for their neglect of practicing sound judgment in the way of discipline, showing them the

necessity of putting those who were guilty of corrupt practices out of the community, lest as a leaven they should affect the whole lump. In verse 11, he points out how unsafe it is for the Lord's people to have any society with the workers of iniquity. In verse 12 and 13, he shows that it is the church's duty to judge those that are within, that is, her own members, leaving the judging of those that are without to God. In chap. 6, he blames them sharply for going to law one with another before the unjust, showing that it would have been better they had allowed themselves to be defrauded, and that every matter of difference or controversy should be judged and determined by the church, in regard to its own members.

A Christian society, gathered by God's power, having received diversities of gifts and qualifications, is considered as a body properly constrained by its holy Head (who is perfect in wisdom), that it may peacefully exist according to pure laws, rules and comely orders, both within and without. For the maintaining of this state, every member has its proper office and station wherein he or she is to act, yet only by the guidance of the holy Head, who is ever known to preside over His humble, dependent people, as a present help in the needful time, supplying all their needs as they wait His time. Pertinent to this is Eph. 4:15-16; "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love."

The apostle, in 1 Cor. 12, with great strength of reason and perspicuity, shows the diversities of gifts, differences of administrations and operations, all by the same Spirit, who works in all as He will. He further shows that, notwithstanding this variety, all, and of all sorts, are baptized into one body, and made to drink into one Spirit; he says, "For the body is not one member, but many;" and shows they are all useful to and dependent upon one another, so that none have a right to claim such a self-sufficiency as to be independent of other members. Indeed, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are truly useful. The near union, harmony and sympathy of this glorious body, is set forth in verse 26; "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

For brevity's sake, I forbear at present making more quotations on this subject. These are sufficient to demonstrate fully the strong obligation which all spiritually-baptized members are under to rightly understand their places in the body, and to come forth in a faithful discharge of their duty as in the sight of God, to whom they must be accountable. It likewise appears that every member (having become such by his or her voluntary consent) is strictly bound to keep and maintain the established rules of that body; the breach of which not only renders him or her guilty in God's sight, but also accountable to the body. It also behooves this body, immediately upon the transgression of its rules and orders, to exert itself in dealing with transgressors, and to administer sound judgment in order to restore them; or, on failure of success in that, to disown or refuse to have unity with such, letting the world know they are not of their body, so that its reputation may be preserved amongst those who are without, as well as for its own peace

and safety within. By a neglect of this, not only may others be infected by the corrupt member, and his evil may spread in the body like a leprosy, but the Lord may also be provoked to withdraw from that body which neglects the exercise of true judgment against evil; as in the case of Achan, Joshua 7, and also that of the tribe of Benjamin, Judges 19-20.

It is too obvious to be denied, that the professors of Christianity, by losing the power and life of religion, also lost the true spirit of discipline and good order in their churches. In the place of this, they have substituted rules, orders, and canons of their own invention, principally calculated to support that power by which the clergy (so called) got their wealth. The present state of church government appears to be truly deplorable amongst most of the different sects of Christian professors that I know of. Consequently, they are in a very corrupted state, greatly lacking that judgment and righteousness which was to fill Zion, and the wisdom and knowledge which was predicted would be the stability of her times.

Cave and King, in their book *Primitive Christianity*, clearly show, from the writings of many of the ancients, particularly for the first three hundred years after Christ, that much care and zeal were maintained to preserve the church clean and pure by a wholesome discipline. King shows, that not only the teachers, but the whole church were concerned and active in dealing with, receiving satisfaction from, or finally censuring people; and also that no teachers were set over the church, but only such as the whole unanimously agreed to receive. Moreover, it is demonstrated that the common people, generally called laity, were equally concerned with others in deposing and censuring ministers, when they ceased to have unity with them (see pages 22 to 25, 112, and 116). Both he and Cave, citing Tertullian, show that the manner of the primitives in giving judgment on such accounts was very weighty and solemn. "As amongst those that are sure that God beholds what they do," says Tertullian, "this is one of the highest forerunners of the judgment to come, when the delinquent is banished from the communion," page 120.

