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*THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS AND MODERN SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

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The subject assigned to me is "The Teachings of Jesus as They Bear upon the Solution of Modern Social Problems." For the sake of clearness it may be well for me to define or illustrate what is meant by the expression "modern social problems." We mean such problems as those which arise from the constant conflict between capital and labor; the problems which are created by extreme wealth, extreme poverty, and ignorance; the problems of marriage, divorce, the social evil, and child life; the problems which follow in the train of the terrible liquor traffic; and the problems that flow out of race prejudice and culminate in cruel war. These problems are not new, but they are more acute, more menacing, and more insistent in the complex civilization of the twentieth century than ever before in the history of the world.

Many human solutions have been proposed ranging through the whole gamut from extreme Individualism to extreme So-

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*THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

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TEXT—“*And He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ; till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.*” Ephesians 4: 11-16 (R. V.).

‘ Last Sabbath morning, my Christian friends, I spoke to you on the relationship which the Church sustains to the Lord Jesus Christ as its Head, from a passage in the first chapter of this epistle to the Ephesians: God “gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”; at which time I endeavored to show you somewhat of the profound significance of the Church involved in the figurative language of that passage. I wish this morning to continue the discussion of the general subject of the nature of the Church, with special reference to its unity; and for this purpose have selected for our consideration an

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other passage from the epistle to the Ephesians, which I have read as a text. The apostle Paul has more to say about the nature of the Church, its relations to the Saviour, and its internal development, in this epistle than in any of his other writings.

The unity of the Church is a subject of vital interest to all Christian people, and is exciting much discussion in our day. Every thoughtful member of the Church is disturbed over the divisions which rend the Body of Christ; and these divisions, it must be admitted, afford no little occasion for the enemy to blaspheme. How can the modern Church, which is rent asunder by contending parties, be the Body of Christ? Have we any longer on earth a true Christian Church?

There are a number of passages in the New Testament Scriptures which emphasize the unity of the Church as essential to its existence; and before entering upon the discussion of the text for the morning there are two of these to which I desire to call your attention. One of them is taken from the intercessory prayer of our Saviour found in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17: 20-21). The meaning and the purpose of this prayer are unmistakable. It reveals the mind of our Lord in regard to the oneness of His disciples, assigning as the reason for it the influence which this unity would have upon the unbelieving world. The prayer, in a word, is that all of the disciples of Christ, those who were then living and those who in years to come were to believe on Him through their preaching, "That they all may be one * * * that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The other passage is from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether

we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The meaning of this passage is that the members of the Church are not only one in the Body of Christ, but they are one, also, by the baptism of the Holy Spirit: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." Now, aware as we are of the divisions which at present rend the Church of God, the study of these two passages is necessarily disturbing. One is tempted to ask such questions as these: Was the prayer of Christ unheard? and has it remained unanswered during all of these years of the Church's history? Is the baptism of the Holy Spirit an illusion, or ineffective in uniting God's people? Of course there is but one answer to these questions for the true believer in Christ. The prayer of Christ must have been heard. He himself says in praying to the Father, "I know that thou hearest me always" (John 11:42); and not only are His prayers heard, but they are also answered. The work of the Spirit too must be real and effective. We cannot question the reality and the power of His operation in the Church throughout the ages past, and at the present time. How then can we explain all of these divisions existing in the Body of Christ? If we take the position that the true Church cannot exist in its present divided state our arguments prove too much. We would then be forced to admit that the intercessory prayer of Christ has remained unheard and unanswered; and that the promise of the Holy Spirit to be given to the Church has not been fulfilled. But we know that such a conclusion is untrue; the prayer of our Lord has been answered; and the Spirit has been present, and is now present in the Church; multitudes have been the subjects of His regenerating and sanctifying power, and all the activities of the Church are due to His controlling agency. We must then look for some other explanation of the present divided condition of the visible Church.

I.

First, then, it must be admitted that the unity of the Church was designed by Christ.

There is but one "House of God," one "Church of the living God," one "Head," and "One Body"; as the apostle says here in the connection from which our passage is taken, "There is one body, and one Spirit, * * * * * one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." We have here a remarkable assemblage of "ones," emphasizing in a striking way the unity of the Church. We cannot read such words as these and fail to realize that the apostle is endeavoring to impress upon the minds of His readers the oneness of the Body of Christ.

