

They Went Out from Us

Samuel Eyles Pierce (1746-1849)

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."—1 John 2:19

The former verse contained a declaration that there were at that period many antichrists, which was an evident sign the last state of the apostolic church was just closing. It was necessary this should be known and taken notice of because whilst the fathers in Christ might be wholly out of danger from these heretics and from heresies and errors, yet such as were not established in Christ might not be so. As the Apostle therefore wrote to these and informed them what the times were, so he also informs them from whence these persons came. They originated in the church: they went out of it. They were therefore the more dangerous, seeing they knew the better how to sow their pernicious errors. They were the more to be avoided in their persons, as well as their doctrines also...Their renouncing the faith and fellowship of the Gospel after they have made plausible professions and appearances of being believers in Christ, their separating themselves from our church communion that they might broach their infamous errors and spread the same with their infamous practices far and wide, fully manifest they were never true believers, but downright hypocrites and falsehearted professors. These persons I would guard you against. Your being preserved from them and their pernicious ways and errors will be good evidence for you that ye are on the Lord's side and belong to Him. As this distinguishes you from them, so it makes you very precious unto us. It is therefore that I address you on this subject...I am

1. TO SHOW THESE ANTICHRISTS MENTIONED IN THE FORMER VERSE WENT OUT FROM THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST: and the

reason they went out of it was because they were not of it. "They went out from us, but they were not of us."

Where could these apostates go out from but the church? If they had not been in it, they could not have gone out from it. The church they went out of was the true church of Christ, founded by the Apostles themselves on Christ, the foundation and chief cornerstone, in which the true and everlasting Gospel was preached; the ordinances of Christ —Baptism and the Lord's Supper—kept as purely as Christ Himself had delivered them; the whole church plan, form, order, laws, and government properly enforced and attended unto also. And these persons had professed their faith in all the essential truths of the Gospel. They had been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. They had been regular members of churches. They had been admitted to the Table of the Lord. It may be [that] they had been admitted to fill up some office in the house of God, such as that of deaconship or of being preachers of the Word.

Yet their ambitious spirits were such, they could not be content but they must bring in another gospel, contrary to what the Apostles preached. And in the virulency of their spirits were set most desperately on spreading the same. They therefore broke through all the sacred ties and obligations of church fellowship and went off from the various churches to which they belonged, pretending to have greater light into truth and what they called the Person of Christ and grace than the very Apostles themselves. "They went out from us."

The word us is a very distinguishing one in the New Testament. It was made use of on the first formation of an instituted church, which took place immediately on the ascension of Christ into heaven. Peter, speaking of Judas Iscariot to the church then present, says, "He was numbered with us" (Acts 1:17). And of the whole church as included in the word us, he says, "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to

be a witness with us of his resurrection" (1:21-22). We have this word us made use of by the Apostles in their writings to express the church of Christ by. As for instance, "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us" (Eph. 5:2). "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5). Our Apostle uses this word us in the same sense here. These persons, whom he here styles antichrists, had been in the church. They went out of it without leave. They took themselves off abruptly; neither gave they their reasons for so doing. They would not acknowledge themselves under any sort of obligation to the churches to whom they belonged. Thus, they openly and publicly renounced all submission to Christ's Lordship and Kingly authority over His house, the church. Thus, they went out as traitors and with a treacherous design against Christ and the church that He hath purchased with His own blood: to corrupt His worship, to renounce

His truth, to blaspheme the same, to draw away from the true churches of Christ followers after them. They went out from us. It was most awful in them so to do.

It must have been in some of them the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is styled in this Epistle, "the sin unto death" (1John 5:16-17). They turned their back on Christ, His Gospel, His ordinances, His Apostles, His churches, and everything belonging unto Him, and framed out of their own errors, heresies, whims, and fancies, a Christ and Gospel for themselves. The Apostle assigns the reason why they went out from the churches in the way and manner they did—it was because they were not of one heart and soul with the churches in the truth. "They went out from us because they were not of us."

The true church of Christ is holiness to the Lord. Her real members are born of God. They have the Spirit of God. They know Christ. They live Christ. They are baptized into one and the same Spirit. They love the Truth. They abhor all and everything that detracts from it. No marvel that these antichrists should go out, depart from the true churches of Christ, and set up

for themselves. They were not one with them, whilst they remained amongst them. Therefore, they only waited for an opportunity, and then they left them entirely.

