



An Exposition of
2 John

With Some Comments on
Gal. 5:9 and Rev. 2, 3

Number One in a series on
the holiness of Christian fellowship

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Table of Contents

The Setting of 2 John	1
No True Love but “in Truth” (vv. 1-3)	4
No True Walk but “in Truth” (vv. 4-6)	13
No True Fellowship but in the Doctrine of the Christ (vv. 7-11)	15
True Joy by Love in Truth and Walk in Truth (vv. 12, 13)	31
Gal. 5:9	32
Doctrinal Evil and Moral Evil	32
Evil Doctrine Is Worse than Moral Evil	
Because it Purports to Come from God	
And Thus Makes Him the Author of It	33
The Character of Paul’s Approach to the Galatians	34
Why Did Paul Not Tell the Galatians to	
Excommunicate the Teachers of the Evil Gospel?	35
Revelation 2 and 3	36
Appendices on 2 John	46
Appendix 1: Evangelicalism’s Failure on 2 John	46
Appendix 2: Open Brethrenism’s Failure on 2 John	47
Appendix 3: The Lake Geneva Conference Report’s	
Attack on 2 John	53
Appendix 4: What About the Lord’s Table and Supper?	58
Appendix 5: Some Other Ways in Which Doctrinal Evil is Palliated	61
Appendix 6: The Exposure of Evil Doctrine	68
Conclusion	69
Index of Scripture References	71
Index of Subjects, Names and Some Titles	73

Preface

The paper you are reading is one of a series bearing directly on the holiness of *Christian* fellowship. The Word of God ever promotes holiness in the practical expression of fellowship, whether fellowship expressed in connection with the assembly of God (1 Cor. 1:9) or in connection with the family of God (1 John 1:3, 4).

Fellowship in the family of God involves the practical expression of the oneness of life and nature that we have in the Son (John 12:24; 20:22; ch. 17; etc.). This is expressed *in the light* (1 John 1:6, 7). The Spirit empowers fellowship in the light. In John, fellowship with one another is the practical expression of oneness in life and nature of those in God’s family, in the light where God is.

Fellowship as members of one body, united to the Head in heaven by the Spirit sent down at Pentecost (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2) is expressed in assembly matters, and especially in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 10:16-18). The Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy, the True, is in the midst of those gathered together unto His name (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 5:4). The Spirit so gathers, and empowers unity in holiness in the assembly.

It is not intended to say that there is no bearing of one of these upon the other. Among the connecting links is the requirement of practical holiness which must characterize the assembly of God and the family of God.

Holiness is separation from evil, unto God; it honors God in hating evil and loving good. In God Himself there is absolute separation from evil, and only what is good. Note also the order when He says:

Let love be unfeigned; abhorring evil; cleaving to good (Rom. 12:9).

Here we learn what characterizes unfaked love. In 2 John the message is that all believers, even a sister and her children, must maintain separation from evil unto the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

To do otherwise is to destroy the fellowship of the family of God; yes, to falsify the Son of the Father, in truth and love. It would make one a partaker of the propagation of a false Christ.

We can easily see how Rom. 12:9 is a truth that bears upon the family of God as well as upon the assembly of God. It is a command for our walk in every aspect.

2 John speaks directly about fundamentally evil doctrine (“the doctrine of the Christ”). Therefore some comments on Gal. 5:9, which applies to evil teachings, is added, as well as some matters from Rev. 2 and 3.

An Exposition of 2 John

The Setting of 2 John

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH

The second and third epistles of John insist on the truth. The second warns the faithful against the reception of those who do not teach the doctrine of Christ, especially the truth respecting the Person of Christ. The third encourages believers to receive and help those who teach it. Accordingly, they both (and the second especially) lay stress on “the truth.”¹ ♦

The house of the elect lady was *the sanctuary* of the truth, and had to *keep outside* all that was not of it; all those that did not bring the doctrine of Christ with them. The house of Gaius on the contrary, was the *guest chamber* of the truth, and had to open *itself* to the witnesses of it. She was to be the guardian of this mystery -- he, the fellow-helper of it.

