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CONTENTS.

Sunday Morning Address.....	97	The Jews. Their Land and Affairs...	115
Questions Answered by the Editor..	103	The Advocate Bible Class.....	117
Magnitude.....	110	The Advocate Sunday-School Class.	119

FELLOWSHIP.

SUNDAY MORNING ADDRESS.

BY THE EDITOR.

**F**ELLOWSHIP is a word that means companionship, society, mutual association of persons on equal and friendly terms. In society men and women are careful not to fellowship those who are not what they consider respectable. In some countries great care is exercised to avoid any compromise of the principles of what is called caste. To a large extent the world's division of society is, like all human inventions, an artificial affair, not founded upon solid and sound principles of justice, righteousness and love. A poor man, be he ever so pure in heart and righteous in practice, is no companion for the rich man, simply because he is poor. The true character of the man is not that which decides the question of companionship, but the measure of his purse and the degree of style he is able to maintain are the elements that decide the question of worldly fellowship.

It is different under the law which governs the society of

God's people. Whether a man be rich or poor, great or small, in the worldly sense, is entirely outside the question of fellowship under the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The foundation of fellowship here is upon the solid rock of truth and righteousness, giving no scope to fleshly pride and human haughtiness. The power of the gospel brings down the mighty from their seats and exalts those of low degree, so that they come into the relationship and status expressed in the words, "One is your head, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."

God is righteous, good and wise; man is unrighteous, bad and foolish. In view of which the Psalmist exclaims, "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law" (Psa. xciv: 20)? Instead of there being any fellowship between God and men in the iniquitous and mischievous state in which the world is found, His righteousness demands the destruction of all the thrones of human government. Since there never can be fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, darkness and light, God has condescended to set in operation a plan whose work is to *take out* a people for his name, between whom and Himself will obtain that true fellowship which is based upon truth, justice, righteousness and love.

Man having by sin broken off that sweet communion and fellowship with God he enjoyed when created, he descended to such a depth that he could not possibly lift himself back to the plane from which he by transgression fell. He wandered away so far from the way of understanding that he became lost in the labyrinth of ignorance and folly and could not of himself return. No man could "redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. xlix: 7). To meet the necessities of this deplorable and helpless condition God's plan was all-sufficient. He reached down the tender yet powerful hand of love, and helped poor, fallen humanity by begetting His well-beloved Son, and investing Him with such mental and moral proclivities as enabled faithfulness to ransom man back

into communion and fellowship with God. Adam carried all his posterity away from God and left them in exile; Christ restores all in Him to the sweet communion with the Father, which enables our hearts to fill with a gratitude that finds expression in the exclamation, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

In order that men might come into fellowship with each other, with Christ and through and in Him with God, the gospel is sent to visit them and take out of them a people for His name (Acts xv: 14). The gospel believed and obeyed restores the mind to a oneness with God, and by the act of baptism we are inducted into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, a complete oneness in the whole family in heaven and in earth. Here is a "family circle." A circle is drawn by the Truth, inside of which there is fellowship; but no fellowship with any or anything outside. The church is thus the pillar and ground of the Truth and refuses to support, allow room for or to compromise with the unfruitful works of darkness in the outer world.

Now, brethren, we cannot help seeing from this that by accepting such a privilege as that of admittance into the family circle of the God of heaven and earth we incur great responsibilities. We are no longer isolated individuals, who have simply our individual self to consider, but we have to remember that fellowship brings us together and lawfully imposes obligations to respect each other, to bear with each other, to help, comfort, console, correct, reprove, and with all to love each other, love Christ and love God.

Having thus come into the exalted relationship of sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, we may consider ourselves wise men and women in the true sense, while regarded as foolish by those inflated with the wisdom of this world. Hence the Apostle Paul says, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we

break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread. \* \* \* But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils" (I. Cor. x: 15-20). Now fellowship is not simply partaking of the bread and the cup. These may be partaken of by one who is not of the body, one who may be acting the part of a hypocrite; but he would not thereby be in fellowship. On the other hand, it is not necessary to partake of the bread and the cup with those who are either not in the Truth at all or hold the Truth in unrighteousness in order to fellowship them. If our minds and hearts are with them we are in fellowship with them, though we may hide the fact from our brethren by refraining from the act that gives expression to fellowship. To do this, however, is to act the part of a deceiver, for which the person alone is responsible who is guilty of such hypocrisy; for mental reservation and inward thoughts of others we may not judge and are therefore not responsible for them. But let us remember that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We have heard it claimed that one can partake of the memorials in an ecclesia and yet not fellowship one or more present from whom he differs on some vital doctrine or against whom he may hold a charge of wrong-doing. This can only be where the complaint has been made known and Scripturally acted upon, and after that the person charged intrudes and defiantly partakes. But to break the bread and drink the wine with a mental reservation that some present are unsound in doctrine or immoral in practice is to act the part of a hypocrite. For the act of partaking of the memorials is a powerful and solemn way of giving expression to true fellowship with those with whom we partake. If it is

not this it is meaningless. To partake with such inward thoughts is to walk in darkness; of which the Apostle John says, "If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and *do not the truth.*" We *do* that which is a lie. "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I. John i: 6, 7). To outwardly receive one in fellowship whom we believe to be unworthy is to partake of his supposed or real evil deeds; for by the act of partaking we virtually say, "I partake *with* you."