Athenagoras told the emperors, that no Christian could be a bad man, unless he was a hypocrite; and Tertullian openly declared, that when men depart from the discipline of the Gospel, they so far cease amongst us to be accounted Christians. Cave, page 95.

When at any time invited to public solemnities, such as marriages and the like, the prudence of the church thought fit to lay restraints upon their members, forbidding light and foolish actions, such as leaping and dancing; insisting they should eat and drink with modesty and gravity, as is fitting for Christians; for which he quotes a council of Laodicea, second part, page 73.

They took notice of all offenses against the Christian law, any vice or immorality that was either public in itself, or made known on good authority to the church. For, says Cave, the holy and good Christians of those times were careful to keep the honor of their religion unspotted, to stifle every sin in its birth, and by bringing offenders to public shame and penalty, kept them from propagating the malignant influence of a bad example. For this reason they watched over one another, told them privately of their faults and failures, and when that would not do, brought them before the attention of the church (third part, page

406). Agreeably to the nature and constitution of the church—which, as it transacts only in spiritual matters, so it could inflict no other than spiritual censures and chastisements—the common and standing penalty they made use of was excommunication, or suspension from communion with the church; cutting off and casting out an offending person, an infected member, until by repentance and wholesome discipline he was cured and restored; and then he was re-admitted into church society (page 410). Penitents, before they were received into unity, made open confession of their faults; this being accounted the very spring of repentance, and without which they concluded it could not be real. Without true repentance and amendment of life, neither riches nor honor would procure any admission into the church.

Professors of Christianity have been, and still are, very forward and active in heaping up offerings, by performing what they call religious duties, while true virtue has been shamefully neglected. Multitudes professing faith in Christ, and who are accounted members of His church, are allowed to remain in various sins and pollutions without any control or rebuke, to the great scandal of the Christian name. Indeed, it may now be said that iniquity runs down like a mighty stream or torrent among many, carrying all in its path. What painful apprehensions must fill the minds of thoughtful parents respecting their offspring, when, morally speaking, no other can be expected than that they will be carried away by this torrent into everlasting destruction! Oh that it were rightly considered by all Christian professors, that obedience is better than sacrifices or offerings, and to hearken unto the voice of God, in putting away the evil of their doings from before His eyes, is better than the fat of rams. To what purpose is the multitude of their sacrifices or offerings, while the most weighty matters of the law of God are neglected?—namely: judgment, mercy, and faith; even that faith which produces good works. Let them carefully ponder in their hearts what the Lord has declared by His prophet, “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let judgment run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” Amos 5:21-24.

Man is apt to begin at the wrong end, or where he should finish, presuming to perform worship and service to his Maker before he is in a fit condition to be accepted; but a being of infinite purity will not so much as look towards him in that regard, while a man has any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, either in himself or in others. Indeed, the Lord will be sanctified by all them that come near Him. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with any assent or approbation; and this being true concerning the acceptance or non-acceptance of individuals, it is also true, and will hold good, in regard to churches and countries or nations. Oh, then! how greatly it behooves all who desire to stand approved in God’s sight, to exert their utmost care and diligence in judging, condemning and suppressing evil of all kinds, first in themselves, and then in every branch of the community, as far as it lies in their power.

I shall now proceed to show, that when the Lord was pleased to restore Christianity in its primitive purity and power, which was in the middle of last century [1600’s], church-government, good order, and

wholesome discipline were also restored amongst a humble, self-denying people, who were, as God's people in all ages have been, much despised, reviled and persecuted. Yet through all the heathenish rage of their adversaries, the rising up of the rulers of the earth against them, and the people imagining vain things concerning them, their bands were not broken, nor were their cords cast away. They saw that holiness was the Lord's delight, and they promoted it with all diligence amongst mankind in general, but more especially amongst themselves. The Lord, who at first raised up chosen instruments, and sent them forth into the world (which was as a briery thorny wilderness), wonderfully blessed their ardent labors with increase, so that in a few years a large number of churches were planted, even amidst all the rage and fury before mentioned, and were quietly settled and established under the teachings of His Spirit in their hearts. Hereby they grew up in wisdom and stature, and in process of time clearly saw, in the divine light, that they must form themselves into an orderly body, to be governed under such regulations as would put them in the best capacity, as a religious society, of glorifying God, and being most useful to one another, as members of the same body; and that also, by being embodied and disciplined as an army with banners, they might make a firm stand against every appearance of evil, with their united strength, under the Captain of their salvation.

