

[F305]

## STUDY VI Part 3—The Church and Meetings

### ORDER AND DISCIPLINE IN THE NEW CREATION

#### **"Comfort the Feeble-Minded"**

Continuing our examination of the Apostle's words in our text, we note that the Church is to comfort the feeble-minded. We thus have notice that the reception of the holy Spirit does not transform our mortal bodies so as to entirely overcome their weaknesses. There are some with feeble minds, as there are others with feeble bodies, and each needs sympathy along the line of his own weakness. The feeble minds were not to be miraculously cured; nor should we expect that because the minds of some are feeble and unable to grasp all the lengths, and breadths, and heights, and depths of the divine plan that, therefore, they are not of the body. On the contrary, as the Lord is not seeking for his Church merely those who are of fine physical development, strong and robust, so likewise he is not seeking merely those who are strong and robust in mind, and able to reason and analyze thoroughly, completely, every feature of the divine plan. There will be in the body some who will be thus qualified, but others are feeble-minded, and do not come up even to the average standard of knowledge. What comfort should we give to these? We answer that the elders, in their presentations of the Truth, and all of the Church in their relationship one with the other, should comfort these, not necessarily in pointing out their feebleness and condoning the same, but rather along general lines—not expecting the same degree of proficiency and intellectual discernment in the members of the family of God. None should claim that those who have such disabilities are, therefore, not of the body.

The lesson is much the same if we accept the revised reading, "Comfort the fainthearted." Some naturally lack courage and combativeness, and with ever so good will and ever so loyal hearts cannot, to the same degree as others of the body, "be strong in the Lord," nor "fight the good fight of faith" in the open. The Lord, however, must see their will, their intention, to be courageous and loyal, and so should the brethren—if they are to attain the rank of overcomers.

All should recognize that the Lord's judgment of his people is according to their hearts, and that if these feeble-minded or fainthearted ones have had a sufficiency of mind and will to grasp the fundamentals of the divine plan of redemption through Christ Jesus, and their own justification in God's sight through faith in the Redeemer, and if on this basis they are striving to live a life of consecration to the Lord, they are to be treated in every way so as to permit them to feel that they are fully and thoroughly members of the body of Christ; and that the fact that they cannot expound or cannot perhaps with clearness discern every feature of the divine plan intellectually, and defend the same as courageously as others, is not to be esteemed as impugning their acceptance with the Lord. They should be encouraged to press along the line of self-sacrifice in the divine service, doing such things as their hands find to do, to the glory of the Lord and to the blessing of his people—comforted with the thought that in due time all who abide in Christ and cultivate the fruits of his Spirit and walk in his steps of sacrifice will have

new bodies with perfect capacity, in which all the members shall be able to know as they are known—and that meantime the Lord assures us that his strength is shown the more fully in our weakness.

### **"Support the Weak"**

This implies that there are some in the Church weaker than others; not merely physically weaker, but weaker spiritually—in the sense of having human organisms depraved in such a manner that they as New Creatures, find greater difficulty in growth and spiritual development. Such are not to be rejected from the body, but, on the contrary, we are to understand that if the Lord counted them worthy of a knowledge of His grace, it means that He is able to bring them off conquerors through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. They are to be supported with such promises as the Scriptures afford—to the effect that when we are weak in ourselves we may be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, by casting all our care upon Him, and by faith laying hold upon His grace; that in the hour of weakness and temptation they will find fulfilled the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness." The entire congregation can assist in this comforting and supporting, though, of course, the elders have a special charge and responsibility toward these, because they are the chosen representatives of the Church, and, hence, of the Lord. The Apostle, speaking of the various members of the body, after telling of pastors and teachers, speaks of "helps." ([1 Cor. 12:28](#)) Evidently the Lord's good pleasure would be that each member of the Church should seek to occupy such a place of helpfulness, not only helping the elders chosen as the representatives of the Church, but also helping one another, doing good unto all men as we have opportunity, but especially to the household of faith.—[Gal. 6:10](#)

