

MABEL CLEMENT

by

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ECONOMY PRINTERS ASHLAND, KENTUCKY

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was Monday night and the house was crowded as usual. Sunday had been a busy day. Doctor Stanly had preached two sermons with the old Campbellite ring so far as language went, but it was evident to all he was shorn of his power and felt he had lost his grip on his own people.

"It is time for us to be at our work," said Mr. Tibbs. "I confess that the practice of Baptists in regard to the Lord's Supper has greatly puzzled me, perhaps I should say disgusted me. In fact, I have had no patience with it."

"Why so?" inquired Mabel. "This is a land of religious liberty and all ought to be permitted to worship and serve GOD as they conscientiously believe the Scriptures teach."

"I think," continued Mr. Tibbs, "I am now in a state of mind to study the matter without prejudice. But I confess I have been full of prejudice. They seem to be glaringly inconsistent. They admit there are good people, Christian people, in all the churches and yet refuse to commune with them. This seems Pharisaic. Their practice leads the world to believe they are selfish, bigoted, self-conceited."

"It is true," replied Mabel, "that close or restricted communion is very unpopular and renders the Baptists unpopular with unthinking people. It is also true and unreasonably so, that it renders them unpopular with all other denominations. This is unreasonable, since Baptists are governed by the same principles in their restricted communion that other denominations are governed by in their open communion."

"I do not see how that is possible," said Mr. Tibbs.

"I think it will appear in the discussion of this question," continued Mabel, "that other denominations are unwilling to allow Baptists to have the same measure of religious liberty they claim for themselves. But in order to get at the matter properly, let me ask, are we in forming our opinions to be influenced by sympathy, by public opinion, or by the Word of GOD?"

"By the Word of GOD," responded the Doctor. "There is to be no appeal from the Book."

"That is correct," replied Mabel. "If we allow our Christian sympathy and love to lead us, we will surely commune with all Christians; while, if we are controlled by public opinion, there is no telling into what vagaries we may fall. The Bible alone must be allowed to shape our beliefs and practices."

"You are right," added the Doctor. "If the Christian world had taken the Bible for its creed instead of manufacturing a thousand others, there would today be no schisms and divisions."

"True," replied Mabel; "but we must not forget that one's creed is simply what he believes; and as every one has a creed there can be no objection to expressing it."

"Why not take the Word of GOD for a creed," inquired an auditor.

"It does not suit Baptist theories," said the Doctor. "Therefore they make one to suit them, differing from the Word of GOD."

"I was told," said Mabel, "you would prod me with this question and am ready for it. Our creed is what we believe the Bible teaches; no more and no less."

"Your man-made creeds," said the Doctor, "have created all the confusion among Christians. Throw your creeds to the moles and bats and let us unite on the Bible."

"That means," replied Mabel, "on what you believe the Bible teaches; i. e., on your creed."

"No! on the Bible," replied the Doctor.

"That repentance precedes faith, that the sinner is saved when he believes, that baptism follows remission of sins," said Mabel.

"No! the Bible does not teach these things," responded the Doctor.

"It is plain the Doctor wants us to unite on his interpretation of the Bible; he is not willing to unite on what we believe," said Mabel.

"We have no creed but the Bible," replied the Doctor.

"You have," replied Mabel. "In the '*Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*' is a tolerably full expression of Cambellite belief prepared by Mr. Campbell himself. For a fuller expression of the Scriptural views of the Reformation he refers, not to the Bible, but to the Christian Baptist and Millennial Harbinger. Mr. Campbell never hesitated to write out what he believed. Many others have done the same thing. In so doing they wrote out their own creed."

"We have no creed but the Bible; we believe and teach the Word of GOD," said the Doctor, emphatically.

"I deny it," said Mabel spiritedly. "Baptists deny it, Methodists deny it, Presbyterians deny it - all denominations deny it! You point to the Bible and say, 'This is our creed.' Do not all denominations do the same thing? Now, let all parties write out plainly what they believe and let us see who believes the Scriptures. If we are ashamed of our belief, we should give it up; if we are not, let us write it out and defy the world to show wherein it differs from the Word of GOD."

"All you say," replied the Doctor, "is mere talk; it is the height of nonsense! Every intelligent person ought to agree that we cannot express Bible thought in language better and plainer than

the language the HOLY GHOST used."

"That is true," said Mabel; "but the trouble is many read things into a text that are not in it; they have a theory to support and must interpret the Word of GOD so as to support it. Now you point to Acts 2:38, **'Be baptized... for the remission of sins;** and say, 'This is what I believe.' Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, etc., say the same thing. You mean one thing and we mean another. Here is the nonsense! Write out your interpretation of that passage. If you do you will say it means *in order to*.

