

The Ideal Congregation in the Light of the Holy Scriptures

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Spiritually speaking, this world is a dreary, sterile, desolate wilderness. Here nothing spiritual and holy thrives and flourishes. Under the curse it yields briars and thorns and noxious weeds. Sin blasted and blighted the moral creation of God and turned the Eden of the Lord into a barren desert. But through the intervention of divine mercy, God has set on foot a plan of gracious renovation. He has sent down the riches of His grace, that men dead in trespasses and sins might be transformed into a holy people zealous of good works. God has established His Kingdom of Grace, the Holy Christian Church. His Kingdom, set up in the world, is the separation to Himself of the called and regenerated children of men. United in the fellowship of the Gospel, they constitute His spiritual Church, and appear in our wilderness world as a watered Garden of the Lord.

It is a beautiful word-picture of the Church — a watered Garden of the Lord. It is not only beautiful, but also Biblical. Scripture speaks of the godly people as "watered gardens," so why should we not apply this figure to the Church, which is a communion of godly people — saints.

As a Garden the Church is separated from the world. Originally like the waste, howling wilderness; nor distinct and separated, called out of the world as to spirit and character. The Church is in the world, but not of the world, — not like it. There is no more prominent line of demarcation than that which separates the Church from the world. And this separation is clear and sharp. The Church is as unlike the world as a garden is unlike the desert wastes. It is simply the difference and contrast between holiness and sin. The Head of the Church is the Lord of hosts; the god of the world is the devil. A separation is inevitable.

As a Garden the Church is surrounded by a protective hedge. Were it not, it would be a prey to wild beasts; it would be a thoroughfare to every rude, irreverent foot. It would become a waste, a desolation. The Church of Christ is fenced round as with a wall of adamant. And God is her Keeper and Defense. He is round about her in the energy of His almighty power and by the presence of His infinite Spirit. It is even as the Psalmist says: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth for ever." Small wonder Jesus said of His Church: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." What could be safer and more secure than the Garden surrounded by the presence and power of the Lord?

As a Garden the Church is in a state of cultivation and growth. By the Word preached through His messengers the Holy Spirit is continually adding to the Church such as should be saved. The Word is a seed, and under the benign influence of the Spirit the seed grows and multiplies, for the Word that goeth forth out of the mouth of God does not return to Him void, but prospers in the things whereto He sends it. But with the outward growth must go the inward strengthening. Isaiah says that the Church is not only to lengthen her cords, but also to strengthen her stakes. The Church is to advance in knowledge and holiness that she might be the real salt of the earth, the only bright spot in all this dreary vale of tears.

As a Garden the Church is distinguished by trees and plants. The godly man is likened to the lofty cedar, the useful olive, the fruitful vine, the fragrant myrtle, the thriving willow, the refreshing pomegranate. Believers may be compared to beautiful flowers. Adorned with the graces of the Spirit, they are indeed flowers of loveliness, pleasing and acceptable to God, and ornamental to the world in which they live. David describes them thus: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."

As a Garden the Church is richly watered by the blessings of heaven. Water is indispensable to fertility and growth. Without it nature is so scorched up, and vegetation languishes. The Spirit of God is often presented to us under this figure of water. Isaiah prophesied that in the wilderness "waters shall break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water." So Jesus in the last great day of the feast "stood up and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." And in

reference to His vineyard the Lord says: "I will water it every moment." These communications of the Spirit are essential to our comfort, to our well-being, and to our fruitfulness. They keep the Garden of the Lord ever green, and produce from the trees of the Lord abundant increase. The warm rains of the Spirit's sending give the Bride the urge to call to the Bridegroom: "The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell."

For as a Garden the Lord expects return of fruit from it. All the labor and outlay of God's goodness is to produce to the glory of His name the fruits of holiness. He expects holy graces to be manifested, holy virtues to be exercised, holy spirit to be displayed, holy conversation to be exemplified. He wants that spiritual fruitfulness which will render fit for transplanting to the pure and blissful regions of the Eden above.

And how reasonable is this expectation, how important to us! Let us inquire if we render to the Lord the fruits of righteousness, and show forth the praises of Him, who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Do we form a part of the Lord's Garden? Are we plants of His right-hand planting? Are we growing and flourishing? Are we retaining our verdure, growing as the fir tree or cedar, yielding fruit to God?

What are our congregations like? I do not know what they are like. I can judge only by outward appearances. But the Lord knows, for He looketh into the very heart of men and churches. There may be much to censure; there may be much to commend. It is not my purpose to do either. In that which follows I shall endeavor to set before you the ideal for which we should strive. It is my purpose to show you

I.

The Ideal Congregation is Governed Exclusively By The Word of God.

All the works of God are glorious. Wherever we look abroad, we see
 "The wonders of His hands,
 Or impress of His feet."

The earth displays His greatness, goodness, and power. The heavens display His glory, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Who can lift his eyes upwards to the expanded skies and behold the star-beset heavens, without exclaiming: "How manifold and glorious are all Thy works, O Lord God almighty!"?

But there is a scene still more delightful, more glorious, and more sublime than any of these; a subject much more closely connected with man's well-being; not of secondary, but of the most momentous consequence to him, both in time and in eternity. I refer, of course, to the Word of God in which God reveals Himself, His wisdom, His will, and His plan of salvation to man.

When I speak of the Word of God, I mean every syllable of that inspired message, from the first verse in Genesis to the last verse in Revelation. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works." And of this divinely-inspired Word the apostle says to our congregations: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

The Word of Christ and the Word of God are synonymous. The Word of Christ is God's saving revelation to sinful man. It includes the threatening thunders of Sinai and the redeeming rays of Calvary. It is the hammer of the Law that beats the sinful heart into dust, and the fire of the Gospel that purges it of all sin and guilt. It convicts man of sin, and convinces him of forgiveness. It crushes disbelief and creates faith in the sinner's heart. It tears down the wrong and builds up the right. It transforms a despairing, dying child of sin into a believing, loving, praying, serving child of God. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

And this Word will dwell in a truly Christian congregation richly — abundantly and profusely. It will be proclaimed from the pulpit to the exclusion of everything else. It will be taught in every home and practiced by young and old. It will be seen in each individual Christian's conversation and conduct. It will determine doctrine, direct discipline, and dominate daily life. It will convict, convince, correct, and comfort. It will overcome temptation, sweeten affliction, lighten toil, and surmount obstacles. It will wipe away tears, and

sustain in the hour of death. It brings men to Christ, helps them to follow Christ, and takes them home to Christ when the day is done.

