No. 67

On the conduct of the first years
A common session

July 20, 1825
Acts 2:46, 47. - "And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the churchdaily such as should be saved."

"Mankind naturally wish in every pursuit for the aids and effects of society. Who is not desirous in any ambitious enterprise, of engaging others, that its difficulties and dangers may be divided? Whose efforts rendered more easy and successful? In any agreeable and prosperous undertaking, who does not wish to communicate to others the benefit of?"
he has obtained?" It is natural for man to seek for fellowship, both in danger & in enjoyment. 

When men act in concert, their emulation is kindled, their passions are sharpened, their hands are strengthened. & their pleasures by being circulated flow back again to their own bosoms with an enriched & increased relish.

Religion, as well as other objects of human attachment, interest, &severity, disposes the heart to feelings, to sentiments, & to joys, to others. When the disciples Andrew & his friend first met with Jesus, how naturally did they impart the important discovery to their nearest friends, & invite them to share in the blessing. No sooner done read of the three thousand converted by the breaking of Peter, than we find them united in the same duties of devotion & service together in one harmony. They continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine & fellowship, & in breaking of bread.

"And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, & breaking bread, & & conversing in their houses, & praising God, & having favor with all the people. & the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved." This is a most pleasing & instructive view of the conduct of the early converts. & though there be much in it, which is peculiarly adapted to the circumstances & necessities of the times, yet we may consider it as a fair general description of the zeal and earnestness, the beauty of the love with which united their hearts, & it was before we too the happy effects of their department in the first cause.

"In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, who had lately been rejected, despised, & crucified by his own countrymen, there arose a society of men. & the world furnisheth no model. It consisted out of a few enlightened & philosophical minds, whom an improved taste & cultivated manners, & the same studies had converted,
but of a great multitude, formed of men of various
remote nations, of different languages, of dif-
ferent religious parties. There were the contem-
plative Chri-
stonian & the proud Roman, the revolutionizing legisla-
tor from the banks of the Nile & the modern Arab
from the shores of the Red Sea, equally submitted
to the powers of the eye, & speaking of the wonderful
works of God! They have but one heart & one mind
that of their Founder. They all march with the Arm
mighty in spirit & in truth. Their hearts to elevate
north & south, their lips often in songs of praise, they
are united by the obligations of the most pure gear
tine benevolence; they are bound together in the field
in which none but pure & good hearts can travail. We
behold, as it were, a new earthly paradise; yon see,
& the trees are all trees of life.

