

An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name

by Rice Haggard

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity and the use of the name 'Christian' for the followers of Christ, highlighting the consequences of division and the loss of the spirit of the Christian religion.

Scripture: Isaiah 48:11, Isaiah 62:2, John 10:16, John 17:11, Acts 10:34, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Ephesians 4:3, Revelation 21:9, Revelation 22:18

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Love"

Description

Rice Haggard preaches about the importance of unity and love among Christians, emphasizing the need to set aside denominational divisions and come together under the simple principles of the Gospel. He highlights the dangers of partyism, human inventions, and man-made rules that have led to division and strife within the church. Haggard calls for a return to the original teachings of Jesus Christ, promoting a church united in faith, love, and adherence to the Scriptures.

Transcript

/2/ Some may, perhaps, be anxious to know who the author of the following pages is, his name, and to what denomination he belongs. Let it suffice to say, that he considers himself connected with no party, nor wishes to be known by the name of any -- he feels himself united to that one body of which Christ is the head, and all his people fellow members.

/13/ ACTS XI. 26.

/3/ The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

A disciple is a scholar, or learner; such were the followers of Christ -- students under him their Lord, and Master. During the times of his ministry on earth, he taught them the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven; and though he taught them diligently, yet they remained only learners, until the Holy Ghost came, took of his, showed it unto them, and anointed them. John 16. 14. I John 2. 20. They were then enabled to comprehend the sum of that holy science now contained in the new Testament. This being the case, it was proper they should no longer be called disciples, but Christians; because the latter name was best

expressive of their character, and because Christ was, from that place, about to spread his kingdom, and collect out of different nations subjects of his grace and government. It was therefore necessary, that those peculiar people should have a name incontestably proper, significant, cementing, common, and agreeable to all; that those of different name, and education, as Jew and Gentile, collected to form one holy nation, might not be barbarians to each other, but united as one family.

Hence they were called Christians; and the original (chreematizoo, according to the best critics, see Schrevelius, Dod. Guyse, &c.) strongly intimates, that they were called so by divine appointment. For it generally signifies an oracular nomination, or declaration from the mouth of the Lord, as used in other parts of the New Testament. See Matt. 2. 22. . . . notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee. Luke 2. 26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Acts 10. 22. . . . Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house to hear words of thee. Heb. 8. 5. as Moses was admonished of God, when he was about to make the tabernacle, &c. Chap. 11. 7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, &c. and 12.25. For if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, &c. From the foregoing passages therefore it is highly probable, nay to me it appears manifest, the simple meaning of the text is, that the disciples were, by divine appointment, first called Christians in Antioch.

In this view the promise of Jehovah is fulfilled to his church; Isai. 62. 2. thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. 65. 15. for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name. 56. 5. I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off. Acts. 15. 7. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord; and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

Though the name christian, is now nearly eighteen hundred years old, & almost lost in party names, and distinctions, yet it may be worth while to consider farther its original import, as a happy mean to recover not only the name, but also the thing.

/4/ This name should stand as a distinction between the followers of Christ and the world, out of which he has chosen them. It may properly be considered a patronymick name, a badge of relation to Christ, as his servants, his bride, &c. and as intimating their unction by the Holy Ghost: for as Christ was anointed to prepare him for his work, so, for the same purpose are his followers.

It is a catholic name, intended to bury all party denominations. The name Jew was odious to the Gentiles, and Gentiles, to the Jews. But the name christian swallows up all other names in one common and agreeable appellation. He who broke down the middle wall of partition, has taken away partition names, and united all his followers in his own name, as one common denomination. And it is but a due honor to the Lord Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, that they who profess his religion, should wear his name. Those, therefore, who take their denomination from his subordinate ministers, pay an extravagant, and almost an idolatrous compliment to them.

The Roman catholics, having corrupted and lost the thing, acted consistently enough in laying aside the name. But what excuse should we plead for protestants, who profess to act upon the original plan; and yet are divided, each pointing a different way, saying lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there? In these days it is not enough to be christians, but we must be something more. . . . rided bigots to some party, and the

whimsies entertained by that party.

I believe some things, which great and good men have believed and taught; but I believe them not on their authority, but solely on the authority of Jesus Christ. It would, therefore be iniquity in me to rob him, in order to compliment them.

The subject may be reduced to two general propositions.

I. The requisites to constitute a Christian. And

II. Why the followers of Christ should be called Christians, and nothing else.

I. The requisites to constitute a Christian.

A Christian, in a good degree, imitates the character of Jesus Christ, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners; in whose mouth there was no guile. Therefore,

Reformation is strictly necessary, seeing the lives and characters of the unconverted do not, even remotely resemble the spotless character of Jesus Christ.

Faith is equally, or rather superlatively necessary: for without this it is impossible to please God, or come to him. Heb. 11. 6. By faith, mountains may be removed, and virtue drawn from the fountain of life. By it sinners may lay hold on eternal life, and trust there all upon the truth of God's promise.

Repentance is also necessary, and therefore strictly enjoined from Heaven, in the most positive manner. Matt. 3. 2. Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Luke 13. 3. except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Acts 3. 19. Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, &c.

/5/ Adoption is also necessary to constitute a christian: for by nature we are strangers, and foreigners, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. But through Christ we are adopted into the family of God, brought into the state, spirit, and privilege of his sons. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Rom. 8. 15. Gal. 4. 5. Eph. 1. 5, 13.

Many more arguments might be deduced to substantiate these points; but as the principal subjects of investigation lie yet before us, we come to consider,

II. Why the followers of Christ, should be called christians. and nothing else.

1. Because the name is significant, the interpretation being anointed ones: for the word Christ signifies anointed. Is. 61. 1. The Lord hath anointed me, &c. Psal. 105. 15. Touch not mine anointed, that is, mine anointed people.