We also arrive at the same conclusion when considering the intercessory prayer of our Lord, already commented upon. He there prays for the oneness of His disciples, to the end that the world might believe upon Him. The revelation of this purpose should convince us of the importance of unity of believers, which is conceived of in the mind of Christ as a great evangelistic agency to impress upon the unbelieving world His divine mission. It is a kind of echo of the words of the Psalmist, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1); and the value of it was exemplified in the familiar remark of the Pagans concerning the conduct of the early Christians, "Behold, how these Christians love one another."

II.

My next remark is, it is obvious that the unity of the Church is also essentially spiritual.

This appears first from the prayer of our blessed Lord, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." The unity which He prayed for in His disciples was like that which subsists between the Father and the Son, and, of course, is spiritual.

Jesus said, "I and my Father are one;" and again, "Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me." The oneness of the Father and the Son in the Godhead, therefore, is a type and pattern of the oneness which Jesus prays for in His Body, the Church.

This also appears from Paul's remark, that "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, * * * * * and have been made to drink into one Spirit." The unity between the disciples of Christ is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore spiritual. The Spirit of God is given to every true believer; and the apostle assures us that He manifests His presence by different gifts. But he adds, "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Corinthians 12:11). All three persons of the Godhead, therefore, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, are enlisted in the work of producing and preserving the oneness of the Body of Christ.

From all this it appears that the real unity of the Church cannot consist in an external union or uniformity. However perfect the outward union might be, it could not be the expression of the unity designed by our Lord unless there first be in the several members of the Church the unity of the Spirit.

In the history of the Church the mistake has often been made of teaching that an external visible organization under the control of one earthly head fulfills the purpose of the Master. If we have arrived at a proper interpretation of the prayer of Christ, and of the passage quoted from Paul in regard to the baptism by the Spirit, we cannot believe that any mere external organization can answer to the unity of the Church designated by the Saviour, and described by the apostle.

But, brethren, do not understand that in pursuing this line of argument, which is based entirely upon the Scriptures, that I am offering an apology for the many divisions that exist in the Church, with the bitter antagonisms and unseemly strife which have characterized much of its history. I am the rather earnestly endeavoring to make clear to you the meaning of the

Church unity as it is taught by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament Scriptures. What then, you may ask, is the explanation of the divisions in the Body of Christ?

III.

This leads me to remark, in the third place, that the explanation of these divisions is to be sought in the imperfect condition of the membership of the Church. The Church is still in its childhood, and it evinces many of the characteristic features of the childhood age. The apostle recognizes this condition in the terms used in this great passage which we have under consideration. He speaks of the time when we shall come into "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." He speaks of our being "no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine"; and he speaks of our growing "up in all things unto him, who is the head, even Christ." Such expressions as these justify us in saying that the Church is still in the age of childhood.

It is subject to the imperfections of childhood. Children may be perfect as children, not in the moral and spiritual sense, but so far as their physical development is concerned; but they have not yet reached their full growth, and are thus in an imperfect stage of development. It is under this figure of speech that the apostle describes the Church. The Church is composed of imperfect members. This is necessarily so; it arises out of the condition of the human race. We are all imperfect creatures, we are guilty of sin and transgression; and it is because of this condition that Christ has come into the world, and that He has established the Church, of which He Himself is the Head. The Church will never be perfect as long as its members are imperfect. It cannot exist apart from the membership. If it were possible to have a perfect Church, composed of perfect members, it could not remain in this world; it would then be "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,"

and ready for the coming of the Bridegroom. Many of the criticisms of the Church are based upon ignorance of its real nature, and of its purpose and work among men. Some hypercritical people seem to imagine that when a man repents of his sins and becomes a Christian that act of his binds him to live a perfect life, and that if he fails in realizing such an ideal he is a hypocrite, and unworthy of the respect of right thinking people. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is only an indication that he has awakened to his real condition, that he has accepted the offer of God's grace, and that he is seeking to be rid of sin, its power and its consequences. The Church is offered to him as a home, and as a school for spiritual discipline, furnishing the means of grace to help him on toward God. The more imperfect people are, the more they need the Church. Just as the more ignorant a community is the more it needs a school; and though you collect into a school all the ignorant children in the neighborhood, half of whom do not even know how to read and write, and all of whom are as undisciplined as wild colts; you still have a school which is endeavoring to fill a great want, and which, if persisted in, will become an untold blessing to the community in the education of its children. This is equally true of the Church. In the most wicked neighborhoods it is needed the most; and although when a church has been organized among such people, and has gathered in the outcast and the vile, it will be far from perfect; yet it is still a Christian church, if it has the Spirit of Christ at work among its members, and it is a part of the Body of Christ.