Others again we have heard say that the table is the Lord's, not ours, and therefore we have no right to dictate who shall partake. It is true it is the Lord's table, but it is so by reason of the fact that it is spread by His command and in accordance with His laws—the laws of His household. Now the question is, Can we claim the right to spread the table of the Lord and yet after it is spread allow it to be polluted? Is it that we are to eat and drink with the drunken at the Lord's table and plead the excuse that it is His, not ours? What folly some men can be guilty of! Whose are we if we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ? Are we not the Lord's? That being the case is not the table the family table? What respectable family would think of allowing its house to become a den of thieves? In the world and in the church men are very particular to guard the sanctity of their homes and household, but it seems that some lose that concern when the household of God is in question. There seems to be an idea that much care must be exercised in protecting our own temporal things, while the things of God may be treated differently or indifferently as whims may decide. Let us never forget that the body—the ecclesia—is "the temple of God; and if any man defile it him will God destroy."

In a well-regulated family there are certain well-known rules that each member recognizes as his duty to observe in

order to hold the family together in peace and good will. Outside of these rules, however, a certain degree of latitude is allowed—a necessity in this life of various complexions of mind and thought. The household of God is no exception in this respect. It is no easy thing to bring a number of men and women together into real and affectionate communion. The characteristics, capabilities and idiosyncrasies of humanity are so numerous and varied that hard indeed is the work of first bringing them together into one compact, and then of holding them together in one body. The power of the gospel, however, is equal to the work so far as it was intended to be a success in this evil state of things. Its work is defeated, though, sometimes, by going beyond the cardinal rules of the household and using generalities as explosives in shattering in pieces the body. In some cases brethren of narrow comprehension and an enviable zeal—if the zeal could be kept in harness—will magnify a gnat into a camel; and if you do not believe that the gnat is a camel they will raise a disturbance and force an issue and divide and break up an ecclesia. We must, as long as we are in this evil state, allow for imperfections. There will be some strong and some weak; some on the whole consistent and some otherwise. We haven't got to the perfect state yet. We must do the best we can with the poor instruments and material we have to work with. But the difficult question is, What is the best we can do in deciding matters of fellowship?

Now the only answer that our present evil state will admit of is this: Let fundamental truths be well defined and accepted as a basis of fellowship. Upon the basis thus Scripturally defined and understood the body is founded and agrees to stand steadfastly. Whenever a question is raised that creates contention ask the question, Does it deny or nullify either or any of the fundamental principles? If it does it interferes with fellowship; if it does not it interferes not with fellowship. This, we think, is a safe rule and the only practicable one in the present state of things. But suppose a question

that does not, in and of itself, affect fundamentals is persistently forced to the extent of continued disturbance, what then? Then the matter assumes a personal form, not a doctrinal. The persistent person becomes the disturber and he is the person to repent of and forsake his evil practice or to be refused fellowship. In such cases it is our duty to learn to wisely discriminate and judge and deal wisely and promptly, that the church of God be not destroyed by our neglect of duty. Let us practice now in these things—for that is what they are for—so that we may be worthy to share in ruling the world to come.

#### QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE EDITOR.

What is the literal meaning of the phrase "people of the saints" (Dan. vii: 27)? Are they not subjects of the saints, or the "seed of the blessed" (Isa. lxxv: 23)? Could not the mortal subjects of the Messiah who are obedient receive subsidiary positions in the kingdom? In the present state of affairs is not the most humble officer a colleague with the chief magistrate?

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The present state does not compare with that in which there must of necessity be a wide difference between rulers and ruled, one being immortal and the other mortal. The text referred to settles the question that the "people of the saints" are not mortal subjects, because it says, "The kingdom and dominion and the the *greatness* of the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints." All that is implied by "kingdom," "dominion" and "greatness of the kingdom" is given to one class, not two. It is not that these are given to the saints and others belonging to the saints. If the phrase "people of the saints" is made to mean mortal subjects, then all the gifts are to them, and where would the saints be in such a case? Dr. Young's translation makes the verse more clear than the common version. It is as follows: "And the kingdom and the dominion, even the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High; his kingdom," etc. It is to these people (the saints) the words of Matt. xxv: 34 are therefore addressed; for it is for them that the kingdom was "prepared from the foundation of the world."

According to Matt. v: 17, Rom. x: 4 and Eph. ii: 15, Christ came to