2. Because the scriptures favor that as the name most proper for the church. It was given by divine authority, as has been already shown; and who will dispute the reason, and propriety of it? Paul almost persuaded Agrippa, as himself acknowledged, to become a christian. Acts 26. 28. %àPaul was desirous, not only that the King should become a christian, but all who heard him; would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds, v. 29. Peter calls the followers of Jesus by the same name. I Pet. 4. 16. This appears to be the name alluded to in Eph. 3. 15. the name by which the whole family in Heaven, and earth is named.

3. The Church of Christ is one body, and one name is enough for the same body. He that changes his name has generally a design in it. Paul was pointedly opposed to the appellation of any other name to the church. See his first Epistle to the church at Corinth, chapter first and third. The Corinthians were not satisfied to be called christians, and nothing else; but some wished to be called Paulites, after Paul; some Apollosites, after Apollos; and some Cephasites, after Cephas. As in these days some are vain enough to profess themselves Calvinists, after Calvin; Lutherans, after Luther -- Arminians, after Arminius &c.(1) This is improper, unless their religion, be human, not divine--springing from men, not from God. Had Paul encouraged such a spirit among the Corinthians, and others where he preached, there might soon have been as many parties among them as there were ministers; and he being the greatest, might have triumphed over the rest; as many are now attempting to do. But his noble soul, abhorring the idea, endeavored to nip the poisonous weed in the bud, by telling them they were carnal; and urging these pungent questions, Is Christ /6/ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptised in the name of Paul? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?

4. Because unscriptural names, are spurious things, being destitute of divine authority; and not only so, but they are divergent, having a tendency to disunite the body of Christ, scatter its sacred members, and cause them to bite, devour, and be consumed one of another.

5. Because Christ and his church are often in scripture designated under the endearing relation of husband and wife. And there is a real propriety in a woman being called by the name of her husband, seeing they are no more two, but one flesh. Gen. 2. 24. Mark 10. 9, &c. The Lord says to the church I am married unto thee. Jerem. 3. 14. He complains of her as a treacherous wife. v. 20. Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now. Hos. 2. 7. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shall call me Ishi, that is, my husband. v. 16. And I will betroth thee unto me forever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness. v. 19. I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness. v. 20. ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, to him who is raised from the dead, &c. Rom. 7. 4. I have espoused you to one husband. 2 Cor. 11. 2. See also Psal. 60. 5. Cant. 4. 12. Eph. 1. 23. and 5. 23. Rev. 21. 9, &c. and 22. 17. would it not be a matter of jealousy for a woman to refuse to be called by the name of her husband, or wish to be known by another name, especially if that person whose name she preferred should be a base character. What would any man think of his wife, if, in word, she acknowledged her lawful marriage to him, but would be called by the name of some of his male domestics? Or she would carry the name of the domestic in her forehead, that is, publicly, by which she might be known; and the name of her husband in her hand, that is, privately, would he not suppose she was insane? or conclude she loved his servant better than himself? He would undoubtedly consider himself robbed of his due honor, as her head and husband. Now God says he is a jealous God, and his glory will he not give to another. Exod. 20. 5. Isai. 48. 11. Zech. 8. 2. Let professors of religion, who choose to be called by so many names, which the mouth of the Lord hath not named; and who glory in their names, make the application; it is easy, and natural; the similitude answereth as face to face in a glass.

6. The church of Christ is built of lively stones, a spiritual house. I Pet. 2. 4,5. Knowing that a house divided against itself cannot stand, and to cut off all excuse for division, he broke down the partition wall, and abolished in his flesh the enmity, to make in himself of twain (Jews and Gentiles) one new man, a holy and united church. The Lord has justly made a difference between the righteous, and the wicked. Exod. 1. 7. Mal 3. 18. but between the righteous we are more than three times told there is no difference. Acts. 10. 34. 35, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, &c. and 15. 8, 9. Rom. 3. 22. and 10.

12. These things I have in a figure /7/ transferred to myself and Apollos, for your sakes; that ye might learn in us, not to think of man above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? 1 Cor. 4. 6, 7. In chap. 11. 3. he lets them know, that the head of every man is Christ, as the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. In chap. 12. 12. he would have us remember, that though there be different gifts it is for the perfecting of the same body. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, v. 13. and have been all made to drink into one spirit, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free. To the Gallatians he says, there is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither bond, nor free there is neither male, nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Chap. 3. 28. See also Eph. 2. 18-22, and 4. 1-6. Col. 3.11.-15. Just before our Lord left the world, he fervently prayed to the Father, that they, the church, might be one, even as we are one. John, 17, 11, 21, 22, 23. He plainly saw, that nothing short of the unity of his people, would stop the mouths of gainsayers, and crush infidelity. He knew it would be in vain to persuade, and impossible to prevail on the world to believe, that he was sent of the Father, while his followers were falling out by the way.

Having sufficiently shown, that the name christian, is the ancient and proper name for the church, the question will naturally arise, whence came other names? I answer. They had lost the spirit of the christian religion, and departed from the simplicity of the gospel.

At first they sought the honor of the Redeemer, and the advancement of his kingdom; but after they descended from these noble ends, self took the lead, and directed them to make honor, and empire, power and profit, their chief objects. The church of Rome, foremost in pride, avarice, and ambition, made the first struggle; and to accomplish her end gave herself names unknown before; such as the Mother church, the holy Roman Catholic church, &c. Here the christian name was lost. In process of time, other enormities arose, and grew to an amazing size, which more or less infected all her members. New rites and ceremonies were almost continually introduced, until they became too intolerable for a pious mind to bear. At length some, who could no longer support under the galling yoke of her superstitious deviations from the original plan, and her unscriptural invasions of their religious rights, entered their protest against her capital errors, and withdrew from her jurisdiction. Their first object was reformation, which, with much labor, and through many sufferings, they effected in a good degree, and in many respects.