Thus, it was in the Apostle John's time, a little before the close of the apostolic age. "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us." This is the account the Apostle gives of them. As it was then, so it has been ever since. All the heresies which have tormented the churches of Christ ever since and down even to our present times have originated from persons who have been in the churches, who have departed from the churches, from such as have made schisms and divisions in the churches. And when any old error is newly revived, it in general springs from such persons as are disaffected to the true churches of Jesus Christ.

It may be you will expect me to give you to understand what I mean by a church of Christ. Most certainly, I understand a company of saints giving themselves up to the Lord and to each other by the will of God, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord agreeable to the rules laid down in the written Word. I do not look on all the congregations of saints to be worthy of the title of the churches of Christ...Many denominations amongst us...are sound in the articles of Truth—so far as they respect salvation—yet I should not look on them as justly claiming the titles of the churches of Christ, and that for this reason: because they are not framed according to the plan and model of the New Testament account of the same. The greatest reformation of churches that ever took place since the reformation from popery was in Oliver Cromwell's days. Dr. Owen, Dr. Goodwin, Dr. Chauncey, and others give the best account of the formation, plan, order, members and officers, laws, rules, government, and discipline of the churches of Christ, which I can refer you to: except it be in the writings of Dr. Gill, who has made some improvement in the same. The churches styled independent churches, and those styled the baptized churches of

Jesus Christ, are properly churches. There is no difference between these but in the ordinance of Baptism. These have a defense in themselves, of themselves, and from themselves to defend their members from error and heresy. [Yet] many in these are weary of Christ's yoke and often find ways and means to cast it off. At times, error and heresies spring up amongst them; and it must be so, according to the purpose and sovereign will of God. So says the Apostle to the Corinthian church, "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1Cor. 11:19). There were in that church many who profaned the Lord's Supper and polluted it, some who denied the resurrection of the dead. Yet the church at Corinth being properly organized according to our Lord's institution remained a true church, though all the members of it were not one with the Lord Jesus Christ. [Similarly,] the Gospel remains immutable in its truths, doctrines, and grace, notwithstanding Hymeneus and Alexander, [who] put the same away from them and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience (1Timothy 1:19).

It is an honor to belong to a true church of Christ. It is to be lamented any should be admitted into it without having a clear and Scriptural knowledge of it. For when they profess and give themselves up to walk with a church, it is very dangerous to depart from that church, unless any immorality or heresy spring up and is connived at by the majority of members. Or unless a member has good reason to believe he should increase with the increase of God more by removing his communion to another church. In the present day, there is very little conscience made of these things. But whoever observes it will see, it is no honor to remove from one church to another, nor is it a blessing to any church to receive any disaffected member into their communion. It is always best when the church in its members is gathered into its own holy fellowship by the ministration of the same minister of the Gospel. Then they uniting in the same faith, the obligations they subject themselves unto as the yoke and by the divine authority of Christ will have a very blessed effect and lasting effect on them...But I drop this and proceed to my next particular, which is

2. TO SHOW HOW THE APOSTLE CONFIRMS HIS ASSERTION.

He had said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us." He gives this reason of their going out from them: They did not belong to them. Though they were for a season numbered with them, yet they were never of them or of their number; if they had, they would have most certainly remained with them: this is his argument. For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.

How solemn! How awful! These antichrists came out of the apostolical church of Jesus. They had been in it. Their names had been registered in their church book. They had been church members with the best of saints. Yet all this did not preserve them from the foulest apostasy. They had heard and professed to have received and believed the very same doctrine the Apostles preached! Yet this did not keep them steadfast in the faith. They were carried away with lust and lasciviousness. This led them to corrupt the doctrine of God's free grace: to suit it to encourage their own corrupt affections, and from hence to proceed to set forth such a different christ, such a different gospel, and such a different spirit as eclipsed the whole glory of that Christ and Gospel that was preached and declared by the Apostles themselves. If these wretches had not for a season been under the profession of Christ and in the church amongst His people, they could not have acted as they did. They could not so completely have corrupted the Gospel, if they had not had the notional scheme of the same in their minds. It answered their end for a season to remain in the churches to whom they had given in their names. It suited them to leave these churches at such seasons, when they could, to distil their pernicious influences, as they thought and hoped it would gain converts to them...Christ is yesterday, today, and the same forever (Heb 13:8). So are the truths and doctrines that have respect unto Him, and in and by which He is revealed unto and set before His church, and which His saints have such evidence of in themselves that one for them all says, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which