Divine wisdom was wonderfully with those worthies first sent out and engaged in this blessed work, directing their steps with true judgment, as well as opening the minds of a numerous people of various growths, to receive the manner and form of government and order, which those of the clearest sight discovered, in the light of Truth, to be best adapted to promote the glory of God, and the preservation of His church and people. Yet there were some opposers, as in the primitive times, even within their own body or society—men of perverse spirits, who troubled the church for a time with quarrelsome complaints, and corrupt disputations. But the Lord, who knows how to put a stop to the rage and cunning devices of the enemies of His church, brought a blast upon them, which has exposed the names of the leaders to ages and generations to come. Thus the faithful were enabled to carry on this great work, designed for the defense and preservation of God's people, in defiance of all those Sanballats, Tobiahs and Geshems, (see Nehemiah chapter 2, 4, and 6) who were permitted to rise up against them and their godly undertaking.

Great wisdom may be discerned by those eyes which the Lord has opened, in His thus ordering and placing His people in such a way that the strong bear and help the infirmities of the weak, supporting one another in that which is good, and judging down all that is of a contrary nature to it, in every rank and station; and where none dare to be above correction, but rather esteem it a mark of love and sincere regard that others extend care over them; agreeably to 1 Thess. 5: 12-14; "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

What an inexpressible favor it is to be even one of the least members of this body, or branch of the

heavenly Father's family, where help and edification may be received from those of greater growth and maturity than ourselves. On the other hand, what satisfaction it affords the fathers and mothers in Israel, to see the children and weaklings of the flock of a teachable disposition, carefully endeavoring to walk according to the Truth. Some are made by God to be as "saviors upon mount Zion," (Obad. 1:21) and as watchmen upon her walls, anointed and appointed by the Holy Spirit to watch over the flock of Christ, as those that must give an account. Such excellent service may justly entitle them to the application of that language whereby Job sets forth what he had done in the time of his prosperity, Job 29: 13-16; "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not I searched out."

Elders who rule in this way in the church are indeed worthy of double honor, whether they minister in word and doctrine or not; being such as (agreeable to Peter's advice, 1 Pet. 5:2-4): "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

It is of the utmost importance that the members who constitute the church of Christ, be thoroughly acquainted with the true Spring of action in the Lord's body, lest any should presumptuously imagine that, since church government deals with outward and civil concerns, human abilities (natural or acquired) are sufficient to manage it. If any fall into such a dangerous error, it must be for lack of duly considering the nature of the work to be engaged in; it being no other than what appertains to the spiritual kingdom of Christ and its promotion in the earth—which kingdom man by nature cannot either see or understand. It is written, "the world by wisdom knew not God," and they certainly cannot know His kingdom, nor how to act properly therein under the Supreme Head, when they know Him not.

To be capable of acting rightly in the discipline of the church, man must be born of the Spirit (or born from above), and receive a qualification from the Holy Spirit for that work. Such as these are the only qualified persons for maintaining good order in the churches, whether young, old, or middle aged, male or female, and should be regarded as those who are set over others in the Lord. These are highly esteemed and loved for the work's sake by the discerning ones in the church. Indeed, those who are alive in the Truth can savor the things of God that are conveyed to them through these favored instruments; and these can also reject the things which are of men, whenever man intrudes into the work of God; for the innocent life raised up in them is burdened and grieved therewith.