But as they were not themselves entirely cured of the old infection, they propagated, in some measure, the same disorder in the doctrines they taught, and the government under which they placed the reformed. This disorder, like noxious vapors, soon infected the atmosphere of the church; or as noxious weeds, although not planted in the same soil, soon grew up and infected the ground.

It is remarkable from the history of those times, that the reformers themselves soon began to act in the same manner the church had done from which they separated; and to practice the same things against which they had protested in others.

/8/ The church of Rome had introduced several things as articles of faith, and rules of government beside those contained in the word of God; against these the reformers protested as human; alleging, that the Holy Scriptures contained all things necessary for Salvation, and were the only sure Rule of faith and conduct: and upon this ground they began to carry on the reformation.

But when they began to wax great, to be well known in the world, and to receive honor of men, they began to contend for the mastery, and to strive who should be the greatest. Here pride, passion, &c. so hateful in the followers of Jesus, soon found incentives. One could not obtain exclusive honor, but at the expense of

another. Hence each began to explode the opinions of others, in order to extol his own; and that too in non essentials, in things merely circumstantial. For these were the trifles, about which only they could contend; because their religion being substantially, the same, they had no whereelse to begin. But they did not end here. For, astonishing to relate! with respect to these non essentials, those worthy reformers parted. And the difference of opinion being then agitated, as it still is to this day, the consequence was that the breach was increased. Each had his advocates, and followers; and it became like priest, like people; the people caught the spirit of their respective leaders. Each party liked the other so little, they were not content to be known by the same name. Hence it came to pass, that each espoused the name, by which they chose to be distinguished from the rest.

Thus arose the denomination Calvinist, Lutheran, Arminian &c. and in this way we may account for the many parties, and party names, which have arisen and swallowed up the church of Christ to the present day. Similar causes will produce similar effects.

After the example of the old church, from which they had departed, they began to introduce human Laws, Rules, Rites, Ceremonies, Creeds, Confessions, Standards, Helps, Forms of Government, Discipline, &c. &c. to make laws to bind both soul, and body, and cast them to the tormentors, until they should repent, and submit to their authority.

The native consequences of these things, were what might be expected. Like confining fire and powder in a bombshel, the consequence is a violent explosion. These ingredients burst off the reformers and the reformed from the church of Rome; then burst them asunder from each other. And it would take a very accurate historian to tell into how many pieces this combustible matter has rent the body of Christ. One thing I know, that wherever non essentials are made terms of communion, it will never fail to have a tendency to disunite and scatter the church of Christ. It is certainly making the door of the church narrower than the gate of Heaven, and casting away those whom Jesus has received.

It is indeed not a little surprising, that things, which will be granted not essential to the salvation of the soul, should so long have been made terms of communion; so that while it will be granted a man continues essentially in the faith, and his moral, and religious character unexceptionable, yet he cannot be admitted into the church; or if /9/ he is in it, he may be excommunicated, (that is delivered over to satan) as though the God of Heaven had rejected him.

It is also matter of astonishment, that a person, whose experience of grace they receive as valid, and whose life is confessedly devout and pious, they will refuse to admit to the privileges of the Lord's house, and drive him from his table, as they would even a dog, or a wretch unworthy of a crumb!

And what excuse will be plead for such conduct? He has not complied with all the punctilious of our party. But there is an enquiry far more important, and that is, Is he one of Christs flock? Let truth, and candor now answer. Why he tells us indeed, (and we cannot deny it) a beautiful story about the great deep of his heart being broken up -- his sensibly feeling the sinfulness of sin -- his sore distress on account of it -- his seeking to the Lord Jesus, and being healed -- one thing he affirms, that whereas he was blind he now seeth -- that he has chosen God for his portion, that he loves his ways, his people, and his laws -- that sin has ever since appeared to him exceeding sinful, &c. As to his moral conduct we have no objection against it. And if he could only see with us, as to church order, and some other things of a doctrinal nature, we would rejoice to give him the right hand of fellowship, and see him at our table, enjoying all the privileges of the Lord's house with us. For as to practical, and experimental religion we are satisfied with

him, in a word we believe he is a christian, Poor man! we pity him: may the Lord give him to see right!

How will such shepherds answer him who said unto them Feed my lambs? John 21. 16 -- when he calls them to give an account of the stewardship committed to their trust Luke 16. 2. 1. Pet. 4. 5. -- when he demands of them, where are such and such whom I sent hungry to you to be fed? You have lorded it over their consciences, and driven them from my board -- you would not allow them one crumb of my bread, nor one drop of my wine.

Methinks I hear them say, "Lord I hoped they would become orthodox"; that is, change their sentiments respecting external things, "come over to our side, and then I would have fed them."

Am I mistaken: or do I really hear the Judge reply, "Were you wiser, or better than I? Did I not tell you, there were other sheep which were not of this fold, them I would bring; and there should be one fold, and one shepherd? John 10. 16. "Did I not also tell you, I was no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feared me, and wrought righteousness was accepted with me? Acts 10. 34. 35. See also 2. Chron. 19. 7. Rom. 2. 11. Eph. 6. 9. Col. 3. 25. I Pet. 1. 17. "why then have ye beaten my people to pieces?" Isai. 3. 15. I sent you not to divide my flock, to sever, and judge them" Matt. 7. 1. Rom. 14. 4. 10. James 4. 12. but to feed them: What I require of my stewards is, that they be faithful. Luke 12. 42. I Cor. 4. 1. 2. Tit. 1. 7. that they take care of all that is mine. Heb. 13. 17. Will any party attachment avail before the Judge. Will any frivolous arguments be heard? Can wilful ignorance stand fourth and plead their excuse? If it cannot, it had been better for them that a millstone had /10/ been hanged about their necks, and that they had been drowned in the depth of the Sea. Matt. 18. 6.

Take a fair view of partyism, and you will find the following things.