### **"Patient Toward All"**

In obeying this exhortation to exercise patience toward each other under all circumstances, the New Creatures will find that they are not only exercising the proper attitude toward each other, but that they are cultivating in themselves one of the grandest graces of the holy Spirit—patience. Patience is a grace of the Spirit which will find abundant opportunity for exercise in all of life's affairs, toward those outside the Church as well as toward those within it, and it is well that we remember that the whole world has a *claim* upon our patience. We discern this only as we get clear views of the groaning creation's condition, revealed to us through the Scriptures. Therein we see the story of the fall, and how all have been injured by it. Therein we see God's patience toward sinners and His wonderful love in their redemption, and in the provisions He has made, not only for the blessing and uplifting of his Church out of the miry clay and out of the horrible pit of sin and death, but glorious provisions also for the whole world of mankind. In it, too, we see that the great difficulty with the world is that they are under the delusions of our Adversary, "the god of this world," who now blinds and deceives them. [2 Cor. 4:4](#)

Surely this knowledge should give us patience! And if we have patience with the world, much more should we have patience with those who are no longer of the world, but who have by God's grace come under the conditions of His forgiveness in Christ Jesus, have been adopted into His family, and are now seeking to walk in His steps. What loving and long-suffering

patience we *should* have toward these fellow-disciples, members of the Lord's body! Surely we *could* have nothing else than patience toward these; and surely our Lord and Master would specially disapprove and in some manner rebuke impatience toward any of them. Furthermore, we have great need of patience even in dealing with ourselves under present distress and weaknesses and battles with the world, the flesh and the Adversary. Learning to appreciate these facts will help to make us more patient toward all.

### **"See That None Render Evil for Evil"**

This is more than an individual *advice*: it is an injunction, addressed to the Church as a whole, and is applicable to each congregation of the Lord's people. It implies that if some of the household of faith are disposed to take vengeance, to retaliate, to render evil for evil, either upon brother members or upon those outside, that the Church will not be acting the part of a busybody in taking notice of such a course. It is the duty of the Church to *see* to this. "*See that no man render evil for evil,*" means, give attention to it that this proper spirit is observed in your midst amongst the brethren. If, therefore, the elders should learn of such occasions as would be covered by this injunction, it would be their duty kindly to admonish the brothers or the sisters respecting the Word of the Lord; and, if they will not hear, it would be the duty of the former to bring the matter before the congregation, etc., etc. And here is the Church's commission to take cognizance of such an improper course on the part of any. Not only are we to see to one another, and to look out for each other with kindly interest, to note that backward steps are not taken, but we are to see to it that, on the contrary, all follow after that which is good. We should rejoice in and commend every evidence of progress in a right way, giving it our support as individuals and as congregations of the Lord's people. By thus doing, as the Apostle suggests, we may rejoice evermore, and with good cause; for so helping one another the body of Christ will make increase of itself in love, growing more and more in the likeness of the Head, and becoming more and more fit for joint-heirship with him in the Kingdom.

"Let Us Consider One Another to Provoke  
Unto Love and to Good Works"

—[Heb. 10:24](#)—

What a loving and beautiful thought is here expressed! While others consider their fellows to fault-find or discourage, or selfishly to take advantage of their weaknesses, the New Creation is to do the reverse—to study carefully each other's dispositions with a view to avoiding the saying or doing of things which would unnecessarily wound, stir up anger, etc., but with a view to provoking them to love and good conduct.

And why not? Is not the whole attitude of the world, the flesh and the devil provocative of envy, selfishness, jealousy, and full of evil enticement to sin, of thought, word and deed? Why, then, should not the New Creatures of the Christ body not only abstain from such provocations toward themselves and others, but engage in provoking or inciting in the reverse direction—toward love and good works? Surely this, like every admonition and exhortation of God's Word, is reasonable as well as profitable.

## "The Assembling of Ourselves"

*"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day drawing on." [Heb. 10:25](#)*

The Lord's injunction, through the Apostle, respecting the assembling of his people, is in full accord with his own words, "Where two or three of you are met in my name, there am I in the midst." ([Matt. 18:20](#)) The object of these gatherings is clearly indicated; they are for mutual advancement in spiritual things—opportunities for provoking or inciting each other unto more and more love for the Lord and for each other, and to increased good works of every kind that would glorify our Father, that would bless the brotherhood, and that would do good unto all men as we have opportunity. If he who says, I love God, yet hateth his brother, knows not what he says, and deceives himself ([1 John 4:20](#)), similarly mistaken, we believe, are those who say, I long to be with the Lord and to enjoy his blessing and fellowship, if they meantime neglect opportunities to meet with the brethren, and do not enjoy their company and fellowship.