The Church shows also that its divisions are due in a large measure to its immaturity. Children and people of immature minds are much more likely to disagree among themselves than those who have reached a more advanced age. It is the thing to be expected that children will fall out among themselves and fight each other, and be at times altogether unreasonable; and wise people know that these difficulties are attributable in the main to their immaturity. A similar state of things pre-

vails in the Christian Church. Its divisions are in a large measure due to the immaturity of the Christians who compose it. If the members are not children in age, as many of them are, they are at least children in the spiritual life. When we are born into the kingdom we are not born mature Christians, as Minerva is said to have sprung full-orbed from the head of Jupiter; but we are born as children. It is not expected, however, that we should always remain children in the Church and in the spiritual life. We should look forward to, and endeavor to attain unto a higher state of spiritual development, when, as the apostle said, we should "be no longer children," but should attain "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The immaturity of many people who have long been members of the church is an amazing thing. It shows itself in the kind of preaching that interests them; they are lacking in spiritual discernment, seeking only to be entertained like children. They are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"; they never seem to reach the point where they are able to leave, as the apostle says, "the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection"; they are like children who never can get beyond their elementary studies. You have seen such children, who will spend even months in learning the alphabet, or learning how to spell and read. Some grow faster than others in the Christian life, but we all begin as children. The apostle Paul recognized that in his own experience: "When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child"; he asserted, however, that he did not always remain a child, either in physical or mental development: "But when I became a man I put away childish things." Many people are slow of growth in the Christian life, and some never seem to reach maturity, they are never able to "put away childish things." If they know anything of the doctrine of Christ they only know it in part. But, according to the teaching of the apostle, we should not always remain in that condition: "When that which

is perfect is come, then that which is in part should be done away."

The Church also shows that it is in its childhood days by its credulity. So many Christian people are ready to believe almost anything they hear; like children, says our text, they are "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error." They are so immature and imperfect in their knowledge of spiritual things that they are ready to believe any foolish doctrine that may be taught them. This accounts, perhaps as much as any other one thing, for the divisions in the Church. Ambitious, irresponsible and dishonest men arise in the Church, teaching error, and lead the people astray; encouraging them to the establishment of new movements and new churches, new denominations; claiming that they have made some discovery in spiritual things, and endeavoring to support their views by the Holy Scriptures. The people of God are so credulous, and so poorly prepared to defend "the faith once delivered to the saints," because they know so little about it, that they are misled into the adoption of soul-destroying error.

IV.

Now the point which I have been leading up to, and which I wish to make, as unmistakably taught in this great passage, is that it is the work of the organized Church to promote unity.

The passage distinctly says that when Christ "ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men"; and chief among these gifts are the "apostles," "prophets," "evangelists," "pastors and teachers" of the Church. The purpose of their appointment in the Church is declared to be "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering," and "unto the building up of the body of Christ; till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind

of doctrine." Here is a distinct recognition of the imperfections, the immaturity, and the credulity of the membership of the Church of Christ, and the necessity of training them into "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God."

As the saints are developed in character under the influence of their teachers, and through the work of the ministry, they come the better to understand each other, and bickerings and strife disappear from among them. When they reach "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" they will be like Him; and when they become like Him they must also become like each other. Their present divisions are largely due to the weakness of their faith, and the imperfection of their "knowledge of the Son of God." But as they become established in the faith, and better equipped in knowledge of spiritual things, they are not so easily led astray from the truth.

This, I believe, as far as it goes, is a true setting forth of the doctrine of the unity of the Church. The Church is essentially one in spirit and in its relation to Christ, the Head of it. The divisions in it are due to the imperfect state in which it exists in this world. It will probably never reach the condition of an external union with entire uniformity of order and of worship. But as the members of the Church are perfected in their faith and knowledge of Christ, and in their likeness to Him, they are necessarily drawn nearer together; and as "the church of the firstborn which are written in heaven" they will be entirely one. In the meantime we should not be seeking to perpetuate our differences; but we should be willing to recognize the children of God wherever they are found; and should understand that some of them are in every branch of the present visible Church. Our object should be to minimize our differences, and magnify our resemblances; and endeavor to show that the spirit of Christ is the spirit of brotherly love. All the true Christians in the world are not Presbyterians, nor are all of them Protestants; but many of God's children are to be found in the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches, and in other ancient but less known communions.