1. It has a tendency to immortalise the name of him, who first brought it in to being; and to give the minds of its members an unhappy bias, or prepossession in favor of one against another: and thus they become bigots -- for they are led to conclude, that although others may be partly right, they themselves are altogether so. This tends natively to prompt the pride of the human heart, and to verify that saying of the hypocritical Jews, who were more afraid of ceremonial than of moral uncleanness, stand by thyself, and come not near me; for I am holier than thou. Habits are soon formed, which lead them to have exalted ideas of themselves, and consequently contemptible ones of others, who differ from them. They soon begin to boast of their party, to tell wherein they excel their neighbors. The opposite party is exercised in the same way. Hence arise disputes, which interest all the passions of the human mind, and hurry them oftentimes into the most unwarrantable extremes. And, like Milton's war with the devils, it is finite against finite, policy against policy, orator against orator, argument against argument, passion against passion, gendering strife -- the contest is never ended; but the war waxes hotter, and hotter; and each party is zealous to enlist soldiers into their cause, and to compass sea and land to make one prosylite. But should one gain the ascendancy over the other, what is the result? Pride avarice, ambition, &c. being the moving springs in the contest; honor, greatness and addition are the reward.

2. When the followers of Christ are divided into different parties, and choose to be called by different names, a great deal of the preachers time and studies is spent in inventing and vending arguments to draw persons over to their respective parties. Hence the holy scriptures must be bent and twisted in support of them: to which purpose those divine materials will never submit. For who does not know, that if the Scriptures are consistent, they never can support so many parties, and those too so widely different? Nay, so far are they from supporting any that they forbid all, and sap the very foundation of them, as has

been already shown.

3. Different parties have established different forms of government, and discipline in their different churches, to which members of other societies have either no access, or before which they are not willing to appear. Hence it comes to pass, that acts of immorality, to the great dishonor of religion, and promotion of infidelity, much oftener escape the just censures of the church than they would do, if all were of one name, and felt themselves bound by the same common bond of unity. Thus, for instance, if I, being a member of one denomination, know a person, who is a member of another, guilty of drunkenness, lying, profane swearing, or any crime whatsoever, I have neither part, nor lot in his party; he may, therefore, continue the practice, and remain a member, till the day of his death; unless some of his own church overtake him in the fault. This is a lamentation, and /11/ shall be for a lamentation. For I believe it is a grievance for which there never will be found sufficient redress, while different parties exist.

4. While different parties exist, there is nothing more certain than that each will endeavour to support that one to which he belongs, in consequence of which he will endeavor to weaken the rest; to prevent their influence; and that is in effect, as far as he can, forbidding them to do good. We have this exemplified in one of Christ's disciples, Mark 9. 38. Master we saw one casting out devils -- a glorious work indeed! and surely all men ought to be encouraged, who are engaged in it -- casting them out too in thy name -- and that is the only name under heaven in which it could be done -- and he followeth not with us -- and what of that? we forbade him -- for what? -- because he followeth not with us -- a poor pitiful reason indeed! But Jesus said, forbid him not; for there is no man that shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. Verse 39. Glory, to his name for this rebuke! But if he was now on the earth, he would not only have one to rebuke, but the parties altogether.

5. Partyism is calculated to fill the mouths of gainsayers with arguments against us. For we preach, that the religion we recommend to the world is a religion of love; is a spirit of amity and concord -- that it is pure, peaceable, and easy to be intreated -- it is that spirit of charity which suffereth long, and is kind -- envieth not, vaunteth not itself -- is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly -- seeketh not her own -- is not easily provoked -- thinketh no evil -- rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth -- beareth all things, believeth all things; hopeth all things, endureth all things. . . . and finally that it never faileth. 1 Cor. 13. 4. 8. That is, in other words, that it is of God, and is perfect like 'its author. And we stand up and solemnly profess, that this is our religion. But does our conduct towards each other manifest it? It does not. The men of the world say (and there is too much truth in it) "They are not what they pretend to be. . . they put on the habiliments of sanctity, and make long prayers; but interest is at the bottom of all their plans." And indeed facts are so plain against us as nearly to prove the truth of what they assert.

6. Partyism always tend to grieve, and dispirit, the hearts of those who are for peace. They desire to learn, and to know nothing among men, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified -- to live peaceably with all men -- not to render evil for evil, nor railing for railing, to love the brotherhood -- and, like their divine Master, to behold with equal eye all, in every nation, that fear God, and work righteousness. Hence when they go up to the house of God, it is with design and desire to worship God in spirit and in truth; to get their souls nourished with the sincere milk of the word; to renew their spiritual strength. . . that they may be enabled to withstand the wiles of the devil, and combat his temptations. . . that they may renounce the allurements of the world, and mortify their members which are upon the earth. . . that, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith, they may run with patience the race that is set before them. . . forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward to the things that are before, /12/ they may press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore they desire, not to be always learning the first principles of the doctrines of Christ, but to go on towards perfection. But when they arrive at the place, which is called by the name of God, how much are their souls grieved, and disappointed? Are they there taught to disdain, in comparison, all other knowledge but that of Jesus crucified for the sins of a guilty world? to imitate that love that led him to Calvary and the Cross? to breathe, in the midst of persecution and reproach, of suffering and death, that prayer of Love, Father forgive them?

No, this is not the spirit that is inculcated; this is not the religion that is taught them from the sacred desk. The preacher rises and exhibits a few things respecting the first principles of religion, which most of them have long since learned by rote. . . Then instead of turning to the right, and leading them into the marrow and fatness of the Gospel, into green pastures by the still waters; causing them to lay down, and rest in God; like a warrior he rouses them to arms, wheels to the left, and teaches them to fight not indeed the battles of the Lord, but imaginary ones. . .

He sets their notions and whims in battle array against the notions, and whims of their brethren of other parties. . . instructs them accurately in the arts of war, furnishes them with weapons which are carnal, not mighty through God to the pulling down the strong holds of satan and of sin. . . weapons, not prepared to fight and overcome their foes, but to wound, and destroy their friends. Here they are not taught to fight the good fight of faith. . . to put on the whole armour of God, &c.