It is in the nature of things that each human being must seek some companionship; and experience attests the truthfulness of the proverb, that "Birds of a feather flock together." If, therefore, the fellowship of the spiritually minded is not appreciated, longed for and sought after, if we do not improve opportunities to enjoy it, we may be sure these are unhealthy indications as respects our spiritual condition. The natural man loves and enjoys natural fellowship and companionship, and plans and arranges with his associates in respect to business matters and pleasures, even though their common worldly hopes and plans are very limited indeed as compared with the exceeding great and precious hopes of the New Creation. As our minds become transformed by the renewing of the holy Spirit, our appetite for fellowship is not destroyed, but merely turned into new channels, where we find a wonderful field for fellowship, [F310] investigation, discussion and enjoyment—the history of sin and the groaning creation, past and present—God's record of the redemption and the coming deliverance of the groaning creation—our high calling to joint-heirship with the Lord—the evidences that our deliverance is drawing nigh, etc. What an abundant field for thought, for study, for fellowship and communion!

No wonder we say that the one who is unappreciative of the privilege of meeting with others for the discussion of these subjects is spiritually sick, in some respects, whether he is able to diagnose his own ailment or not. It may be that he is diseased with a kind of spiritual pride and self-sufficiency, which leads him to say to himself, I need not go to the common school of Christ, to be taught with his other followers; I will take private lessons from the Lord at home, and he will teach me separately, and deeper and more spiritual lessons. Quite a few seem to be afflicted with this spiritual egotism—to imagine themselves better than others of the Lord's brethren, and that he would depart from his usual custom and from the lines marked out in his Word, to serve them in a peculiar manner, just because they think more highly of themselves than they ought to think, and because they request it. Such brethren should remember that they have not one solitary promise of the Lord of a blessing so long as they are in this attitude of heart and conduct. On the contrary, "the Lord resisteth the proud and showeth his favors to the humble." The Lord blesses those who hear and obey his instructions, saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." To those who are in a right attitude of heart it is quite sufficient that the Lord has enjoined that we come together in his name; and that he has promised special blessings to so few as even two or three obeying him, and that the Church is representatively his body, and is to be prospered by "that which every joint supplieth," and to edify itself and to

"build one another up," as members in all the graces and fruits of the Spirit. Sometimes the difficulty is not purely a spiritual egotism, but partially a neglect of the Word of God and a leaning to human understanding, supposing that the promise, "they shall be all taught of God," implies an individual teaching, separate the one from the other. The customs of the apostles and their teachings, and the experience of the Lord's people, are all contrary to such a thought.

However, on the other hand, we are not to crave merely numbers and show and popularity, but are to remember that the Lord's promised blessing is to "two or three *of you* "; and, again, through the Apostle, the exhortation is to "the assembling of *ourselves* together." It is not a sectarian spirit that the Lord and the Apostle inculcate here, when they intimate that the assemblies are not to be worldly assemblies, in which the Lord's people are to mingle, but Christian assemblies—assemblies of those who know of God's grace and who have accepted of the same by a full consecration of themselves to Him and His service. The worldly are not to be urged to come to these meetings. They are not of *you*, even as "Ye are not of the world"; and if they were attracted, either by music or other features, the spirit of the injunction would be lost, for where worldliness would abound, and a desire to please and to attract the worldly, very speedily the proper object of the meeting would be lost sight of. That proper object is explained to be "the building up of *yourselves* in the most holy faith," "edifying *one another*," "inciting *one another* to love and to good works." ***Jude 20; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24***

Let the *evilly disposed* flock together, if they will; let the *morally disposed* flock together with their kind; and let the Spirit-begotten ones *assemble themselves* and proceed along the lines laid down in the Lord's Word for their edification. But if they neglect this, let the blame for unfavorable consequences not be attached to the Head of the Church nor to the faithful apostles, who clearly emphasized the proper course and exemplified it in their own conduct.

This does not mean that outsiders are to be forbidden entrance to the meetings of the Church, if they are interested enough to desire to come in and "behold your order," and be blessed by your holy conversation, exhortations to good works, and love, and exposition of the divine Word of promise, etc. The Apostle intimates this very clearly in ***1 Cor. 14:24***. The point we are making is that "assembling ourselves" is not an assemblage of unbelievers, where endeavors are made constantly to break the hearts of sinners. The sinner should be free to attend, but should be let alone to see the order and love prevailing amongst the Lord's consecrated ones, that thus even though he comprehend only in part, he may be reprov'd of his sins by discerning the spirit of holiness and purity in the Church, and may be convinced respecting his errors of doctrine by beholding the order and symmetry of the truth which prevails amongst the Lord's people. Compare ***1 Cor. 14:23-26***.