The ideal congregation will tolerate no minister who does not stand four-square on the Word of God. It will denounce, condemn, and shun false prophets. It will abhor and avoid false doctrines and corrupt practices. It will accept no other word than that which God reveals in the Holy Scriptures, even though an angel from heaven proclaimed it. It will hold fast the profession of faith without wavering, knowing that the testimonies of the Lord are sure. It will endure nothing but sound doctrine, never turn away from the Truth, nor lend ear to fables and superstitions. It will let the Word of God be the supreme judge in every matter of difference, dispute, and discipline. The Word of God is its highest authority, its last court of appeal, its unalterable decree, its infallible guide.

This Word a Christian congregation will treasure. It will hold fast to it, jealously defend it, gladly stand up for its and cheerfully lose all, even life itself, rather than let go of it. It will gladly hear and learn the Word. It will receive the Word with joy and gratitude. Knowing its source, its value, and its inestimable benefits, it will let the Word penetrate and permeate its very heart and life. It will use the Word as its daily soul-food, drawing from it strength and sustenance for spiritual growth. It will read and study the Word in the home, prayerfully attend to it in the house of worship, diligently teach it to the young, and express it in daily life. As in the tones of one great many-tongued oratorio, there arises like the sound of many waters a tumult of voices — a congregation of Christ singing with united hearts the sweet refrain:

"Abide with richest blessings
Among us, bounteous Lord;
Let us in grace and wisdom
Grow daily through Thy Word"

II.

The Ideal Congregation has The Proper Regard for the Holy Sacraments.

The sacraments are ordained by God the Father, commanded by God the Son, and operated by God the Spirit. They are means of grace — means by which God's free and unmerited grace is conveyed to His children. They are the property of the Christian congregation, to be rightly and diligently observed and used. This a true congregation will do. It has the highest regard for the sacraments, because it knows whence they came, what they are worth, and what blessings they bestow.

The sacrament of Holy Baptism is God's means of making a sinner His child and at once a member of His Church. A Christian congregation has no unbaptized members. There is no such thing. Therefore the congregation will faithfully bring its infants to the blessed font, knowing that thereby they receive forgiveness of sins, and become sons and daughters of God, brethren and sisters of Christ, and heirs of His eternal Kingdom. To Christ's people Baptism is more than a ceremony, custom, or charm; it is indeed a means of grace unto salvation to every one that receives it in true faith, "a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

For that reason Christian people will be careful in their choice of sponsors for their children. They will choose only such who can honestly, earnestly, and prayerfully give answer to the questions put to them in the baptismal rite.

And members of a truly Christian congregation will not delay the baptism of their children. They will not, as is the case in many sectarian, and sad to say also in some so-called Lutheran churches. "save up" their children for a big baptismal service once or twice a year. They will bring them to the baptismal font as soon as possible, knowing that to delay is to withhold from them the grace and forgiveness of God unto their eternal salvation.

And parents and sponsors will be diligent in prayer for the baptized children, and do everything they possibly can that the children may never forget their baptismal grace, and grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The prayer of a Christian congregation will ever be:

"With joy we bring them Lord,
Devoting them to Thee,
Imploring, that, as we are Thine,
Thine may our offspring be!"

The sacrament of the altar is known by other names, such as the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, and Holy Communion. But by whatever name we call it, Martin Luther has given us the best definition of the Lord's Supper ever given: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself." In our days the sacrament is much abused. Aside from the false opinions of it, the Lord's Supper is regarded by many with calm indifference and neglect. However, enlightened Christians consider it an ordinance of God, bearing the stamp of divine authority, truly adapted to promote their growth in holiness and joy.

Members of a Christian congregation know that the Lord's Supper is more than a memorial or love feast. They know that their Lord used bread and wine in its institution, and they will not presume to be wiser and greater than their Master and use substitutes. They know that in, with, and under the bread and wine Christ gives them His true body and blood — the body born at Bethlehem and offered on Calvary, and the blood that coursed through His veins and was shed on the cross. They know that this is so, because Jesus is a faithful Lord whose word is right, and whose works are done in truth. They know that He is able to do what He says, for to Him is given all power in heaven and in earth. Nothing can shake them in this faith, the word of Jesus reigns supreme!

They know also, that the Lord's Supper is no mere ceremony, for they have learned that it is of infinite value to their souls, because it confers inestimable benefits and blessings. They know that the body and blood of the Lord is given them in the sacrament for the remission of sins, and that where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. When they receive the Holy Supper and hear Jesus' words: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins," they have the full assurance of sins forgiven, because Jesus died for them. There is no doctrine more comforting to them than that of the Savior's presence with them. And nowhere is He more eminently present than when His people are gathered around the table in the communion of His body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins and the strengthening of their faith.

For that reason they will be worthy recipients of the blessed sacrament. They will examine themselves as to their sins and as to their faith. They will hold the mirror of the Law up to their hearts and behold the multitude of their transgressions. They will acknowledge that they are wretched, naked, blind, and cry with the publican: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" And this will drive them to the Lord's Table for pardon and peace for they know that the sacrament was instituted for sinners. They know

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

"Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." In this life-giving word they believe, trust, rejoice, and ever abide.

They do not come to the Lord's Table with enmity and hatred for a brother in the heart. They do not partake of the Holy Supper as a mere matter of form or custom. They do not regard the sacrament as a pretty ceremony which it is well to observe at least once a year to keep up appearances. They do not come to the altar in a trivial, thoughtless manner, more concerned about their outward appearance than about the inward state of

the soul. They do not regard the Lord's Supper as a charm against illness but as a preparation for a blessed end. They do not go to church only when they go to communion. They desire and receive the sacrament often, for they know that they daily sin much and have need of much forgiveness. With united hearts they sing the fervent prayer:

"In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament!"