But they are taught to think lightly of other christians, perhaps better than themselves, and to beware of them as dangerous. Thus, by these strategems of the devil (for they deserve no better name) the minds of their hearers are turned from the love of the brethren to hate them, and, view them often as outcasts from God.

7. Another evil that arises out of partyism is, that frequently, in the same neighbourhood, and at the same time, there are several worshiping assemblies in opposition to one another; when the whole might conveniently constitute one assembly only. Each of these parties, in their own opinion have God engaged on their side, and in opposition to the others. Let christians blush and be ashamed, at the recollection! Does not this look too like ancient heathenism, when each nation had their God, who took part with them against the rest, both in times of war and peace? These different divisions, and subdivisions, have their different houses of worship built, and dedicated according to the pattern of their own mind. Their holy domes are the sacred property of the party; and generally one of the stiffest of the sect carries the keys. When, therefore, a stranger passes along, though in pursuit of the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and though he may have clean hands, and a pure heart; may have forsaken father, and mother for sake of Christ, and the Gospel; yet he cannot be admitted to preach, nor to teach, unless he be something more than a christian. His name therefore, and surname must be delivered up; the name of his sect, the articles of his creed, &c. Should it happen, that he was not called by the name of their leader, or if /13/ he did not wish himself to be known by the name of any particular party, he must pass on, though the people were dying in their sins, and destitute of stated preaching. He comes to another temple, rotting to the ground, unoccupied. . . the hinges of the doors rusting with idleness, and the people around perishing for lack of knowledge; but unless he can embrace that manism, which has distinguished them as a party, he cannot be admitted there.

He goes on, and comes to another, they bid him enter in and preach. . . But should he advance anything, which does not tend to strengthen their party, they will either oppose him to his face, or go away, and revile him behind his back. Or though he should preach the things they approve, and would extol in one of

their own name; yet, in him they will account for it, on other principles. "Yes," say they, "he knows where he is; if he were at such a place, he would preach other doctrine. Thus men often make void the commandments of God, through their own traditions. Under these distressing circumstances, frequently those whom God has sent to preach the everlasting Gospel, have to turn out into the hedges, and high ways, exposed to wind and weather; and call, to the Gospel feast, those who are not too full of pride, or prejudice to hear them.

We have long been crying out against the church of Rome for her superstitious, and unscriptural inventions; while we have neither suspected, nor examined our own;(2) as though the world did not see and many of our acquaintances know, that we neither have, nor even pretend to have, a thus saith the Lord for many things we both do and teach. Alas for us! the children of this world are to this day wiser in their generations than the children of light. They have long since learned that short, though important lesson, united we stand, divided we fall: But we will divide, and rend in pieces, and yet expect to stand.

To remove the cause of division, that the effect may cease, is a work, which should engage the attention of every good man. In order to this we should certainly judge righteous judgment. We should let truth have its due weight, and ascribe the effect to its proper cause. Now where shall we find an instance of a lasting separation having taken place in the church of Christ by a close and strict adherence to the word of God on each side? It is a fact confirmed, by history and observation, that the more closely any body of christians adhere to the word of God, as the only standard of faith and practice, the more firm, and lasting will their union be, And, on the contrary, the farther they depart from the simplicity of the word, by the introduction of human inventions, the more certainly and speedily do corruption, schism, and desolation follow.

/14/ That schism does exist in the christian church is a lamentable truth; and that human inventions are the cause of it is too evident to be denied: therefore, let that man, or set of men, who have introduced, or are the supporters of them be regarded as the true schismatics. And let such inventions be forever excluded from the church, and then, and not till then, will the unity of the spirit, and bond of peace be restored.

8. Another evil tendency of partyism is, that it always gives the common enemy of souls an advantage over the church: For while each party is engaged in internal broils, and factions, they are all off their guard; as to other enemies. Their eyes are fixed on each other, and removed from the great adversary of souls. Hence he is left at liberty to make inroads at pleasure, to stir up passions within, strengthen prejudices, foment quarrels, wound the weak, overturn the wavering, and confirm the wicked in their wickedness. And the strength of each party is so far exhausted in struggling against one another, that they have neither time, nor strength to oppose the arch-enemy, nor his emissaries. And therefore, many fall an easy prey. It is astonishing, that the friends of religion have not, at least more policy, if not more goodness, than to assist this enemy, when he concert schemes to impede the work of salvation, and destroy the souls of men.

To me it appears, that if the wisdom and subtilty of all the devils in hell had been engaged in ceaseless counsels from eternity, they could not have devised a more complete plan to advance their kingdom than to divide the members of Christ's body. And yet his ministers, through pride, ambition, the love of domination, &c. will aid in this horribly tragical scene; and that too, for sake of some new found forms and ceremonies; or to gratify their honor, or profit, which may, perhaps, in the end, prove less to them than "thirty piecies of silver" did to Judas.

These, and innumerable other evils which cannot be named, result from the various divisions, which have taken place, and do still exist in the church of Christ.

But while it will be readily acknowledged by serious, and unprejudiced minds, that these are great evils, attended with incalculable bad consequences; yet, in the present existing state of things, it is much easier to lament than remove them. I will grant there are great difficulties in the way; but, I trust, they are not insuperable. --

Let it first be firmly believed, that there are real and great evils, and I am persuaded every honest man will be willing to listen to any plan that promises their removal. We have departed in some measure (I believe greatly) from primitive christianity: if we can find by what means we shall get back, doubtless it will remedy the evils, which have arisen from our departure. I will mention a simple method, which I am willing to try, till some abler hand suggest a better. And it is the following. "Let all Christians worship one God. . . Acknowledge one Savior. . . . Have one Confession of faith. . . One form of government. . . Be members one of another. . . Members of one church. . . Profess one religion. . . Let none be received but /15/ living members. . . " And finally "let none be expelled but for a breach of the divine law."