This brings us to a consideration of the general

### **Character of the Meetings**

of the Lord's people. We remark, first of all, that on this subject, as on others, the Lord's people are left without cast-iron laws and regulations—left free to adapt themselves to the changing conditions of time and country, left free in the exercise of the spirit of a sound mind, left free to seek the wisdom that cometh from above, and to manifest the degree of their attainment of the Lord's character-likeness under the discipline of the Law of Love. That Law of Love will be sure to urge modesty as respects all innovations or changes from the customs of the early Church; it will be sure to hesitate to make radical changes except as it shall discern

their necessity, and even then will seek to keep close within the spirit of every admonition and instruction and practice of the early Church.

In the early Church we have the example of the apostles as special teachers. We have the example of the elders, doing pastoral work, evangelistic work, and prophesying or public speaking; and from one illustration, given with particularity in [\*1 Cor. 14\*](#), we may judge that each member of the Church was encouraged by the apostles to stir up whatever talent and gift he might possess, to glorify the Lord and to serve the brethren—thus to exercise himself and to grow strong in the Lord and in the Truth, helping others and being helped in turn by others. This account of an ordinary Church meeting in the Apostle's day could not be followed fully and in detail today, because of the peculiar "gifts of the Spirit" temporarily bestowed upon the early Church for the convincing of outsiders, as well as for personal encouragement at a time when, without these gifts, it would have been impossible for any of the number to be edified or profited to any extent. Nevertheless, we can draw from this early custom, approved by the Apostle, certain valuable and helpful lessons, which can be appropriated by the little companies of the Lord's people everywhere, according to circumstances.

The chief lesson is that of mutual helpfulness, "building one another up in the most holy faith." It was not the custom for one or even several of the elders to preach regularly, nor to do or attempt to do all the edifying or building up. It was the custom for each member to do his part, the parts of the elders being more important according to their abilities and gifts; and we can see that this would be a very helpful arrangement and bring a blessing not only to those who heard, but also to all participating. And who does not know that even the poorest speaker or the most illiterate person may, if his heart be full of love for the Lord and devotion to him, communicate thoughts which will be precious to all who may hear. The class of meetings here described by the Apostle evidently was a sample of the majority of meetings held by the Church. The account shows that it was a mixed meeting, at which, adapting the account to present times, one might exhort, another might expound, another might offer prayer, another propose a hymn, another read a poem which seemed to fit his sentiments and experiences, in harmony with the topic of the meeting; another might quote some scriptures bearing on the topic under discussion, and thus the Lord might use each and all of these members of the Church in mutual edification, mutual upbuilding.

It is not our thought that there never was preaching in the early Church. On the contrary, we find that wherever the apostles went they were considered specially able expounders of the Word of God, who would be present probably but a short time, and during the period of their presence, it is likely, they did nearly all of the public speaking, though we doubt not that other social meetings, open to all, were held as well. This same practice respecting apostolic preaching was no doubt followed by others who were not apostles; as, for instance, Barnabas, Timothy, Apollos, Titus, etc., and the same liberties were enjoyed also by some who misused them and exercised quite an influence for evil—Hymenaeus and Philetus and others.

Where the Lord has laid down no positive law it would be inappropriate for us or for others to fix a law. We offer, however, some suggestions, viz., that there are certain spiritual needs of the Church which require ministering to:

(1) *Instruction* is necessary—in the more purely prophetic matters and also in the moral doctrines, and in respect to the development of the Christian graces.

(2) Because of more or less differing methods in the use of language, and because of more or less unawareness of mind and varying degrees of spiritual perception, as between those who are babes in Christ and those who are more mature in knowledge and in grace, it is advisable that opportunities be afforded at which each will be encouraged to express his understanding of the things which he has learned, either through reading or hearing, to the intent that if his understanding of these things be defective it may be corrected by the statements of others on the subject.

(3) There should be frequent regular meetings at which reasonably full opportunities would be given to anyone to present what he might believe to be a different view of truth from that perhaps generally held and approved by the *Ecclesia*.

(4) There should be not only devotional services connected with all meetings of the Lord's people, but experience shows the profitableness of *each one*, in the hearing of his brethren, *confessing with his mouth*, either in testimony or in prayer, his devotion to the Lord.