III.

The Ideal Congregation Has The Proper Regard for The Holy Ministry.

There is no relationship more solemn and important than that subsisting between the Christian minister and his flock. It is a spiritual relationship; it is a dignified relationship; it is a deep, responsible relationship; it is a relationship clearly defined in the Sacred Volume; and the duties both of pastor and people are comprehensively stated, and plainly placed before us. By taking heed to the inspired oracles, the Christian minister cannot mistake his duties and the way in which they are to be discharged; and Christian churches, by the same holy rule, will at once perceive the return which they are to make to the minister God has placed over them.

When St. Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthians he wrote to them: "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear; for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do." "He worketh the work of the Lord." The Christian minister is called to his office by the Lord. He is qualified by the Lord. He is employed in doing the Lord's work. The means and instrumentality of doing it are laid down by the Lord. His great object is to glorify the Lord, and to diffuse abroad the true knowledge and glory of God. His success is from the Lord, and his final reward the Lord, the righteous Judge, confers upon him.

The work of the Christian minister is solemn. It is work connected with mind and with spirit, with the undying souls of men. It is work which comprises all that is momentous in time and eternity. It is inseparably connected with the eternal glory or the everlasting misery of our fellow beings.

It is arduous work. It is work which requires the outlay of the whole man — all the energies of the body — all the capacities of the mind — and all the emotions of the spirit. It is arduous from the lofty sublimity of its theme — from the formidable array of its opponents with whom it must contend. It is arduous as it requires all the devotion of time, means, energies and resources which the most highly favored human being may possess. A Christian minister must devote all he has to God and the requirements of his office. It is a work pertaining to every day, every season, and every place where he lives and moves. Well might the apostle exclaim: "Who is sufficient for these things?"

It is responsible work. The Christian minister is but a servant or steward, and he must surrender a clear, minute, and complete account of himself and his work to God. God will reckon with him, and reward or condemn, according to the employment of talents he has committed to his trust. That responsibility is connected with the eternal destiny of those under his charge. The blood of souls, if he should be faithless, will be required at his hands. Such is the office and work of the Christian minister.

Another word of St. Paul, addressed to the Thessalonians, will suffice to show the congregation's regard for its pastor: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake."

There is, first of all, spiritual acknowledgement. "To know them," means more than acquaintanceship or personal recognition. It signifies that a congregation is to acknowledge its pastor as the servant of God, and to approve him as such; to receive him in his spiritual capacity and office, as its teacher and overseer in the Lord. They are especially bound to do this from the fact that he is the man of their own choice. He has not forced himself upon them; neither has he been forced upon them by any official, or by act of congress, or by any

synod. They have indeed invited him to preach the Gospel to them, and freely, cheerfully, and prayerfully called him to the high and dignified office of pastor over them. Therefore they are to know him and acknowledge him in his official character as the man of their own choice.

They are also to "esteem him"; to value him; to regard him as of great worth, for so the word signifies. Do we not value our parents? Now he will have to act as a father, to be filled with parental anxiety, to labor for their welfare, to be responsible for their immortal souls. Do we not esteem or value the physician who watches over our health? The pastor is to have charge of a congregation's spiritual health, to labor, and visit, and advise, that they may be strong and healthy, vigorous son and daughters of God. Is not the pilot reckoned of great value, who has care of the vessel? The pastor is to direct his people how they may safely cross the sea of life, and is sacredly responsible that he so guide them that they may not miss the haven of eternal life.

They are to esteem him highly, yes, very highly! They are to esteem one another; they are to esteem all the Lord's people everywhere; but their pastor must have a high place, a deep place, and an extensive place in their regards. Next to Christ, he should have no equal or compeer in their hearts. "Esteem him very highly in love," in sincere affection; not cold admiration, but in hearty and intense affection. Esteem, without love, is like the light of the moon, cold, and will surely wane; but esteem grounded in love is like the beams of the sun, cheering and delightful, and will encompass him with heavenly radiance every day. A Christian congregation will esteem its pastor very highly in love.

And this will be manifest by the congregation's attendance on his ministry. If he is bound to preach to them, the obligation is equally binding upon them to receive the Word which he dispenses. Nothing will compensate for neglect here. Nothing will cheer and encourage a pastor more than to see every member in his place in the house of God.

It will also be manifest by cheerful and affectionate cooperation. The church is a family; all are to be usefully engaged. God says to every member of a congregation: "Go, work in My vineyard." The minister must take the lead, and they must rally round him. He may do a little single-handed. So did Moses during Israel's engagement with Amalek. But he may, like Moses, fail, unless his people are near him, to encourage his heart and hold up his hands. The pastor of a true congregation will have it said of him: "And there went with him a chosen band."

The true congregation will always treat its pastor with kindness and respect. However he may familiarize himself with them, and be as their companion and friend, they will not let this betray them into a disrespectful course of conduct towards him. In their families, in their meetings, and in all contacts, they will have respect to the spirit of kindness. They will not receive or circulate reports concerning him. The purest characters have not escaped calumny and slander. No doubt Satan rejoices when he can effect this; the world, and infidels especially, will triumph. The minister's character is in his people's keeping; they are to be the guardians of his reputation. And this will be easily effected, if they will not circulate or hear reports. They know Paul's admonition: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."

Now this kindness will include also the providing for the wants of a pastor. The care of a church of any size is enough for any man, however talented, active, and strong. A congregation will require all its pastor's energies and time. Then, as a matter of justice and equity, they will feel bound to provide for his temporal wants, even as the Lord has prospered them, to keep their pastor's mind free from material anxieties and cares. They will do this cheerfully, and to the utmost of the ability which, as a church, they possess.

And above all, they will give him a constant place in their prayers and supplications. They will pray for him in the closet, in the family, and in the assembling of themselves together. They will pray that he may be filled with knowledge, with great zeal and boldness, with the Spirit's aid, with the Saviors grace, and with extended success. Thus they will prove that they highly esteem him in love. And on that last great day they will have him cheerful, delighted, in rapture, surrounded by a large and holy assembly, and passing with his train, to stand before the Divine Majesty; and while Jesus smiles upon him and upon them, the pastor can say: "Here, Lord, I bring them Thou gavest me." And Christ replies: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" Until then they unite their hearts and voices to pray:

"God of the prophets: bless the prophets' sons;
 Elijah's mantle o'er Elisha cast;
 Each age its solemn task may claim but once;
 Make each a nobler, stronger than the last!
 "Make them apostles: Heralds of Thy cross;
 Forth may they go to tell all realms Thy grace;
 Inspired of Thee, may they count all but loss,
 And stand at last with joy before Thy face!"