Nothing can more afflict the souls of the spiritually living than to hear the darkening of counsel by a multitude of words without knowledge. None were properly qualified to judge and govern in outward Israel, unless they were gifted of God for that purpose. We find that they were to have God for their king, and those whom He raised up by His immediate power to be their judges under Him, (this being a perfect

pattern of the Christian church). However, they impiously rejected this government that they might be more like other nations, that is, left more to their own power and policy, and to be less dependent upon God. While they looked to the Lord for judgment, aid, and protection, how wonderfully did He provide for them a Moses, an Aaron, and a Miriam in Egypt, through the Red Sea, and in the wilderness. And for the help of these, the Lord also raised up a large number of inferior judges, upon whom He put His Spirit as an essential qualification.

It would be needless to be very particular in showing how the Lord was pleased to raise up many, and to put His spirit upon them, under whose blessed influence and strength they wrought wonders for the reformation, deliverance, and protection of His people; such as Joshua, Othniel, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samuel, David, Solomon, Nehemiah, etc. And when the people perceived that the Spirit of God was upon these leaders, they eagerly joined them in God's work, out of faithful subjection to the Spirit of God in and upon them, and not unto them as men.

Very remarkable is the humility and the honest, upright petition of Solomon, which amply demonstrates the state of mind which all must be brought into, who are favored with ability to judge and govern in the church of Christ. "In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, 'Ask what I shall give you.' He said, 'O Lord my God You have made Your servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in. Give therefore Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this great a people of Yours?'"

I might draw much more from the precious doctrine and experience of God's people recorded in the holy Scriptures, demonstrating the outward order, government, and beautiful discipline of the church, which is the kingdom of Christ, wherein the truly sanctified of God act as subordinate kings and priests. But this is expressed in Daniel 7: 21-22, "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, (i.e. the power of antichrist in the form of a church, with its orders and rules) and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." Oh! How long has this wicked horn had the rule and government where the saints should reign; so that there has been little or nothing seen of the nature of that excellent government which is found in the kingdom of Christ. There has been no true vision from the prophets; the law has perished from the priests, and counsel from the ancients, Ezek. 7:26. And the glorious kingdom of the Messiah has for many ages been as it were banished from the earth, or at least hidden from mankind, as in a wilderness, whereinto the true church fled (see Rev. 12:6).

But the Lord has been pleased, in a good degree, to restore again the excellent order of His house amongst a despised people; concerning whom I shall now endeavor to give some account of what my eyes have seen, my ears heard, and what I have tasted and handled of the good Word of life in their assemblies; particularly respecting those called meetings for discipline, and for church order and government. These

meetings I have attended with diligence (as I thought it my indispensable duty), for about thirty years; the first ten of which I was for the most part a highly pleased and comforted spectator of the sweet harmony and handsome order of God's house. Indeed, I beheld the love, the sympathy, and the care extended in each branch thereof, one towards another, in silent seeking the assistance of the holy Head, that the entire body might edify itself in love, and the King of saints be known to rule all that was within us. When we become members of Christ's body, we cease to consider ourselves as individuals only, but also as members deeply interested in the welfare of the body. Here is a united labor and travail, being all in one common interest.

I have often beheld the awesome Majesty of the divine power amongst these people, and could say in humble admiration, at least in my heart, "Cry out and shout, you inhabitant of Zion, for great is the holy One of Israel in the midst of you!" There has been no lack of any good thing in the camp of God, "For the Lord was our judge, the Lord was our lawgiver, the Lord was our king" (Isa. 33:22), and therefore all the splendid art and invention of man in religion was wholly laid aside, as Saul's armor was by David, and all were concerned to go as David did, in the name, that is, in the power and dread of the Most High. When I thus stood still, looking upon Zion, viewing her beauty and excellency, I saw great things done by lowly instruments, going forth against their enemies in the name of the Lord only; and truly, this has caused me to be knit to them, and to love them as my own soul. The sight and sense of such things made me exceedingly watchful in my mind, afraid to speak and act, unless I found a well-grounded assurance that the Lord required it of me; by feeling the weight of His divine power upon my spirit, opening my understanding and guiding my judgment, that I might clearly know what, when, and how to speak in the fearful presence of God, and before the princes of His people, whose words I observed, "were as goads, and as nails fastened by the master of our assemblies, which are given from one Shepherd" (Ecc. 12:11).