But that is not what it means. And I affirm you do not believe the passage, but you believe a theory which you imagine the text teaches."

"I am sure now that statement is correct," said Arthur.

"Baptists," continued Mabel, "have interpreted the Scriptures and have put that interpretation into a confession of their faith, so that all may see what we believe and whether our faith and practice are according to the Scriptures. All this hue and cry against creeds is nonsense."

"I am satisfied about creeds;" said Mr. Tibbs. "Every man has a creed. If a man has no creed, he doesn't believe anything. If he believes anything about the Bible he ought not to be ashamed to write it out so it can be known what he believes."

"Amen!" said a Methodist elder.

A whispered assent swept through the audience. The Doctor bit his lip and kept quiet.

1. "Let us first settle this question, What is the design of the supper?" said Mabel.

"I suppose," said Arthur, "the communion of Christians at the Lord's table is designed to show their love for one another and promote Christian union. Am I correct?"

"I think not," was Mabel's reply. "You evidently haven't studied your Bible."

"I admit it," laughingly replied Arthur. "Tell us what the design is."

"When JESUS instituted the supper," said Mabel, "He said to His disciples, **'Do this in remembrance of me.'** And Paul says, **'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.'** This means it is a sacred memorial or remembrance of CHRIST."

"But," inquired Mr. Tibbs, "when we commune together do we not show a mutual fellowship?"

"I think," said Mabel, "that the joint participation of the supper does incidentally declare both Christian and church fellowship, but that is not the design of the supper. Paul in I Corinthians 10:16 says: **'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?'** This shows that in the supper we are to commune, not with Christians, but with CHRIST, receiving by

faith the benefits that flow out of His broken body and shed blood."

"I see you are correct," said Mr. Tibbs. "Evidently the design of the supper is to keep up in our minds the memory of CHRIST's death and suffering for us. At the same time, in observing the supper we commune with CHRIST, draw near Him by faith and receive His blessing."

"This point being settled," said Mabel.

2. "Let us next decide who are to commune. I would be glad if Dr. Stanly would tell us."

"I certainly have no objection," answered the Doctor. "I can answer in the very words of Scripture: **'Do this in remembrance of me,'** and **'Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.'**

The first passage shows it to be our duty to observe the supper. This every disciple ought to do regularly every Lord's day. The second passage shows it is every man's business to examine himself as to his own personal fitness. No man is to hinder him if he chooses to come to the Lord's table."

"But surely there must be some restriction," responded Mabel. "Doctor, you would not invite infidels, atheists, murderers, etc., would you?"

"I do not invite persons to or exclude them from the Lord's table. I spread the table and allow them to come or not, as they choose. Thus I avoid responsibility."

"But as a minister and guide of the people you teach them who are to come and who are not," said Arthur. "It is the business of ministers to guide the people in these matters, and if they do not they are of no use to us. I am sure you would not instruct infidels, atheists, etc., to come to the table of our Lord."

"Let me state some Scriptural prerequisites to the Lord's Supper," said Mabel.

"1. The New Birth is one. Those not born again are children of the Devil. John 8:42-44. The Devil's children are not to commune with us, for the supper was meant for GOD's children. This no one will dare dispute; and this is restricting communion.

"2. Repentance. An impenitent sinner is not to be invited to the Lord's table.

"3. Faith. An unbeliever is in a state of condemnation and spiritual death and is not fit to commune.

"4. Baptism. The Scriptures unmistakably teach that Scriptural baptism in the divinely arranged order precedes the supper.

I remember I was present some years ago in a large Campbellite church on a Sunday when there was to be an address by a Sunday school secretary of considerable note. The Methodists and Presbyterians had been invited and were present in large numbers. The pastor in administering the Supper said: 'The Scriptures teach that none are to commune who have not been baptized; and we believe baptism is immersion; now I'll take that back - we know that baptism is immersion: I felt that no intelligent Methodist or Presbyterian would dare commune with us after

that."

"And that shows," added Arthur, "that we are restricted communionists ourselves."

"And ought to be," said Mr. Tibbs.

"5. Church membership is also universally admitted to be a prerequisite to the Lord's Supper. This is so because it is a church ordinance. It belongs, not to the world, not to the individual, not to any denomination, but to the church. Hence there is nowhere in the New Testament a record that anyone not a regular church member communed."

"Well," said the Doctor, "we will agree in the main with what you have said; but the Baptists persistently refuse to commune with persons who are regular church members."