IV .

The Ideal Congregation is Faithful in its Attendance on the Services in God's House.

Psalm 27, 4 David writes: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." Among the various excellencies which distinguished the Psalmist, none was more prominent than that of devout and hearty attachment to the house of the Lord. When driven into solitude, his heart thirsted for the courts of the Lord's house, that he might again appear publicly before Him. He could sincerely aver: "I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honor dwelleth."

So speaks and feels every member of a true congregation of the Lord. The congregation's house of worship is God's house, where God dwells. In one sense God dwells everywhere — He fills heaven and earth with His presence. He has, however, two distinguished places of residence — the heaven of heavens and His Church on earth; the one is His sublime and holy habitation, where He is surrounded with the light which no man can approach unto; in the other, namely, His Church on earth, He manifests Himself in His gracious regards for the children of His adopted family. God's people know that He dwells in their house of worship. They know that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them.

For that reason, they desire to dwell in the house of the Lord, not merely to see it, or hear of it, but to be abiding residents in it. Their earthly dwellings are places which they select and choose, there they generally may be found, and in which they take special interest and delight. Thus, like David, they choose the house of the Lord as their most favored residence. Here they go up stately to worship, and its good they always seek; yes, it is their chief Joy, each and every one to say with the Psalmist: "I was glad then they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." In God's house they desire to abide all the days of their life, till they ascend to His holy hill and dwell at His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

The true congregation will desire to dwell in the house of the Lord to "behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." The beauty of the Lord is Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. Him they will behold and hear. They will hear His Word, experience His grace, and receive the fruit of His redeeming love. They will sing to His glory and pray in His name. They will confess their sins and obtain His pardon. They will unite their hearts and voices in the confession of their most holy faith, and thus publicly proclaim to all the world that they are sons and daughters of God who are not ashamed of their hope.

And they will do this diligently and faithfully. They will keep their foot when they go to the house of God, and let nothing or no one turn them from the way, that they might be more ready to hear the truths of God for their eternal salvation. They will not forsake the assembling of themselves together for sake of business, pleasure, or other earthly pursuits. They will not be busy Martha's, concerned with many things, but faithful Marys, sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word, choosing the One Thing Needful, that good part which neither man nor devil can tale away from them. In the house of God on earth they will dwell until they grow and go into the Father's house on high, into the temple not made with hands, and thus find rest for their souls in time and in eternity. Till then, with one accord, they lift up their hearts and. voices in the happy hymn:

"Great God, we hail the sacred day
 Which we have called Thine own,

With Joy the summons we obey
To worship at Thy throne!"

V.

The Ideal Congregation is A Praying Congregation.

Prayer, of all exercises, is most frequently enjoined. It is that for which all the godly have been distinguished. It is essential to genuine piety. Prayer is the movement of the renewed heart, the breathing of the heaven-born soul, and thus the evidence of spiritual existence. Prayer is the language of the children of God. The first word pronounced is "Abba, Father." Prayer is the soul resting with confidence and delight at the feet of God. Prayer is the uplifted eye of the soul, looking upon the face of its reconciled Father. Prayer is the soul moving confidently, and knocking at the door of mercy. Prayer is holding out the hand of need, and having it supplied out of the divine fullness. Prayer is the making known of our requests to God.

A Christian congregation is active and diligent in prayer. Only Christians can offer prayers that are acceptable to God. Only Christians can come boldly and confidently to the throne of grace. Only Christians can call God "Father", and therefore ask Him to supply their temporal and spiritual wants. Only Christians realize what a sublime privilege is prayer. Only Christians will pray to the Triune God alone. Only Christians will pray in Jesus name alone, knowing that only through Him can they reach the Father's heart and open His gracious hand. Only Christians will pray.

And so from a true congregation of Christ there arises incessantly to the throne of God the sweet incense of prayer. They will pray in the closet, at the family altar, and in the public services of God's house. They will pray for the Church, for the extension of the Kingdom, for the well-being of the pastor, for the needy in body and soul, for the pagan and the prodigal, for friends and foes, and for themselves.

They will implore with the Psalmist for the Church: "Arise, O God, plead Thine own cause." They will repeat the Savior's words: "Lord of the harvest, send forth laborers into Thy harvest." They will utter David's prayer for Zion: "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." They will pray for their pastor what Paul prayed for Timothy: "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit." They will pray for the poor and oppressed with the Psalmist: "Give them help from trouble, for vain is the help of man." They will pray for the pagan with Isaiah: "Cause the eyes of the blind to be opened, and the ears of the deaf to be unstopped. Make the lame leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing." They will pray for the prodigal with David: "Turn them again, O Lord of hosts, cause Thy face to shine and they shall be saved." They will pray for the household of faith with the Royal Singer: "For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee." And for themselves they will pray with the disciples of Emmaus: "Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

Thus, when they hear the Lord of the Church say, "Behold, I come quickly," they can joyfully cry with united hearts: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," and wing their way to the Church of Glory, the New Jerusalem which is above. But while yet on earth they will abide in the prayer of the disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!"

"O Thou by whom we a come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The Path of prayer Thyself hast trod, —
Lord, teach us how to pray!"

VI.

The Ideal Congregation is a Paying Congregation.

Someone has said: "Christian giving is an essential part of Christian living." That is unquestionably true. What we have from God, we are to share with others. And surely, there is no better purpose for which to use our possessions than for the Church whose members we are and whose cause we are pledged to support. The

property of the congregation must be kept up, the pastor must be supported, the poor must be relieved, the various activities of the Synod, such as missions and institutions must be maintained. Surely, there is ample opportunity for a Christian congregation to exercise the Christian grace of giving.