The words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 are very pertinent to what I am now touching upon, and ought to make a deep impression upon all those concerned: "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words."

It is plain from what is before-noted, and from much more in holy Writ, that all the power and wisdom of man, until they are subjected, sanctified, and properly influenced by a supernatural life, are wholly excluded and shut out of the church of God. Although these abilities are sufficient for the things of a man, i.e. the concerns of this life; yet the things of God no man can know (nor rightly act in), except by His Spirit. This also appears in part from the words of Elihu in Job 32:7-9: "I said, 'Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. Great men are not always wise, nor do the aged always understand judgment."

Very great has been, and still is, man's loss for lack of understanding this important point. Giving liberty to human abilities in religion, and in spiritual concerns, has opened the door wide for antichrist to become almost a universal monarch. In this way he has gotten great footing amongst all the divisions of professing Christians—our Society in a sorrowful manner (with respect to many individuals), as well as others. Nevertheless, a living body is yet preserved among us; and these, through the divine blessing, have prevented his taking possession of our society, as he has done with some. The eyes and the cry of these are to the Lord, whom they know to be their only sufficiency; and that unless He ordains salvation as walls and bulwarks to keep our city, in vain are all human endeavors.

When I have considered the low, indifferent, languid state of those under our name in many places, both in this and other nations, chiefly occasioned by an inordinate love of the world and the things thereof, my soul has been deeply humbled in awful prostration before the Lord—contemplating His wonderful condescension in still shining forth upon us, as from between the cherubim of His glory, waiting to be gracious by turning again the captivity of many of His Israel, and seeking to rebuild her waste places, and thereby to revive her ancient beauty. He has been pleased to preserve unto us some judges as at the first, and counsellors as at the beginning, though but few in number when compared to the rest. May the great Lord of the harvest raise many more faithful laborers, and send them into His harvest, even such as are described by the evangelical prophet Isaiah, “The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly, he that despises the gain of oppression, that shakes his hands from the holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: he shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks, bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure.” (Isa. 33:14-16)

Oh! how sorrowful it is, in this and other nations, to view the great prevalence of unfaithfulness in large numbers, in most branches of our Christian testimony, much of which is greatly owing to negligence in discipline. Those who should have been, above all other considerations, waiting for fresh and renewed ability from God to build His house, have been principally endeavoring to build themselves and their posterity temporal houses for earthly inheritances; living at ease in their paneled houses, while the ark of the testimony of God has been exposed to peril.

Dreadful is the account such will have to render to God, who have hidden their Lord's talent in the earth, having wrapped it in a napkin, i.e. in a decent *form* of religion. The Lord has opened eyes that see through these fig-leaf covering in most or all the ranks of His people; though it is much to be feared that many have closed their own eyes, except towards the world. Yes, in the world they desire to be clear-sighted, for it is their kingdom. Some of these may presume, from their having long professed the Christian religion, and having taken care (as far as appears to man's eye) to preserve a reputation free from outward spots or blemishes, to be on safe ground. But having given themselves to the pursuit of wealth, these may not only have dried up the tender plant of Life in themselves, but also have laid a foundation for the ruin

of their children, or those who inherit their great stock of possessions; notwithstanding which, some of these may take upon themselves to be active members in the meetings where they belong. Oh lamentable indeed is the state of meetings, managed by such unsanctified spirits! The King of Zion is banished from their councils; and her precious sons and daughters are but as suffering witnesses for God, clothed as in sackcloth; and the Seed of God, which should have dominion in all our meetings, is “pressed down under them, as a cart is pressed when full of sheaves” (Amo. 2:13).