Our different was this scene. For the Apostle he-
me the great instruments of introducing from that pro-
pect out, they had entertained concerning the pro-
establishment of His kingdom. Their ambition had
indulged the hope of filling some high posts
of honor & profit. They had eagerly looked forward
to the time, when they should be employed under
the standard of their Master, to carry through
the world the triumphs of his own. They do not
need triumph in the name of their Master. They
are but subjects to his sceptre. They do see the
kingdom of a thousand & a thousand thousands populating
it. But no sword is unsheathed, no throne is
erected, no banners are displayed. The weapons
of their warfare are spiritual, the swords of truth
by grace, of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. They
find themselves not at the head of armies, but
waiting on the bench of teachers, enrolling the
doctrines of salvation, following the
attention that Philadelphians could never want
are commands. They see societies forming
whose bow is love, whose members are drawn
in favor & forgiveness of sin, whose hope is to
real life. They see friends, strangers, & strangers.
inhabitants of India, & foreigners, who had travelled from afar to the holy city, pleading to the authority of their reported fad, playing an odd coat distinctions, attached to one cause granted by one spirit. These are the triumphs of truth & virtue—here no books are exchange, but could be published. Here, these holy men of God perceive themselves employed in bringing about a revolution in the religion & morals of mankind. Philosophy could never effect a revolution which was the light & glory of that age, & it would spread to the ends of the world & reach down to the ends of time. Thus glorious an event of the future success of the Gosp. How great an encouragement to the Apostles in all their difficulties they were to encounter. How confirming proof to all ages of the truth of the faith, & in the first centuries was so powerful on. Let us attend to the instructions contained in the text. In the last case the word "church" occurs. This word as we find it used in books or in common conversation, has a variety of significations. Sometimes it means the whole body of saints throughout the world. Sometimes, these only who agree in the articles of faith. We not consequently find the word "church" employed to signify an assembly of agreed bishops of presbyters, or a general council, who are considered as a tribunal for ecclesiastical affairs. Very commonly & familiarly it is used to express the house of God, where the meet for the purposes of worship & instruction. But in modern times it has been more distinctly used to signify those who partake in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, who are called communicants by way of distinction from the rest of the congregation. Now in this last case we should remember, the word never occurs in the N.T. In the sacred writings the term church is expressive not of a distinct portion of the ten main body of Christians. This is manifest in the case with respect to those parts of the N.T. in which the word occurs before the history of the in
that of an assembly of persons; given in the exclusion of the Lord's Supper, as when the word did not exist, of course it could not be a mark of distinction. And when the word is used after this ordinance was established, it means that any portion of the Christian society, that is, the whole body, then assembled in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is well known, that in primitive times, "the whole Christian community was considered as one body. In one united society they all held public worship, and joined in all the ordinances of the Lord; no distinction was then made between the ordinance of the supper, and other stewardship; yet least three centuries all ecclesiastical concerns were managed by the assembly of persons, without distinction of church and congregation." But in succeeding times, the church appropriated to itself supreme powers, and made the government of bishops and councils, rose to a rightful distinction. This musty abuse of the invention of the human intellect, as a means of secularizing the idea of the church, and the idea of the human, rose to a rightful distinction. This musty abuse was wholly the invention of the human intellect, and could find no warrantance in the word of God. The only Scripture idea of a church is, as we have seen,
time & scriptural sense of a church, we see at one
the impotency of those vain & exclusive terms of
communion, with which some have endeavored to
exclude the access to the table of X. They are wholly of
human invention; for we find that when our
LoiiS, instituted the supper, he imposed no such
terms. Hence not what might any man choose by
law, nor have the standing, I tell their fellowmen
that he shall not celebrate the memorial of
his Saviour's love, till he agree with them in every article of faith & covenant. They might as
well the same propriety forbid them to come to public
worship on the Sabbath, or to use any other the
means of religion. It is time, the very nature of the act requires, that there should be a injunc-
tion of faith in & to the Messiah, & God, in the sufficiency of his authority & the Scri-
tures; but to go beyond this, & demand a conformity
with whatever we may choose to call important
opinions, however devout & honest, they may be
is a proceeding justified neither by the princi-
ple of religious liberty, nor by the word of God.
No church has a right, by setting up a longarray
of creeds around the communion table, to exclude
any person who is not a disciple of X. The true
idea of a church is that of an association for reli-
gious improvement & mutual edification, by cele-
brating the memorial of their Lord; any other idea
of a church may be annexed to it, it must be the invention
of human

The proceed to observe, that from this text the
members of the church of X may learn some use-
ful & important lessons.