And a true Christian congregation will exercise this grace. Christians know the Giver of all they have; they appreciate His gifts and are very grateful for them. And their gratitude will command and compel expression, not only in word, but also in deed. They know that but for God's mercy they would grovel in a beggar's rags; that in reality they are beggars, constantly holding out their hands for the Divine Giver to fill. They know that everything they call their own is a gift of God's unmerited grace and goodness. They know that all material possessions are entrusted by Him to their care, and are to be used for the glory of God and the welfare of their fellows. They recognize and realize the important fact that they are stewards of God and accountable to Him for the use they make of their possessions.

And this means, above all, their money. True Christians know that money is queer stuff. The opposites meet in it so strikingly. It may be the most cruel, exacting tyrant. It may be the most faithful, intelligent servant. If it come into a man's life unaccompanied by a high spiritual motive power, it has the most peculiar effects upon him. It often wrinkles up his face, and ties hard knots in the wrinkled lines. It can dwarf a warm hand into a cold, muscle-bound fist. It drains the warm blood from the heart, and dries all the sweet, fragrant dew of the spirit. The hand suffers much. It is often stricken with a sort of palsy while in the pocket, and cannot be withdrawn. But, if on the other hand, it come into a man's possession accompanied by a pure, unselfish motive that controls it, it comes the nearest to omnipotence of anything we handle. Gold has the greatest contracting power of any earthly substance. Its only sufficient counteractant is God. God has the greatest expanding power known to angels or men. Gold contracts, God expands. If God be the dominating power in a man's life, then does gold come the nearest to omnipotence of any tangible thing. It takes on the quality of Him who breathes upon it.

Therefore, true Christians never grumble when the minister preaches about money. They know that it is impossible to preach the Gospel and not talk about money. They know that Christ had a great deal to say about money, and that He ever sits over against the treasury and keeps an eye on their giving. They know that the Savior is profoundly concerned with what they do with their money. They know that He is abidingly interested in their conduct when they give their money. They know that He watches with deep concern when they face the collection plate. He cannot help it. He sees what they give. If their gifts are mean and niggardly, He knows it. If they are sweet with the sacrificial breath of Calvary, He knows that. Therefore, when they face the collection plate, they either sadden the Lord or gladden Him. They win His smile or His frown. They call forth either His commendation or His condemnation. They judge themselves, and are judged by their Lord, by what they do with the money He has put into their hands.

For that reason they give their money in a God-pleasing manner. Out of a heart that recognizes the source of their money, that burns with love for the Giver of their money, that overflows with gratitude for gifts received, they give their money. God opens their eyes to see the need, and they open their hearts and hands to relieve and dispel the need. They will gladly contribute their money to the support of their church, to the advancement of the Kingdom, to the spreading of the Gospel. When the collection plate is passed, they will say: "This is for our Lord, for our church, for our mission work, for our institutions, for the defense of the faith." When the poor in the church cry for help, they will say: "They are our brethren, for them we care, with them we share." They will face every collection, every request for money with the prayer on their lips: "O Lord who art the Giver of all we are and have, whose Son became poor that we might be rich, who hast abundantly blessed us with material possessions, for this Thine inestimable love we give Thee unfeigned thanks. Make us willing to give of our money joyfully, liberally, and regularly. Carve the crust of covetousness out of our hearts; cut the cords of indifference and sever the strings of selfishness that tie us to our earthly treasures, and make our offerings a sweet spikenard that fills the earth with its fragrance and blesses us and others. Let us not stop giving to Thee until Thou dost stop giving to us!"

"Lord of glory, Thou hast bought us

With Thy life-blood as the price.
 Never grudging for the lost ones
 that tremendous sacrifice;
 And with that hast freely given
 Blessings countless as the sand
 To th' unthankful and the evil
 With Thine own unsparing hand."

"Grant us hearts, dear Lord, to yield Thee
 Gladly, freely of Thine own;
 With the sunshine of Thy goodness
 Melt our thankless hearts of stone;
 Till our cold and selfish natures,
 Warmed by Thee, at length believe
 That more happy and more blessed
 'Tis to give than to receive."

VII.

The Ideal Congregation is Active in Mission Work.

The bringing of a soul to Jesus Christ is the highest achievement possible for a human life. The greatest thing a person can do is not to be a great scientist, or a great statesmen, or a great financier, or a great warrior, vastly important as these things may be; but the greatest thing in the world is for one person to bring some other person to Jesus Christ the Savior.

And this should be the supreme ambition of every individual and of every church, to bring men to Christ. If we will turn to the Holy Scriptures, they are as clear as light, that God expects every friend He has to go out and win other friends to the same great side and service of Christ.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me," Jesus said to His disciples, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." The early Church went out, and in one short generation shook the Roman Empire from center to circumference and kindled a Gospel light in every part of the vast domain. The men, women, and children who loved Christ, went out and talked for Christ in the presence of those who knew Him not, and thus soul after soul was won for the Savior of men. That's mission work — bringing Christ to men and men to Christ. And that is the highest duty, yes, the most exalted privilege of a Christian congregation.

A true congregation recognizes and realizes this momentous fact. It hears the Savior's commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." They recognize in Him who issues this commission the Son of the living God who declares: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." They recognize in Him who utters this command the Savior who died for their souls' salvation and that of all mankind. Therefore they go, knowing assuredly that neither men nor devils can stop them when God has said: "Go forth!"

But more than this; they know why the Lord thus enjoins them. They see the reason all about them, in foreign lands, in their own country, in their own community, yes, and sometimes in their own homes. The reason is the desperate need which other men have of that Gospel, that Savior, and that blessedness which they possess and enjoy. They have been saved by that Savior, and they are intensely interested and profoundly concerned that others may find the same blessed, forgiving Savior and have eternal life. They see the prodigal in their own homes, the fallen in their own community, the pagan in foreign clime, and are moved to exclaim: "There are we but for the grace of God!" Having experienced the grace and pardon of God in their own hearts and lives, they cannot but cry with the apostle Peter: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard!"