I sincerely wish there were no cause for these strong remarks; but a caution of this kind may be necessary. When this spirit gets in amongst us, in any part of the Society, it cannot fail to lay waste. Therefore, let all consider what spirit rules in them; for where such a spirit prevails, it is not the wise woman who builds the house, but the foolish woman who pulls it down with her own hand. (Prov. 14:1)

It is a mournful truth, that among the many thousands of Israel, there are but few in comparison who really stand upright, as pillars in God’s house; who cannot be at all warped by fear, personal interest, favor, or affection, but look beyond all with a single eye to truth and righteousness. Oh, what sad acquiescing, stooping, and hesitating are to be found in some! “It is my son, my daughter, a near relation, or friend, whom I am unwilling to offend, lest I should suffer in my interest or reputation, or gain their disapproval or resentment.” This cowardly spirit will never dwell on high, but must have its portion amongst the fearful and the unbelieving; and unless such repent, they will be ranked with those who deny Christ before men. They may read of their portion in Luke 12:9, “He who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” True zeal and sound judgment are often rejected by this sort, whether it comes from individuals or from the church, whenever they do not find it to agree with their unsanctified understandings.

It may be further observed, that those whose principal aim is only to maintain the form or outward character in religion, feel very little or no pain on account of the disorderly practices of their fellow-members. These, therefore, can easily plaster with untempered mortar, smoothing things over, and crying “peace, peace,” before judgment has laid hold of the transgressing nature; and all this is done under the deceptive pretense of charity and Christian tenderness. Yet when any are constrained in godly zeal to point out the deadly consequences of “healing the wounds of the daughter of Zion deceitfully,” some of these soon manifest that they are still great strangers to true charity, for they stand opposed to sound judgment, and to those who are engaged to search to the bottom of the church’s wounds. Here something of a persecuting spirit appears, and the bitter leaven of the pharisee is uncovered that strikes at the life of religion. But, agreeably to the usual craft of antichrist, they must call all godly concerns and labors by a contrary name, or they could not attack them with any semblance of reason. Such honest laborers have sometimes been represented as enthusiasts or extremists, too hot in their zeal, and disturbers of the church’s peace, etc. But when there is peace with wrong things in the church, it is much better broken than kept. I believe it was in this sense that our Lord said, “I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword.” It was a sad and dangerous kind of peace, when Israel became so reconciled to the inhabitants of

the land, that they allowed them to dwell therein, contrary to the express command of God!

When the upright in heart cannot, for Zion's sake, hold their peace, their spirits being truly enlightened to search Jerusalem, it is very dangerous for any to obstruct, oppose, or even to discourage them in such a godly undertaking. The voice of their Almighty helper says, "Touch not My anointed;" and He will certainly vindicate His own cause in their hands, and will recompense any injury done to it, or them, as if done to Himself; so that all have need to know well what they do, and what spirit bears rule within them.

In concluding this subject, I am free to express an ardent prayer, which has filled my heart at times for a considerable number of years, that the Lord may be graciously pleased to greatly increase the number of those amongst us, who are made willing to leave all, and to follow the gentle leadings of His Spirit, wheresoever He is pleased to lead them. May He raise up more who prefer the welfare, peace, and prosperity of the city of God to their chiefest joy; that truth and righteousness may be so exalted in every part of the body, as to make all the sinners in Zion afraid indeed. For these cannot stand in judgment when the Lord arises in majesty among His saints, nor in the congregations of the righteous; but in shame will cast away their idols of silver and gold which they have made for themselves to worship, to the moles and bats. (Isa. 2:20).

The substance of what is here signified, has doubtless been the fervent travail of many brethren and sisters, who are deeply affected with the present lethargy which prevails, yet in the midst of which are comforted in observing a great revival of concern, in most places, for stirring up and provoking one another to love and to good works, particularly in promoting good discipline. If this prospers, as I believe it will, truth and righteousness will prevail thereby, and Zion will enlarge her borders, her cords will be lengthened, and her stakes strengthened. She will yet break forth on the right hand and on the left, and her seed will inherit places which are now desolate. Therefore let the true travailers for her prosperity be encouraged; for I believe some of them will see the fruits of their painful exercise, and be satisfied. May all such keep their habitations in the holy Head, whether in suffering or rejoicing, prosperity or adversity; for, as says the apostle, If we suffer with Christ, we shall reign with Him, being glorified together.