"You must remember, Doctor," responded Mabel, "that there was only one kind of churches in New Testament times. Now there are hundreds. They differ as much as day and night, are antagonistic, and anyone of them can be proved by the others to be guilty of destructive, or at least hurtful, heresy. It is morally certain CHRIST would not own as His churches many of the organizations that men today claim are churches of Christ."

"I see," said the Doctor, with some bitterness, "you mean to unchurch us. There is no church but the Baptist, forsooth! What will the world do when they are gone?"

"We do not propose to go, Doctor," pleasantly replied Mabel; "we have come to stay - have been here for nearly nineteen hundred years and have the promise of life till CHRIST comes again. We cannot unchurch anybody; but we are sure many people have made a great mistake by failing to enter CHRIST's churches instead of originating and entering an almost endless variety of societies that in doctrine and practice are so utterly unlike churches of Christ it would be a misnomer to apply that name to them;"

"That is just what I said," replied the Doctor, sarcastically, and with much feeling. "There are no churches but Baptist churches; the rest are just societies."

"Sarcasm," said Arthur very positively, "is not argument. For my part I cannot believe CHRIST is the founder of five hundred varieties of churches, many of them as far apart as the poles - holding doctrines that oppose and condemn each other."

"If I were a Methodist I would say 'Amen!' to that," said Mr. Tibbs. "The thing is absurdity itself. I am getting my eyes opened. I have always considered the doctrines of the Baptists mainly monstrosities; but as they are examined in the light of Scripture and logic I find the monstrosities are on the other side.

"Baptist doctrine is like a rusty silver dollar - the more it is rubbed the more it shines. Now I wish to ask, Were the early disciples baptized before they communed?"

"Certainly," replied Arthur; "the supper was not instituted till about twelve hours before JESUS was crucified. They were baptized three years before this, and they themselves had baptized many others."

"And just before JESUS ascended," added Mabel, "He gave the great commission: **'Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world'**" (Matthew 28:19-20).

This is the Scriptural order: 1. Teach, disciple, make Christians. 2. Baptize them. 3. Teach them to observe all things CHRIST commanded, one of which is to observe the supper."

"Did the disciples teach and practice according to this commission?" inquired Mr. Tibbs.

"They did," replied Mabel. "Ten days after this came Pentecost with its wonderful phenomena. The HOLY SPIRIT was poured out in perhaps larger measure than ever before. The apostles, and perhaps others, preached in tongues they had never learned and exhorted the people who were convinced of sin and ruin to repent. Many gladly receive the Word - gave it a glad reception in their hearts. As many as did were baptized. Three thousand were added to the disciples that day. Then they continued in the apostles' doctrine and in the breaking of bread (which means the Lord's Supper), and in prayer. So they were marvelously faithful to the order of the great commission, doing exactly what CHRIST commanded and in exactly the order He laid down."

"Is there any example in Scripture," inquired Mr. Tibbs, "of one denomination inviting a person of another denomination to communion?"

"Of course not," replied Arthur; "there was only one denomination in New Testament times. Hence such a thing was an impossibility. Here is a question I wish to ask: Do the Scriptures tell us that one church ever invited members of another church to communion?"

"No," replied Mabel, "they do not. But if this had been done we could see nothing very inconsistent, since the churches had the same polity, faith and practice. But if there is anything faulty in our practice on the communion question, I believe it is right here.

For, while it is not universally so, generally our churches invite Baptists of other churches, persons over whom they have no jurisdiction and whom they cannot discipline, to commune with them. It is possible they transcend Scripture bounds here. They do this as a matter of courtesy to brethren of like faith and order. It does not seem flagrantly wrong, since they have complied with all Scriptural prerequisites to communion. They have regeneration, repentance, faith, Scriptural baptism and church membership. Our beliefs, purposes, practices and plans are alike. This has led many to believe such intercommunion is proper. But some churches do not believe in it and offer the communion privilege to their own members only, which they have a perfect right to do, and is exactly as it should be."

"And so your close communion proves you do not love anybody but yourselves," said the Doctor. "You do not believe any are Christians but Baptists, and hence you have no fellowship or love for Christians of other denominations."

"You are certainly wrong and misrepresent Baptists, Doctor," responded Mabel warmly.

"Baptists love Christians of all denominations. It is to be expected that we will be more warmly and strongly attached to persons with whom we sustain church relations; but we all love Christians because they are Christians."

"Close communion," replied the Doctor, "is the greatest obstacle in the way of Christian union. It destroys fellowship and kills love and drives Christians apart,"

"Let us see," said Mabel, "if those who practice open communion are deeply and tenderly in love with one another. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in a sermon on 'Free Grace' says of predestination as held by Presbyterians and others: 'This doctrine not only tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness and good works, but hath also a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation . . . It represents our blessed Lord as a hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity . . . It represents the Most Holy GOD as worse than the Devil; as both more false, more cruel and more unjust.'