Thus, every member of the ideal congregation is a missionary, and all together are one great missionary band, who labor zealously to bring more souls to Christ. They will start at home, in their own families if need be, and seek to gain men to Christ by the power of personal testimony, than which there is nothing else human more powerful. They are ever ready and happy to confess their Savior before men and give a reason of the hope that is in them. By word and deed, by expression and example, they will say to the straying at home: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good," and thus bring many men to the Savior of the world.

Mission work, like charity, begins at home; but it doesn't stay there. It is not limited to geographical or racial boundaries. It jumps these fences and goes forth into "all the world." And a real congregation will see that it does. It hears and heeds the Macedonian cry for help, and spares nothing to respond to that desperate cry. It furnishes men to do the work of carrying the Gospel to other lands and other peoples, and sustains these men with prayers and offerings. Out of the heat and dust of the battle which is being waged in various mission fields against the powers of darkness comes the urgent plea of the missionaries: "Brethren, pray for us!" And to this plea a Christian congregation will respond with faithful, fervent prayer. They will storm the throne of heaven with united supplications, that hell's forces be driven from the gates. They will enter the school of believing effectual prayer, and wrestle with God, as Jacob did, and say: "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me!"

Why do they pray thus? Because they know that they are praying to a God who is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." And the prayer is accompanied by the offering. Faithful prayer means an open heart, and an open heart means an open hand. Thus the mission quota will not only be reached, but far exceeded, for, as stated earlier, a praying congregation is also a paying congregation. From every heart and every tongue there rises to the throne of God this earnest prayer:

"Awake, Thou Spirit, who didst fire
The watchmen of the Church's youth,
Who faced the foes envenomed ire,
Who witnessed day and night Thy truth,
Whose voices loud are ringing still,
And bringing hosts to know Thy will."

"Lord, let our earnest prayer be heard,
The prayer Thy Son hath bid us pray,
For, lo, Thy children's hearts are stirred
In every land in this our day,
To cry with fervent soul to Thee,
O help us, Lord! so let it be!"

"O let Thy Word have speedy course,
Through every land be glorified,
Till all the heathen know its force,
And fill Thy churches far and wide;
Wake Israel from his sleep, O Lord,
And spread the conquest of Thy Word!"

VIII.

The Ideal Congregation Properly Provides for the Education and Training of its Children.

Here is a subject that demands and deserves more than a little consideration, because it concerns the eternal destiny of our children's immortal souls. The subject of education is causing wide-spread concern and discussion at the present time. Prominent educators have weighed our national system of public education and found it wanting. They have come to the conclusion that a vital element is lacking in this system: Religion. But

they are at a loss to supply this want. They know that the religious element dare not be injected into our educational system because of the numerous faiths and creeds, or lack of them, existing in our population. They are aware that to inject this element into public education would be a violation of a fundamental article of our Constitution. As a result, they are confronted by an insurmountable obstacle to true education. They have experienced, and frankly admitted, that public education in our country is a sorry failure, a pathetic fiasco. And they should know whereof they speak! What a blessing, then, that God has appointed to us the only true education, the Christian! How deep-seated our appreciation of, and gratitude for, this inestimably gracious gift ought to be!

Christian education is not education in the sense the world understands it. The world has very distorted notions and hazy conceptions of education. The people of this world imagine that they have educated and trained their children, if they have provided them with food, clothing, and shelter, and have had them instructed in the things that enable them to make a living. And that is all. But what are the results of such an education? Look about you for the answer: Godlessness, lawlessness, juvenile crime. That is the inevitable result of an education that makes people worldly-wise, but not wise unto salvation. Of such mis-education our land is a glaring example.

Ours is a land that boasts of exceptional enlightenment. Wisdom is King and rules with his consort, the Goddess of Reason. But while men have progressed by leaps and bounds in their mental life, they have sunk to a woeful and alarming degeneracy in their spiritual life. We are rearing a generation of mental giants, but spiritual idiots. It is a generation that scornfully asks with Pilate: "What is truth?" It is a generation that has drunk deep at the leaky cisterns of worldly wisdom, but neglects and rejects the Water of Life in the wells of salvation. The children have their heads crammed full of an enormous amount of worldly wisdom. The most of them already know more than their elders. But how many of them know and heed the Ten Commandments? We have Fathers s Day and Mother's Day; we have Mother-Daughter and Father-Son weeks; but how many children pay any attention to the Fourth Commandment? Was youth ever so frivolous and disobedient? Was there ever so little respect for parents and superiors? Is it not true, that father and mother have become little more than biological terms?

Most of the children can tell you the names of all the movie stars, but how many know the names of the prophets and apostles, or anything about them? They are familiar with all sorts of scandal, but terribly ignorant of the Savior. They know all about the eternal triangle, but woefully little about the eternal Trinity. They are well-versed in sex, but pathetically ignorant of salvation. They are smart; but, you know, that word "smart" never did have a good meaning. Their minds are overfed, their souls starved. Too much attention is devoted to their heads, too little to their hearts. They are trained to make a living, but not a life. Their mental proficiency is prodigious, their spiritual deficiency tremendous. As a result, the sins against the Fifth and Sixth Commandments are fearful to behold. Parents, educators, jurists, are overwhelmed by an appalling catalog of juvenile vice and crime. Our national system of education has failed, failed miserably! It has developed a generation that snaps its fingers at divine and civil laws, thus hindering and undermining the welfare of the family, the Church, and the State.

Why is this so? It is so because they forget, or are ignorant of the declaration of God in the Scriptures: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." They forget that the will is the controlling and directing power of all their faculties. And this will is evil. Now, they have developed the body and the mind, but neglected the will. The result is, that the child has a highly developed body and mind which, however, is controlled by a sinful will. The only thing that can bend, change, and develop the will is God's Word; but this is missing in public education. For that reason public education appeals to self, to pride, to ambition, to a desire for applause and reward. That's why we have so much selfishness, greed, and disregard for the rights of others, and so little respect for all constituted authority.

Worldly education has not the right end in view. It has concern only for the temporal welfare of the child. Its aim is to train children to use their heads and hands to make a living, to acquire great knowledge, high honors, exalted positions, abundant wealth. Further than that its concerns do not go. This is not the aim of Christian parents in the education of their children. Their children have been made children of God through

Holy Baptism, and they want them to remain such unto the end. But they know that Baptism alone will not accomplish this in them. Jesus says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Faith is necessary to salvation. "He that believeth not shall be damned." FAITH — SALVATION: this is the only correct aim in the education of children.