Here is a plan, and a simple one too, which is designed as "a healer of the breach, a restorer of paths to dwell in," to bring back those, who have gone astray; those, who by fraud, force, or otherwise, have been led off from the original christian plan.

Come now, my christian brethren, let us all agree that the mischiefs already done by partyism are sufficient, and more than sufficient; and let us begin to enquire "for the good old paths, and walk therein, and we shall find rest."

Let us now a little review and examine the plan.

1. Then, we are to worship one God; because he that does more is an idolater.
2. Acknowledge one Savior, Jesus Christ. For he is the only Savior, besides him there is none else; and his name is the only name under heaven by which we can be saved.
3. Have one Confession of faith, and let that be the Bible. This is so generally and yet so particular a rule, that we shall never be able to find a man or set of men, in the world who can mend it; and we are pointedly forbid either to add to it, or diminish from it; and this prohibition is enforced with a fearful, but just threatening, in the very conclusion of this Book, Revel. 22. 18. 19. "For I testify unto every man, that heareth the words of the prophesy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophesy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

A vast body of divines, both in Europe and America, have confessed the holy scriptures to be the only and sufficient Rule of faith and practice. Now if they be the only rule, there can be no other; and if they be sufficient, there is no need of any other. Some indeed have asserted the contrary; but they were such as wished to Legislate for the Church. Indeed it appears that too many have viewed the Bible, as the statesman does the Constitution, that upon which they are to frame laws; and it often happens, through the ignorance, or the intrigues of designing men, that the laws are anticonstitutional. The pride, ignorance, and designs of the priesthood, have, in this way, introduced innumerable evils into the church. . . They

have not only legislated for the existing generation, but have bound up the consciences of their unborn race.

It is not a little degrading to the supreme God, to suppose, that he himself should institute a religion, and convey it to his rational creatures, by means of supernatural revelation, on the observance of which their happiness, in the present and future world depends; and yet that this revelation should be so vague, that we must have the assistance of men, no more inspired than ourselves, to perfect that which is lacking in the work, of a God? That it must be modeled by political heads; that it needs the labor of Synods, General Assemblies, /16/ Councils of fathers &c. &c. to systematise, and arrange it, before we can adopt it as a rule? This is a thought, that has sunk the credibility of the Scriptures, and being brought out to view, has shook the faith of thousands.

4. Let us have one form of discipline, and government, and let this be the New Testament. The Old Testament is necessary as a guide to our faith: for by it we are led to those things we find accomplished in the new, and which we are to believe. But for the constitution of a christian church; its conduct when constituted; the reception of its members and upon what principles; the manner of expelling and for what, we have a sufficient guide in the New Testament, independent of every other Book, in the world.

When I read, and observe how exceedingly particular Jesus Christ has been in building his church, and the order of it, as to all her members -- that he gave his life for her -- that his love to her is unchangeable -- that she is "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" -- that for wisdom, goodness, &c. there never was one on earth equal to him -- I have a higher opinion of his wisdom, goodness and love, than to imagine he would give her a guide, or a rule, which, in the state he left it was inadequate in some, or in many respects -- and yet that he should appoint, and authorize nobody to make up the deficiency.

5. Let all christians consider themselves members one of another: because in the estimation of scripture they are so indeed. This is illustrated and proved from Christ himself being the foundation, and his church the house, or superstructure built upon that foundation -- he is the vine, they are the branches -- he is the head, and they are the members of his one body, knit together by joints and bands. And therefore they are members one of another in particular. Hence it follows,

6. That all christians ought to be members of one church. Because we find but one foundation for a church, and that is Christ; "and other foundation can no man lay." All therefore that is built upon that foundation, is one superstructure, or one body in Christ. This is his mystical body, and no other. And the name of this body originates from its head, which makes it the christian church, or church of Christ. Therefore,

7. Let all profess one religion. And Let all be more solicitous about the possession, than the profession of this one religion, as that which will make every one happy in God, in himself, and with his brethren. But if a man has religion at all, it will be known, and it must be called something. If our religion be the religion of Jesus Christ, both justice and propriety demand, that it should be called by his name. Otherwise, he will be the author of a good, and another will have the honor of it.

8. Let none be received as members of the church, but such as are made alive in Christ. For the Lord's temple is "built of lively stones, a spiritual house." But let awakened persons now, as of old, be taken under the care of the church, as "proselytes of the gate," to be instructed, watched over, prayed for, &c. But why should they be /17/ considered as part of a body, of which they know, and sensibly feel, they are not members. And let children be taken under the care, and inspection of the church, by baptism, or

otherwise, as each society, or individual member of it shall judge best. But let not brother contend with, or condemn brother for practising, or omitting the rite of infant baptism, or the mode in which it shall be administred, or received. If the spirit and love of Christ in his members will not preserve his people from this, I am sure no laws of human invention can do it.

6 [9.]. Let none be excommunicated from the church, but for a breach of the divine law. As each member is engrafted into the true wine by faith; and nothing but sin can separate between God and the soul; why should any thing else separate members from the visible church? Where is the man, or set of men, who hold a divine charter to forbid communion, or cut off from the church militant, those who hold communion with God, and are fit candidates for the church triumphant?

But there are objections offered against a general union of christians under one name. I shall answer some of them.