This language does not show much love for Presbyterians and others. On the other hand John Calvin was scarcely less severe against Arminianism as held by Wesley and all Methodists, while Toplady turned all his guns loose on Arminians and their hated heresy. And Mr. Campbell, speaking of all the sects says: 'They are not churches of Christ, but the legitimate daughter of that Mother of Harlots, the Church of Rome!' Look these statements in the face and then tell me if these denominations have any great love for one another. Dr. Stanly declares publicly and privately that these people are not Christians because unbaptized. I believe they are Christians. How in the world, then, does he manifest or have more love for them than I do?"

"It is false charity," added Mr. Tibbs, "to pretend to love them as Christians when our doctrine and preaching declare they are unpardoned, because unbaptized - are not Christians, but children of the Devil."

"How these people, regarding each other as they do, can commune together, is hard to understand," said Arthur.

"Dr. Stanly says these unbaptized people are unpardoned, unjustified and unsaved; are children of the Devil and on the way to the lost world; and yet he invites them to commune with him," said Mabel, with much emphasis.

"I give it up," said Mr. Tibbs. "From tonight I am a close-communicant."

"The same over here," said a voice in the audience.

"I tell you," said the Doctor, coloring to the roots of his hair, "I never invite anybody - I simply spread the table and leave the responsibility with my hearers, telling them to examine themselves as to their fitness."

"But, Doctor," said Arthur, "you give them to understand they are welcome and that you are glad for them to come."

"I never heard the Doctor on a communion occasion," said Mr. Tibbs, "tell the people that the

Bible requires baptism before the supper and that nothing is baptism but immersion. This would have been tantamount to Baptist close communion."

"Which will not allow a man to commune with his own mother unless she belongs to the same illiberal crowd," said the Doctor, bitterly.

"JESUS did not commune with His mother," quietly remarked Mabel.

"Since we have examined this subject," said Mr. Tibbs, "I can't see what could possibly induce people to practice open communion."

"Policy!" said Mabel.

"Our policy has certainly led us astray on this matter," said Mr. Tibbs; "we have been cowardly and failed to stand for the truth because it was unpopular. There seems to be more reason for our being close communionists than the Baptists; and yet because it is unpopular we have joined the world in its wicked cry against the Baptists."

"They alone are consistent," said Arthur.

"How often are we to commune?" inquired an auditor.

"The Bible does not tell us very definitely," responded Mabel.

"Luke says: **'Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...'** (Acts 20:7). We do not know whether they did every Lord's day or not, and there is no way to find out. So far as I can see we are left to exercise our judgment about the frequency of the supper. No one can prove by the Word of GOD that we ought to observe the supper every Lord's day; and no one can prove it is wrong to do so. But Christians generally think if it is observed weekly it becomes so common the participants grow careless about the manner of its observance; and so it is not so helpful as when it is observed less frequently."

"If there is any phase of this question that I am not satisfied about," said Mr. Tibbs, "I cannot think of it now. My brain has been all a muddle on this question, and I begin to fear, on every other Bible question. It is marvelous how prejudice against a doctrine, theory or practice can close the eyes to truth. But the mists have rolled away and the truth is as clear as a sunbeam. We are wrong and the Baptists are right on the communion question."

"The conclusion seems inevitable and the Baptist position impregnable," added Arthur.

"And so this position goes like all the rest of the tenets peculiar to our denomination," said Mr. Tibbs.

"Every distinctive doctrine we hold as a people," added Arthur, "gives way on investigation. We have absolutely nothing to hold to."

"Hold on to the blessed Gospel as we preach it, and to the beautiful and expressive forms

practiced by the Christian church," said the Doctor, with great pathos.

"No, not as we preach it, but as the Bible reveals it," replied Arthur.

"We do not deny, but freely admit," added Mabel, "that Campbellism has a beautiful dress, a form that is unobjectionable, because it is a Scriptural form. But it is only a form, a form without life - a corpse! It is as empty as a blasted nut."

"Some years ago," said Mr. Tibbs, "a Baptist preacher made me so blazing mad I could hardly remain in the house till the services were ended. He compared Campbellism to a mosquito feeding on the cheek of a picture. But I declare it looks very much like we have been living (in imagination) on baptism, the picture of salvation. If this is true, I want to find it out, and as another step toward finding it out I would like to hear the subject of prayer investigated. Is it Scriptural for sinners to be prayed for?"

"Let this subject be investigated tomorrow night," said Arthur.

~ end of chapter 17 ~