The atmosphere within God’s house should be full of the fragrance of the name of Christ, that all who are of a contrary part should be forced out (1 John 2:19); the door at the entrance should be so closed, that the same should know that they would be kept out (2 John 10); but the welcome should be so clear and fervent, that all who savor and witness of that name, should feel themselves at home in it (3 John 8). Shall we not all join beloved, in such services as these? Surely all this is Kohathite service -- this is business with the ark itself. Oxen and wagons could not aid in it (Num. 7). The material of the service is too delicate for such help. The shoulders of the Levites must do the service, and even their hands must reverently and only handle the sacred deposit committed to them.² ♦

In both 2 and 3 John truth is pressed. In 3 John, if we count in the word “true (v. 12) then truth is noted seven times.³

[THE] LAST HOUR

The three Epistles of John have in view the ruin of the church on earth as seen in testimony. This is also true of the book of Revelation, where we see the threat of the removal of the candlestick (lampstand). In Rev. 1 the Lord is seen as having taking the position of judge. In 1 John 2:18, John stated that “it is [the] last hour.” This is a *moral* hour, a phase of the history of the testimony on

1. J. N. Darby, *Synopsis* 5:356.

2. *Words of Truth* 2:32, 33, 1868.

3. This makes one wonder why F. W. Grant, in the *Numerical Bible, Hebrews to Revelation*, p. 256, said that in 3 John “we shall find that it is *love* that is emphasized, that the truth must be in love.” In 3 John, love is characterized and governed by truth, as in 1 John.

earth of irremediable failure. It was not so, of course, at first; but a change came about. It means a new epoch within the time of the professing Christian testimony to the revelation of the Father in the Son, in the power of the Spirit of Truth-- Who is the divine Teacher, called [the] “unction” (1 John 2:20). By Him we are taught “the doctrine of the Christ (2 John 9).

The final Antichrist of prophecy is named as the Antichrist by John, as well as that there are many antichrists, with a view to when the last hour will reach its climax of evil perversion of the truth of Christ’s person. Of course, this perversion involves the revelation of the Father in the Son, by the Spirit. Thus, doctrinal perversions of “the doctrine of the Christ” should be seen by believers as pointers to the coming apostasy when the Man of Sin, as Paul called him (2 Thess. 2), will be the director of religious affairs in the revived Roman empire. The time will come when a Triad will be worshiped: the head of the empire (Rev. 13:1-10), the Antichrist, who is the false prophet (Rev. 13:11-18), and Satan himself. It is like a false trinity, though the word trinity is better reserved for other and holy connections, so *Triad* will do.

He who had lain on the bosom of the Lord Jesus, he who has been styled the *apostle of love* by Christians, was the instrument chosen to lay down the *unsparing rejection* of those who abide not in the doctrine of the Christ. Divine love is not ‘the milk of human kindness,’ a sentimentality often posing as divine love to cover up what is really a refusal to act as the apostle directed. The most commonly used artifices to circumvent his directions in 2 John are to define away what he said and to cover it up with a pretension that it is divine love to fellow Christians to so view 2 John. And lo! those who obey what the apostle wrote are then charged with acting in an un-Christian, if not an anti-Christian, manner, and are unloving. Thus are facts and truth reversed. This comes not from “the unction”; this conduct has unholiness working within it, and partakes of the very spirit of antichrist. Such conduct is part of what gives the last hour its character as the last hour, culminating in the revelation of the Lawless One, who does his own will. We little realize how easily we may give expression to the spirit of Antichrist.

A SECOND AND A THIRD EPISTLE

Second epistles are based on first epistles, and second epistles bring to bear needed warnings regarding the Enemy’s work and the spread of evil. And this brings before the Christian his solemn responsibility in view of it. Not only is it a singular feature that 2 John is written to a woman, but quite remarkably, there is a 3 John. Moreover, attention should be paid to the fact that the one written to the woman comes before the one written to the man. There is instruction in this.

In Scripture, the man and the woman are complementary to each other. And Scripture places woman in a relationship of subjection (1 Tim. 2:12-15;

Eph. 5:24). It is not a matter of being morally inferior before God, but of the place assigned by His ordering all things for His glory in Christ. Even in such a day in Israel when God raised up a woman prophet as a sign of the low state in Israel, Deborah stayed in one place and Israel came to her (Judg. 4:5). She did not go around in a circuit among the cities of Israel as Samuel did. Moreover, she warned Barak that if she went to the battle with him, it would not be to his honor (Judg. 4:9). Surely there is a lesson in that.