Children are sinners, no less than others. Can worldly wisdom, science, or civilization regenerate sinners, create faith, and grant a blessed end? Have science or philosophy any remedy for human ills? Have progress and civilization, discovery and invention, helped men's consciences? Is it easier to die because we are more civilized? Is youth more inclined to morality because of today's high "culture"? Is there anything human that can change children's hearts and lives? No; God's Word alone can accomplish this. But if children are not placed under the cleansing, saving influence of this Word, how can we expect them to be saved? If the child is afflicted with a serious bodily ailment from birth, will parents delay securing medical advice and aid until it is too late? The child's soul is afflicted with a dreadful and deadly disease: SIN! And there is only one remedy that can effect a cure: GOD'S WORD! Can parents deny their children this priceless heaven-born remedy? Is not the soul more than the body? Mindful of these facts a Christian congregation sees to it that its children are educated and trained according to, in, and with, the Word of God. Christian parents know that the true aim in the education of their children is to preserve them in true Christianity; to combat evil and nourish a life of faith; to tear down the wrong and build up the right; to save eternally. They are more concerned about their children's eternal welfare than their temporal well-being. They educate not only for this short life, but for that vast eternity. Therefore, they see to it, above all else, that their children are made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

And they know that the duty of educating and training children is primarily that of the parents. They know that children are a heritage of the Lord, and their foremost concern is for their children. They know that they are not only to provide food, clothing, and shelter for their children, but first and Chiefly, to be concerned about the eternal welfare of their undying souls. They know that children are a trust from God, that responsibility for their temporal and eternal well-being rests with the parents, that upon them devolves the sacred duty of instructing them in the Word of God, directing them to the Savior, and teaching them to lead God-fearing lives. Mindful of the admonition of Moses, the Word of God will be in their own hearts, and they will teach it diligently to their children, and talk of it to them and with them, when they are in the house, or out of doors, When they go to bed and when they rise in the morning. And their children will call them blessed!

And when the time comes for the children to attend school, it will not be just any school, for there will have been provided for them with a Christian Day School, supported by a congregation's prayers and offerings. Christians know that the only way in which they can educate their children in true Christianity is to govern their entire secular education by religious instruction. They know that the Sunday School is not enough with its half-hour of religious instruction once a week. When Jesus said: "Feed My lambs" He did not mean, "underfeed them by giving them a Bible lesson once a week"; but He meant what He said, "Feed them, that is, let the Word of God be their daily food and nourishment." A shepherd feeds his flock every day. Christian congregations will not do less for the souls of their children. They know that improper cooking and irregular eating ruin the body, and that by the same tokens an improperly and irregularly nourished soul cannot thrive and grow. Therefore they see to it that their children receive daily and competent instruction in the Word of God in their own Christian Day School, where their whole education and training is permeated with and governed by the Holy Word of God and His Spirit.

We do not claim that the Christian Day School is the only possible medium for the education and training of children in true godliness; but we do believe and maintain that, so far, it has been the best and most efficient, and that is the best argument for its existence and the highest reason for our prayers for its preservation among us.

"O blest the parents who give heed
Unto their children's foremost need,
And Weary not of care or cost:

To them and heaven shall none be lost."

IX.

The Ideal Congregation will Maintain the Proper Church Discipline.

What is church disciplined? This term can be used in a twofold sense. On the one hand, church discipline comprises all teachings admonishing, and exhorting with the Word of God. We believe, in its wider sense, that church discipline is in the mind of St. Paul, when he writes to Timothy: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebukes exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." St. Paul puts the Word of God first. Timothy is to preach the Word, the whole Word, and nothing but the Word.. If he does that, he must of necessity do the rest. A Christian pastor is compelled by his Lord to call the attention of the congregation to anything that may be wrong, to expose, reprove, rebuke, and condemn the wrong, and at the same times to direct people to true godliness, to beseech them to follow after godliness, to prevail upon and urge them to lead God-fearing lives and to encourage them to abide in the way of godliness. This, we believe, is church discipline in its wider sense. And a true congregation will see to it that such discipline is maintained in its midst.

On the other hand, we have church discipline in its narrower sense. By this we mean the course of action a congregation pursues when dealing with such who have fallen into a course and flagrant sin. And here our Lord has given us definite direction. We refer, of course, to the familiar passage in Matthew 18, 15-17: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee., thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

It is very evident from this passage that the chief aim in church discipline is to restore the fallen. Every word the Savior utters here is shot through with love for the erring brother, and filled with concern for his eternal welfare. This fact must be borne in mind at all times when dealing with such who have fallen into open sin. It is still true that, when everything else fails, "love never faileth."

Now, if a member of a congregation falls into open sin, what must be done? It is to be regretted, but not to be denied, that these cases do arise. It is clear from the Lord's words in the above passage that He is not speaking of the faults and failings which cling more or less to all of us in our imperfect state. These personal failings we are to bear with patience and love. But when a member falls into a flagrant sin, thereby plainly violating the Word of God, or giving offense to a brother, the case is different. Then the question at once arises: Can such a man still be a brother and retain the rights and privileges of God's people? What is to be done? That something must be done is evident. But what? In this passage from Matthew 18, the Lord Himself gives the correct method of procedure.

The first and foremost concern must be that the offending member's soul be saved from the deadly consequences of his sin. If possible, he should be brought to realize his sin and repent of it, that he might be absolved from it. Therefore, let him who knows of the sin go alone to the erring brother, as Jesus directs, and confront him with what he has done. And this should be done in the right spirit, with firmness and yet with love, without anger and yet with determination, with the one aim of bringing the offender to the acknowledgement and repentance of his sin. The true Christian will not go once only, but again and again, as long as there is hope of achieving the desired end. And during this time he will keep the whole matter strictly to himself and not whisper or blurt it to others. If the offender is thus brought to the realization of his sin and repents of it, he has been gained, and the matter is closed forever.