by the gospel is preached unto you" (1Pet. 1:24-25). These heretics left the churches because they were not of them, only nominally. They were not the elect of God. They were reprobates....It is evident these could never belong to Christ...All heretics come out of the church. Most of them have been preachers and teachers in it. They are raised up by Satan, first to disturb the peace of the church and next to pollute and defile it with their abominable falsehood. The words of the Apostle are very suitable here: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1Cor. 3:16-17). But I will go on and proceed to my last particular, which is

3. TO SHOW THE REASON WHY THESE ANTICHRISTS WENT OUT OF THE CHURCH. It was by their departure from the true churches and by their errors, heresies, and sins into which they fell, they were manifested to be what they were.

In the day in which we live, we have had many preachers who have shone forth in public view as blazing stars and comets, who have professed superior light, zeal, and usefulness to all others, who have been puffed off [and] had their own cant phrases. Such as saying of some of their great admirers, "They see the Spirit in such and such sentences," in which they have chosen to express themselves. They have—very many of them—fallen foully, scandalously. Yea, most shamefully, and abominably, and all by lust...What shall we say or think of such? I know I think and cannot but pronounce they are of their father the devil. Yet we have persons professing godliness who will stand up for them, [saying] that they are powerful preachers, that they are preachers of the Gospel, that they are clearer and deeper in the truth than others are, that it is on account of their excellency of knowledge in the mysteries of Christ [that] they are persecuted!

Sirs, such excuses for such notorious sinners are an awful sign of what our times are. Let us by no means have anything to do with licentious preachers and teachers. It is a shame to speak of those things that are done

of them in secret. I count it to be a defilement to mention the names of such. I fear there is more licentiousness stalking up and down the professing religious world than any of us are aware of. May the Lord preserve us from it.

It is by these most holy and righteous dispensations of the Lord that He is pleased to separate between the precious and the vile. As it was in John's time, even so it is now. They never belonged to the true church of Christ. So it need not stumble or distress us, as if such were instances of falling from grace. No. Such were never partakers of the grace of God. They professed something that they called grace, but they never knew any more of it than the sound. Let us therefore rejoice when such are most justly exposed...

There is a greater discrimination made by the preaching of the everlasting Gospel than we can or ever shall be able to conceive and apprehend. It is to some the savor of life. It is to others the savor of death. All [this is] by divine and immutable appointment by which man and man are so discovered—as it concerns the Lord's purposes towards them—as is most truly solemn and awful. One is called under the preaching of the Gospel, and another left. Not only so, but at times under one and the same Word, one is won to the obedience of Christ, another is led to blaspheme—so different are the effects that the revelation of God's will produceth in the minds of such as are hearers of it. Hereby that solemn word of truth is realized in us poor worms of the earth, which is quoted by the Apostle, as delivered by the Lord: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to

destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Rom 9:18-24).

These are most important and very solemn questions in which great truths are implied and contained. When they enter into our minds, and their weight, importance, and authority rest upon our hearts, they empty us of all dependence on ourselves. We clearly see that he that glorieth must glory in the Lord. If these things are so, let us know and remember [that] the church of Christ will be preserved and continued to the end of time, and the gates, that is, the powers of hell, shall never finally prevail against it. Let who or whatsoever may arise, and even though it may overthrow the faith of some, yet we may say—and it becomes us to say with the Apostle, when all they who were in Asia were turned away from him—"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2Tim. 2:19). It well becomes us so to do—to depart from all doctrinal and practical iniquity. I can never believe men to be sound in the faith and truths of the Gospel who live in any known sin. I therefore suspect the judgment of many, who insist...that men may be sound in the faith who do not adorn it in their lives and conversations. I am for my own self fully persuaded [that] we can live no one single truth of the Gospel over in our minds any farther than we know it by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. And so far as we live any one single truth of Christ's Gospel, so far we shall live down sin and live above by living Christ and living on Him.

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