In Scripture, woman speaks of subjection and the state of soul. Woman speaks of the subjective aspect of matters and Ruth serves as a godly example. Ruth, “a woman of worth” (Ruth 3:11; Prov. 31) was directed by Boaz, a type of Christ, to “keep here with my maidens” (Ruth 2:8; see 2:22). In contrast, what an awful sight of the woman riding the beast in Rev. 17! That takes place in the first half-week of Daniel’s 70th week. Upon the overthrow of the false woman (who is seen in contrast to the Lamb’s wife, and who is really the antichurch), then the Lawless One, the Man of Sin will be revealed (the final Antichrist of prophecy) who orchestrates the apostasy during the second half-week. In this case also we have a woman (a figure) and a man (a literal one, of course). She brings before us insubjection, in a heightened state of rebellion, followed by the Man of Sin, who is the Lawless One, who does his own will. He will lead the public worship of the evil Triad in that day.

The elect lady and the beloved Gaius were contemporaries and in these two Christians we have brought before us something that is complementary. They each have their house, and their houses are for the Son of the Father, in truth and love. Her house, as we saw J. G. Bellett point out above, was a sanctuary for the truth. She is connected with the house, according to the subjective side of spiritual matters. There was in her house a state of soul that was for the pleasure of the Father and the Son of the Father, in truth and love. It was set for the rejection and repulsion of all that came to get into her house that was not for Their honor. Her house was maintained as a holy sanctuary. It was a reflection of the state of her heart. And this is needed first. Then we have brought before us Gaius’ house -- ordered in service for God. These two houses show us divine order. It is not implied here that Gaius’ house was not likewise a sanctuary, nor is it implied here that her house was not ordered in service to the Lord. Not at all. We are speaking of the way in which God is unfolding these matters to us and there is much to be learned from how God brings teaching before our souls. Gaius’ house is brought before us more as connected with the forward, or public, aspect of God’s work, while the elect lady’s house depicts the moral state suitable to, and consonant with, such service..

What is brought before us regarding these two houses in 2 and 3 John is complementary in character. The activity of Gaius’ house would have been an empty shell without the godly subjective state brought before us characterizing the house of a Christian in 2 John. In the ruin, in “the last hour,” activity in

service is often at the expense of what we read in 2 John. How 2 John is treated, undermining its thrust, will be documented later. Here, the reader’s attention is drawn to the order in which these matters are brought before us, and the importance and necessity of our answering in practice to what the woman brings before us in 2 John.

The fact that it is “the last hour” does not change these principles. Indeed, they are freshly brought before us in these two epistles, written in “the last hour,” the epoch that has extended from John’s day until now.

No True Love but “in Truth” (vv. 1-3)

The elder to [the] elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth . . . (2 John 1).

The Elder. In Scripture, a bishop and an elder are the same thing, one word speaking of the work, the other of qualifications for oversight. Where there were apostolically appointed elders (or by an apostolic delegate, see Titus 1:5), there was a plurality of them. In Scripture, there is no such thing as an appointed elder being over other elders in the way a non-Scripturally appointed Bishop is over a region. Eldership was a local office only. Peter wrote as a fellow elder (1 Pet. 5:1), not as *the* elder. Here, John speaks of himself as an elderly person.

To [the] Elect Lady and Her Children. An inspired letter addressed to a sister in the family of God, called here “elect lady,” and her children, is a singular feature. She was a real person⁴ just as much as her “elect sister” was a real person (v. 13).⁵ She is addressed in the character of one who is elect. The

4. W. Kelly commented:

There have existed from post-apostolic times till our day all sorts of differing views as to this address: Some for Eclecta as a proper name; others for Kyria; a third class for “the church” in more senses than one adumbrated thereby, to say nothing of the Virgin Mary. It appears to me that it was a living sister in Christ to whom the Holy Spirit would have the apostle write without giving her name; and that her “elect sister” in the last ver. (13) strongly confirms this, as it explodes the notion of “the church,” which pleased Jerome (Ep. 123 ad Ageruchiam), the Schol. i., in Matthaei and Cassiodorus; and among moderns, Calovius, Hammond, Michaelis, etc. I am disposed even to think that the more literal rendering was really intended “to an elect lady,” etc., though I shrink from acting on what seems not to have occurred to any one else.