1. It is objected, that controversies would then cease, and all being alike would slide into a dull and careless state, seeing they would have nothing to stir them up to examine whether they were right or wrong. Ans. Let me ask, what good has ever been done by controversy? Where can the person be found, who by controversy was convinced of his lost state, and forced to cry out, "What shall I do to "be saved?" Or who found peace with God in this exercise? Where is the christian, who had his love to God and man increased while he warmly contended to establish the distinguishing opinions of his own party, at the expence of all others? He cannot be found. But on the contrary, how much mischief have we seen done by it? How many glorious revivals of religion have been extinguished by it, as fire upon which mighty waters have been dashed? Has not the heavenly dove fled before the bigots rage? Nay, has not the world been drenched in blood in consequence of it? Let the history of the church vouch for the truth of what I say. Partyism has been the destruction of multitudes of the human race, even without the use of fire and sword. To the careless part of mankind, every party bears the appearance of a religion different from the rest; and each arrogates to itself the honor of being right; of course it condemns all others as being wrong. The natural conclusion, therefore, of those, who are not skilled in theological criticisms, and care as little about them, is, that as there are so many religions (for they denominate each a different religion) they cannot tell which is right. And as there is but one God, and one religion, if any, they conclude all are wrong. Hence they commence infidels, concluding that each party is a cheat, the Bible priestcraft, and its advocates a set of designing men. Upon this ground, therefore, they cast away all religion, and give up the reins to every lust.

2. It is objected, that God has permitted division in the course of his providence, and, therefore it must be for good.

/18/ Ans. If by permission you mean God has allowed it, it is not only for good, but it is good in itself. For God, who is infinitely perfect, cannot allow any thing but what is good. To suppose otherwise, is to destroy the divine nature. But if by permission you mean, that he has not put physical obstacles in your way -- made you cease to be rational creatures -- moral, or free agents -- that is, that he has not overturned the laws of creation, or struck the world out of existence, in order to prevent divisions and controversies among men. If this be what you mean, I grant God has permitted division, controversy, murder, drunkenness, uncleanness, and all other sins, which have existed, or ever will exist. But it is very strange, that it should be applied to God in this sense, when his word, so far from saying he permits, expressly prohibits all sin. For, as I have already shewn, he has forbidden division, and consequently that strife and contention which spring from it.

3. If christians were all thus united, there would be so many to attend the same place of worship, that we could not find houses sufficient to contain them; they would be incommoded for want of shelter, shades, seats, &c. And the preachers would be greatly injured by speaking so loud as to make the multitude hear.

Ans. This objection has the honor of coming through very influential hands; and I verily believe it to be as forcible a one as I ever heard advanced against a general Union. But it is so far from being an evil, that I am persuaded all christians would rejoice to see it.

4. We are commanded to "contend earnestly for "the faith once delivered to the saints."

Ans. "Wisdom is justified of her children." We should contend earnestly, not rashly, for the essential truths of the Bible. And who will oppose them? Not christians surely, but atheists, deists, heathens, and the licentious croud; who are not of the church, but of the world. But are we to take the liberty, to fall out by the way, and brother to smite his brother, when both are agreed as to every thing that is essential to their salvation? God forbid!

5. We are not agreed as to inward principles, how then can we walk together?

Ans. I query whether this is true with respect to any two christians in the world -- We all agree, that man is a fallen creature -- that faith, repentance, and an holy life are necessary to salvation. And who can, or will condemn those, who are possessed of them? Not Jesus Christ; for they are members of his body; nor a righteous man, for they are the delight of his heart -- We also agree, that true religion is one; that the experience of every christian is substantially the same; that no man can get to heaven except he be a christian; and that no man, who lives, and dies a christian, will miss heaven, &c.

About what, then, have we to dispute? Why says one, such a person is an Arminian, he denies absolute predestination; he holds that a christian can fall from grace; he is a free willer; or he is a calvinist, a rigid predestinarian, nay, I think, a fatalist -- or he is a baptist, /19/ &c. &c. and I cannot fellowship him. That excuse will not bear telling, for it is notoriously known, that there are of these descriptions interspersed through the various denominations, and in communion with them, while they hold these sentiments. And being real christians, it makes little or no odds, provided they are called by the same name.

I believe every objection, which can be raised against a general union of christians, arises from unbelief, pride, prejudice, a party spirit, &c. and the spirit of Jesus living in his members will destroy them. Let christians then possess more of this blessed spirit, and it cannot be doubted, but they will soon form an union with one another.

The conclusion of the whole matter is; that the various denominations shall give up their several distinctions, and be consolidated into one body. And why not, since their various names are no more than newfound, spurious things, for which there is no use in the church of Christ? I say newfound, because they are not contained in the New Testament; and spurious, because they have no divine original. And I know of none that claims any for them, but the baptists. They claim it from John, the harbinger of Christ -- he was called Baptist, which was truly applicable to him, as an Officer; because it was expressive of his office. But why should we call every lay-man, and old woman a baptist, who never baptized any body in their lives, and never will?

Brethren, we are just at the door of a gracious providence, and are invited in. We may now constitute a church upon the true basis, free from the conflicting principles of partyism; from whence alone we may

expect to see her pure, benevolent, and divine principles exalted for the happiness of all people. Would to God, that those distinctions, which have so long abounded, and troubled the christian church, were vanished away, never to return! and that union, and church communion, were every where established upon the original simple principles of the gospel!

Could the friends of Jesus Christ be once persuaded of the importance, and utility of this duty, and arrange themselves under his banner; we should soon see them abandon vain jangling, and strife of words to no profit, but to the perverting of the soul; and united in the bonds of faith and love. Happy should we then be! Then thy king, O Zion, should reign in the midst of thee!

To promote this great end, and bring about this desirable event, must be the duty of every religious person -- Now the Lord has set before us an opportunity, and is graciously inviting us to embrace it.