We are told that these primitive times "had favor
with all the people." And how did they obtain
this favor? Certainly not by any mean of impos-
ting acts. No, it was by the purity of their lives.
The consistency of their conduct with their profession.
"They exhibited a wonderful & pleasing spectacle,
& it is easy to conceive that they must have attac-
ted the notice of mankind. And drawing the eye
of one after another, is it surprising that their morn-
was produced sentiments of respect for the promi-
ness from which they arose. Was it not to be expected
that the same sources, with concurred the regards
of men to themselves, should dispose them to embrace
the faith, to which they had adopted; if that men
should be demons of joining themselves to so fine
a benefactor, of helping a community?" In this respect
let the members of churches at the present day
imitate the primitive times, that they too may
be the happy instruments of drawing others to the
purest faith of the gospel. As true, other men as
well as the members of churches are under the
obligation to live well, to live in conformity
to the spirit of the religion of Jesus. The partic-
ipation in the details of life, strictly speaking, em-
forces new obligations; some of these are religious
as a new means of cultivating religious sentiments
and devotional feelings, it obligates us to improve by
the use of this means. No man may flatter himself
that by remaining without the pale of the church
he is privileged to be religious & careless of serious
things. But still we know that the eyes of the
world are fixed on those who have formally
publicly imposed their allegiance to their law.
If then they do in truth love the entrance of no
religion, let them be extremely careful that they
do not bring dishonor in their sacred name. If, in
desire other to despise or at least to be indifferent
to an ordinance, or even with them to have been
so hitherto inaffec
again, let members of churches learn from the
conduct of the primitive times, mentioned in the
text, to be faithful in the law, in the observan-
ces & institutions of the gospel. These early con-
verts attended earnestly to the instructions of the Apos-
tles, you find not the occasions of the commun-
tie pass by neglected. They felt the truth of the re-
ligion they had embraced, 
& derived their not to
delights from its services & institutions. It is a shame
to the danger of our piety; a shame to the weak-
ness of our faith. If we neglect the day of the
house of the Lord, & the means of that religion to

those service we have professed ourselves to be at
At
lastly, let the members of the churches hear from
the primitive times to cultivate a spirit of love. The
early converts were united by the purest of affec-
tions: among these thousands I believe there was
but one heart, one mind. How admirable was
this union of affection in a common cause. "This is
the true and spiritual worship, which should reign
in every
heart and reign through every society. It is true,
we are not required, as were the first, to sell our
possessions and cast the produce into a
common stock; the necessity of the times do
not require it. Shall we then think it
fit just to make any smaller sacrifices for mutual
edification & for promoting a common interest?
Shall we bring even into the concerns of religion,
into the service of truth & of God, our little sec-
ular controversies, our private animosities, you will
strike? No, let it be our care, as the Apostle
says, to study the things that make for peace,
yet none of us, it may be supposed, derive benefit from our own selfishness, or any other sin of omission. Besides, it is not only wrong, but unkind, to neglect the education of others, and to reflect upon the usefulness of their benefits to the preservation of their influence on the minds of others. Christianity is built on certain great facts: the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of *Christ*. Now if there is any great object in perpetuating the remembrance of these facts but by written records or by sensible memorials or exhibitions of them. Written records, some say, cannot read; they may not convince them, especially when they have been long in their hands, so as to offer anything but an old story to invite perusal. Memorials presented to the sacred cause are not only the defects of inefficiency of books, they speak when the latter would not be looked into, arrest attention, and come home to the feelings and conceptions of men. Now the purpose of these sensible memorials is to lead those who attend it to inquire what means these things?

"...for the great and noble practice of faith..." when it is useful to give a more advanced period of life when they have more leisure and taste for serious things. But while delayed long, it would probably never be performed. For the spirit of false shame would be daily gaining a stronger hold on the heart. Behave me, if nothing could give me greater pleasure, than to see the young people of my congregation coming forward to take their places at the table of the Lord, where there are but too many places vacant. But it is not to the young alone that the invitation and admonition are solemnly addressed. We urge it upon those on the very summit of life to give themselves to the Lord, to remember their sins, that thus they may pour their hearts from being overwhelmed by the abiding interests of the...
Now ye shall see, as we speak to the age,

shall them to brightness, their declining years with

the memorial of their sins; love, if it will cause

their gray heads to go down more peaceably to the

grave to reflect that they have obeyed the Lord's last command, if have not despised the comman-
dation of his sufferings if his love to man. And

god grant that we may all be like those adhering

for the day of their coming to receive the reward

of a just recompense more - June, 1820.
At home, July 22, 1820. - [Signature]