Should this aim not be achieved, and the sinner obdurately remain in his sin, then what? Jesus says: "Then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word be established." Even then yet Christ wants the efforts of love continued. Where one has failed, two or three may yet succeed. And they, too, are to maintain a strict silence concerning the affair. They are to continue their efforts till they

have succeeded in gaining the offender, or till they are convinced that their efforts are in vain. These efforts may require a great deal of time, but all can be counted as spent to the glory of God, if the offender is gained.

Now, if two or three fail to win the erring brother, the case is not yet closed. "Tell it to the church," says our Lord. Not in a spirit of anger, resentment, revenge, and denunciation, but in love, always seeking the welfare of the offender. A congregational meeting is to be called, to which the fallen member is invited, and there he is still to be counted and treated as a brother. The whole congregation should unite to point out his sin and offense and plead with him to acknowledge, repent, and be absolved. If he does that, absolution is given at once, and the case is closed. But if he harden his heart, or refuse to appear, then only one thing remains. It is a terrible thing, but Jesus with pain in His heart commands it: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." The impenitent member must be expelled from the church. This step may be extremely painful, especially to those who may be related to the offender. But Jesus is to be more than father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, child, or friend. We must follow Him and His Word, no matter what the cost.

This is Christ's method of church discipline, and a true congregation will esteem and use this method properly. And if a congregation diligently and faithfully maintains church discipline in its own midst, it will also recognize and respect the disciplinary measures of another congregation, and not take into its membership such who have been expelled from other churches. This is also an important part of church discipline. Thus, where the Christ-method of church discipline prevails, there will He be with His power. His smile, and His blessing, And thus will the Church be kept clean. To that end there will rise from united hearts the prayer of David:

"Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good!"

X.

The Ideal Congregation takes a Definite Stand against the World.

St. John sounds the warning: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but of the world." Surely, we may love the world to do it good, that is, give more of our time, talents, and energy to win it for God. But we are to beware of the wiles and ways of the world and avoid making use of worldly means in our work of building the Kingdom.

If we search the Bible carefully, we shall be impressed by the number of passages which refer to the relation of God's people to the world and their attitude towards the same. These passages need no interpretation, they are very plain. In the Old Testament we read: "Deliver my soul from men of the world, who have their portion in this life." Again: "And ye shall be holy unto Me, for I, the Lord, am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be Mine." In the New Testament we find more and even plainer passages. Jesus declares: "Ye are not of the world, for I have chosen you out of the world." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" St. Paul says: "Be not conformed to the world"; "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"; "come out from among them, and be ye separate." James writes: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." There is nothing uncertain about these statements. They clearly and unmistakably teach that there is a very broad line of demarcation between God's people and the world, a line that cannot be erased.

It ought to be easy to distinguish a congregation of God's people from the world around it. They love prayer better than pleasure, they love the Bible better than any other book, they love God's house better than any other house, they love the Savior better than any other person. This does not exclude them from society. Jesus went into society, and wherever He went, they felt the sacredness which was about Him. Christians can go into

society, but they influence society, and do not let society influence them. They do not let it affect their religious life and professions. They do not let it secularize them and make them unfit for prayer. They do not let it silence their testimony of Christ or dampen their interest and zeal for their church. Wherever they go, they take their religion with them. By word and example they will testify to the world that they are the sons and daughters of God. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they may, they do it all to the glory of God.

By the same token they will refuse to drag all sorts of worldly means and methods into the church. They will not make the house of God a department store or restaurant. They will not make the church a house of amusement or a palace of entertainment. Their church will be known for the Gospel it preaches, and not for the excellency of its food and entertainment. They will be interested in saving men's souls, and not in satisfying their stomachs. They will be concerned with bringing men spiritual edification, and not with regaling them with physical attractions. They will be occupied solely with their heavenly Father's business, and not with the fads and fashions of the devil's handmaiden. They will be in the world, but not of the world, "for the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Neither will they form alliances with the sects or with secretism. They will say to the sects what Luther said to Zwingli: "You have another spirit." They will not make common cause with errorists; they will not tolerate them in their pulpits, nor in any way ally themselves with heterodox churches.

They will oppose by word and discipline the unchristian and anti-christian secret societies. They will abhor and avoid, denounce and condemn, their pagan principles and practices. They will not tolerate such who try to maintain membership in the church and in the lodge at the same time. By loving instruction and earnest admonition they will seek to win them from the lodge and entirely for the church, and if unsuccessful, they will pursue the course of action Jesus commands in Matthew 18, and exclude them from the church. They cannot do otherwise; for Christ's people cannot partake of the cup of the Lord and, at the same time, partake of the cup of devils.

Thus, they will separate themselves from all worldliness, unionism, and unholy alliances, that they may not give offense, but be acceptable unto Him who is the head of the Church, even Christ. To that end they will earnestly and fervently unite to pray:

"O keep us in Thy Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay;
Unto Thy Church grant, Lord, Thy grace,
Peace, concord, patience, fearlessness!"

And now we have done. Let us, therefore, again briefly remind ourselves of the ten distinguishing features of the ideal congregation:

1. The ideal congregation is governed exclusively by the Word of God. "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." John 8, 31-32.
2. The ideal congregation has the proper regard for the holy sacraments, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. Rev. 3, 18.
3. The ideal congregation has the proper regard for the holy ministry. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Heb. 13, 7.
4. The ideal congregation is faithful in its attendance on the services of God's house. "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple." Psalm 65, 4.
5. The ideal congregation is a praying congregation. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Col. 4, 2.
6. The ideal congregation is a paying congregation. "Therefore as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterances and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." II Cor. 8, 7.

7. The ideal congregation is active in mission work. "Be not slothful to go and to enter to possess the land." Judges 18, 9.

8. The ideal congregation properly provides for the education and training of its children. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Matt. 18, 14.

9. The ideal congregation will maintain the proper church discipline. "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Rom. 15, 14.

10. The ideal congregation takes a definite stand against the world. "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee." Ex. 34, 12.

And, in conclusion, we lift up our hearts and hands and voices in the prayer of the Church to her Beloved:

"Awake, O north wind: and come, thou south; blow upon My Garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His Garden, and eat His pleasant fruits!" Song of Solomon 4, 16.