It is much to be lamented, that the zealous reformers, when they burst asunder the cords of popish tyranny, ever departed from the scripture plan. But alas! instead of following the plain rules of their divine Master, as laid down by the Holy Ghost, they framed ones of their own, as the means to preserve union. But the effects were fatal -- They have nursed the demon of intolerance which, when aided by civil power, has led martyrs to the stake. It is a truth self evident to the christian, that nothing is a sin but what the scriptures /20/ forbid, and nothing a duty but what they enjoin. If therefore they have gone as extensively as sin, and duty, nothing more can be necessary. And to suppose they have not, is to reflect dishonor on them, and through them, on their author, who is God. We may be sure Christ never intended any other summary, as a standard of faith and practice for his church, but the gospel itself. And if the intrigues of designing men can be set aside, we may, upon the fair principles of the gospel, and simply as christians, form an union, whose order is divine, founded on universal charity. May heaven bless the hand, which shall aid in the consummation of a plan so essential to human happiness, as uniting the precious, and bringing back the children of God to primitive christianity. What is a christian church, but voluntary society, stipulating to walk by the rules of the gospel? And to every such society, when cramped by a man-made summary of faith and practice, searching the scriptures, to know their duty, is rendered in a great measure useless. Human compositions imposed upon thousands, not only undervalue the scriptures; but attack every man's judgment, who stands with the minority: and to all intents, and purposes, aims at the annihilation of private judgment altogether. Verily they are destructive of an union founded on truth: because they impregnate the pure waters of the sanctuary with the impure conceits of men. Some, indeed, say, that the scriptures are not well understood, and therefore rules, and creeds are necessary. But it very easy to see that they are expressed with all that clearness, with which God intended to reveal them. And we may be sure this is sufficient. Any other help, therefore, to make them plainer, and set that up as a standard of orthodoxy, and a term of christian communion in any society, is to involve the church in error.

Our fathers erred, or why a reformation? Their descendants will err; nor shall we see christianity in its native beauty, until it appears in the white garments of the Gospel alone, strips of all the filthy rags of Human Invention.

It is pretended that human standards help to keep evil men out of the church, But it is far more certain from what has been already said, that they help to keep out the good, when they are out, and to put them out, when they are in. He who is wicked enough to wish for a place in the church, in order to gratify his lust of honor, power, or wealth, will be base enough to bend to the times, and suit himself to the sentiments of the day. Who, then, will be the most likely, to suffer expulsion, and to feel the iron hand of ecclesiastical

tyranny? Men of stubborn virtue, of principle, and of conscience -- men of th rigid, tough integrity, which cannot be bent and twisted to comply with the systems which are in fashion -- who will not prefer the dictates of fallible mortals, to the infallible word of God.

It is easy to see, that every rule enacted by man, as a rule of faith, is from its very nature void, or else the laws of Christ are void.

Some have urged, that a church has a right to prescribe to itself terms of communion, provided they be agreeable to the word of God. This would be true, if the terms were not prescribed there already, and no man, nor combination of men has any authority derived from /21/ scripture, to alter them. The precepts therefore, and practice of Christ, and his Apostles, recorded in the New Testament, have been, are, and ever will be, the only proper terms of church communion. And these are so plain, that no honest man need mistake them. But supposing it were granted, that the church has this right, who shall be the judge? How shall each member be assured, that this, and that should be a term? or that such and such things should be terms, and such others should not? Or is private judgment to be annihilated? The difference of sentiments among those, who have prescribed their different and opposite terms, prove that infallibility is not with us. Truth, like the Eternal, is one! Where shall we find it? He who would find truth, pure, and unmixed, must search for it in the Scriptures alone.

Brethren, we are expecting happier times than the church has ever yet seen; when she shall "come up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved;" when she shall "look forth" as the morning, fair as the moon, "clear as the fun, and terrible as an army with banners." There are perhaps, few professed christians in the world, who are not looking, and longing for these glorious days; when there shall be "one Lord, and his name one." When the church shall be one. But it is to be lamented that every party confident they are right, and all the rest wrong, are waiting to swallow them up. You will find no denomination, who are not possessed of this vanity more or less. And hence they are struggling, and have long struggled to bring about that event. But has not each hitherto stood its ground, and the harder the struggle, the less the success. And this is what has been chiefly done heretofore to promote a general union. But it has so long been tried in vain, as is sufficient, I think, to convince every discerning and honest mind, that each party has set out upon wrong principles.

Take the prophet's rule, and measure the foundation upon which each party has built, and you will find it narrower than the rock of ages, and not sufficient to bear the whole body of Christ. But measure the foundation of the christian plan, and you will find it broad as the stone, which God has laid in Zion, able to bear every christian in the world at once. How pleasing the anticipation, but how much more delightful will the enjoyment of that time be, when the different denominations, which have long been at variance, shall join hands in an everlasting peace! Then shall the wide world bow the knee, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father -- Then, and not till then, shall bold transgressors cease, and iniquity ashamed, stop her mouth -- Then, when Zion travels she shall bring forth her children -- the earth shall bring forth at once, and a nation shall be born in a day. For all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest; and the earth shall be full of his glory.

Are you not all praying, brethren, "Lord, hasten the approach of that day?" The day has already begun to dawn among some. Let a spirit of union and love (which is the fruit of the spirit of God,) prevail among you, and you will find, that this is day in the moral /22/ world -- The more you cultivate this spirit, the nuore will the Lord bless you, until "your peace shall become like a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the Sea. Nation shall cease to lift up weapon against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

(Typed and scanned by Peter Rollmann and Hans Rollmann; proof-read by Ms. Heather Russell; HTML by Hans Rollmann)

[NOTES:]

1. We hear, indeed some of the controversial writers apologize for the use they make of these names, that it is only to prevent circumlocution. But it is easy to see, that they are often used as terms of reproach. Thus to the Arminians, the name Calvinists' and to the Calvinists, the name Arminian, is a name of reproach. And to the sticklers for partyism, these terms, while they exist, will be esteemed a sufficient proof of error.

2. It is sufficiently proven by protestant Expositors, that the Mother of Harlots, spoken of by John in the Revel. is the Roman church. Now if a woman in the marriage state becomes a harlot, it is by departing from the law of her husband, and following her own carnal inclinations -- If she becomes a mother, it is by having children -- And if she have children, they must be distinct persons -- If they become harlots, it is by following the example of their mother, by partaking of her spirit, and drinking of the wine of her fornication. Query. If the church of Rome be the mother of harlots, who are her daughters?

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