

JOHN HAZELTON

A MEMOIR Written in 1875

CHAPTER XIV

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, peace be within thee, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good." -- Psalms CXXII: 6-9.

JOHAN HAZELTON was as remote from the spurious, catholicity which acknowledges and receives all professed Christians without inquiry into their faith and practice, as he was free from the bitter sectarianism which cannot acknowledge the existence of spiritual good without the pale of its own communion.

He nevertheless at all times manifested a denominational spirit. He loved his own section of the Church with profound affection, identified himself with it with unconcealed satisfaction, rejoiced in its prosperity, and sought its good in every possible way.

He frequently rendered important service by his valuable Addresses at Recognition Services. The following is a sketch of a singularly weighty one on -

THE NATURE AND CONSTITUTION OF A GOSPEL CHURCH

BEFORE the foundation of the world it was the sovereign, gracious and unchangeable resolve of our covenant God to have a people who should occupy the nearest possible position to Himself. These constitute the Church of Jesus Christ - the whole election of grace - and all the Divine operations in this world relate directly or indirectly to their welfare and glory.

Having loved them, and resolved to fill them with Himself, He originated time, created the world, spoke Adam into being, and commenced His providential government of all things.

The fall occurred, but His gracious determination remained unchanged. He accordingly stepped on to the premises, and gave the first revelation of the purpose of His love. His saving operations commenced. Further indications of His grace were progressively made; promises, types, and predictions were given; and finally, the incarnation of Christ followed, the cross was set up, and the Church was redeemed from the curse and shame.

By His sufferings and triumphs the Lord acquired a right to dispense all grace, and authority to make all arrangements, which were necessary to fulfil God's eternal designs.

These are recorded in the New Testament, from which we assuredly gather, that it is His will that regenerated persons in different localities should unite together for their mutual welfare and His own glory.

It is thus His pleasure that His pilgrims should travel to heaven in companies; that His sheep should be gathered into folds; that His followers should be planted in gardens; that His children live together in the "House of God."

A Church is therefore a congregation of Christian men and women, voluntarily united on Gospel principles, and in accordance with the will of Christ.

A Church is the creature of God; the creature of His Providence, which must gather its members together into one locality; the creature of His grace, by which its members must have been saved and spiritualised; the creature of His truth which must have been endeared to every heart, and which is the great bond of union and fellowship; and the creature of His preserving care, which must not only perpetuate the assembly in a given locality, but uphold each member in practical godliness and a creditable

profession of religion.

Such Churches are Strict Communion Baptist Churches. These hold "the faith once delivered to the saints." No other organization, however great the personal godliness of those who compose it, is scripturally entitled to be called a Church of God.

We stand where the apostles stood. Others have left that ground.

Such a Church is spiritual in its nature, its members being spiritually living and holy persons. Others are out of place. Dead trees disfigure an orchard. A corpse if kept in a dwelling house injures a family; so dead sinners have no right to a position in a Church.

The order of Church fellowship is clearly defined. There must firstly be spiritual life: that life must, secondly, have manifested itself by trust in the Saviour: the living and believing person must, thirdly, be baptised on a profession of faith: and, fourthly, there must be harmony of conviction as to the leading doctrines of the Gospel, and it must be mutually and affectionately agreed between this person and the Church that he be received. None can enter without the voice of the Church, and the Church can force none to join its fellowship, unless they cordially desire to do so.

The form of a Gospel Church is neither national, provincial, nor parochial. Were it so, it would include all the inhabitants of a locality. Its order is congregational. Each assembly is, under Christ, independent of all others; and the right and power to act are vested in the members when duly convened and assembled for that purpose.

Its powers are not legislative but executive. It cannot make laws or alter any of the enactments of the Lord's statute book. It cannot modify, transpose, ignore, or dispense with anything that comes from Christ, but its business is to carry out His revealed will in every particular.

It is empowered to transact its own business; admit or withdraw from members; appoint its own officers; maintain the doctrines and ordinances of

Christ, and publicly worship God, independently of the authority of any man, or company of men in the world.

These ordinances are two - Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both have divine authority - and both should be observed in the strictest deference to His revealed will.

Baptism is by immersion. Its subjects are believers. Its objects the setting forth of our union to Christ in His death and resurrection. It is the ritual way into the visible Church.

The Lord's Supper is a Church ordinance; and partaking of it is a privilege, which should be exclusively confined to its members, and to transient communicants who are members of other Strict Communion Churches.

Christ's authority in revelation both to baptism and the Lord's Supper is before charity, conscience, infirmity, policy, or one's inability to see their importance, and they are binding to the end of time.*

*This address was delivered, with some few variations, twice - at Carlton and Guildford, in October, 1873. Our sketch is compiled from notes taken on both occasions. The above paragraph (copied from the Earthen Vessel, for November, 1873) is important, as it embodies John Hazelton's convictions on a point of delicacy and difficulty.

Persons have been received into Baptist Churches without baptism on various grounds; as that it was uncharitable to exclude them; that they were - wealthy and influential, and would prove useful to the cause; that they were eatc, diseased, or deformed, and could not with safety be immersed in water; or that having searched the Scriptures they could not see that it was incumbent on them to be baptised. Each of these cases is severally referred to in the words before us, the obvious meaning of which is, that under no circumstances whatever should persons be admitted to Church membership without previously being baptised.

Churches have two officers - pastors and deacons.

The pastor presides, preaches, supervises, and rules the spiritual flock, who have voluntarily and affectionately invited him to do so. His temporal maintenance is provided by his people, not as an act of charity but of justice. He has a right-based on the will of Christ - to the proceeds of his ministry.

Deacons are voluntary and honorary servants of the Church. Their office is defined as "serving tables " - the table of the Lord; the table of the poor; and the table of their pastor, whose welfare they should consider, and specially endeavour that he may be free from pecuniary anxiety and embarrassment.

Deacons are stewards of all pecuniary contributions to the cause of God, which they are to apply with the utmost diligence to the purposes intended.

Though a Church is a spiritual community, its affairs should be managed on the honourable and prudent principles, which are universally admitted by upright and worthy men. The proceedings of every Church should be business-like.

The design of all this is the welfare of Zion. Church fellowship is the highest form of fellowship on earth, and ensures very holy ends. A well-ordered Church is a divinely constituted benefit society. By it the truth is maintained; the word of life held forth; good effected; and God glorified.



Provided by Elder Lee Roy Rhodes, Mt Zion Primitive Baptist Church, March 11, 2003.