Concerning the idea that this letter was written to a church, the speculation is that it might have fallen into the hands of a Roman official and was therefore encoded in this way. And this notion leads to much speculation in reconstructing the situation, providing scope for reducing, if not removing, the personal responsibility noted in this letter.

5. Moreover, the word “mercy” (v. 3) points to an individual. See below. It is quite erroneous to say that “the general character of 2 John suggests almost without question that the letter is addressed (continued...)

sovereign grace of God, brought to our attention in addressing her in the character as one who is elect, had placed her in a position of solemn responsibility concerning the Christ Whose sacrifice is the basis of God's acting righteously in grace on her behalf. Besides that, there is an appropriateness and care in not addressing her as the "beloved" lady.⁶ The elder addressed Gaius, a man, as "the beloved" (3 John 1). Each of these addresses is wholesome and comely in its place, though out of step with the common, undue familiarity among the sexes today. No doubt, both she and Gaius were both elect and beloved.

Concerning the import of this address, let us consider these remarks by W. Kelly:

There is this peculiarity about the second Epistle of John, that it alone of all the inspired communications is directly addressed to a woman, and not this

5. (...continued)

to a community and its problems, rather than to a person or family" (Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary, 1, 2, 3 John*, Waco: Word, p. 318, 1984). What is "without question" is that such views undermine the Christian's responsibility that is pressed in this epistle. Of course, with such a view it follows that the elect sister in v. 13 "is another local church group." It also follows that "its individual members would be {answer to} 'her offspring.'" Thus works the theological mind. In effect, it would also make of the house (v. 10), a local church. To take this idea a little further, observe this:

While a strict interpretation of the text supports an individual person as the addressee, the context supports an enigmatic reference to a community . . . The statement "whom I love in the truth -- and not I only, but also all who know the truth" seems more appropriate to a church than to an individual (Glenn W. Barker in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, 2 John*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 361, 362, 1981).

It is not explained why that statement "seems" a more appropriate reference to a church. Perhaps it "seems" more appropriate because of trying to avoid a "strict interpretation." But God's inspiration of the Word of God more than "seems" to indicate that a "strict interpretation" should be followed. The notion that this letter is thus 'coded' is expressed this way:

But those were perilous times, and it would not be an unknown thing, in those days any more than ours, for a disaffected Christian to turn over an incriminating letter to the nonchristian civil authorities, and to procure prosecution of the writer for provoking a disturbance (*The New Layman's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 1668, 1979; this is an Open Brethren commentary).

We also read in this volume that "This commentary suggests a reconstruction of the situation in which the Letters were written: the reader will of course recognize the element of conjecture" (*ibid.*). Yes, we have "conjecture" here for the instruction of our souls in the things of God. Interestingly, 3 John is not said to be 'coded' in this way. Let the reader be sure that this 'coding' idea strikes at inspiration (regardless of any denial) and undermines God's instructions regarding personal separation from evil at home. Still, the same writer says that "the greeting will signify church approval or condemnation," and simply ignores the Scripture statement, "for he who greets him is made a partaker of his wicked works." Why the omission of the consequence of failing to condemn? Really, this would mean that that church is a partaker of the wicked works and all in it are guilty as being one with this indifference to a true Christ.

6. With this cp. 3 John 2, 5, 11, as well as 1 John 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11.

only but also to her children. There are certainly good but special reasons for a course so exceptional. We know how much the word of God, not to speak of every spiritual instinct, would lead a Christian woman however gifted to seek a place of retirement and of unobtrusive service.

We feel how all that is blessed of God's grace, and I may add of God's gift, is only so much the more set off when woman, while thoroughly using whatever the grace of the Lord entrusts to her, understands nevertheless the place in which it has pleased Him to put her here below. Yet here we have one of the most stringent epistles the Holy Ghost ever wrote addressed to a woman -- the elect lady -- and to her children, as the immediate objects of it, -- not to an extraordinary apostolic commissioner, nor an elder, nor an assembly, still less an assembly with bishops and deacons. Why so? Because there was a question before the Holy Ghost of such unspeakable urgency and magnitude that all considerations must give way to it. God so ordered things that the Epistle should be sent to a woman originally, for the very purpose of showing that, whatever may be the ordinary ways of God in His church, there are occasions and seasons in which the very foundation of His grace and of His moral glory must be maintained at all cost. Wherever this is the case, no excuse can be tolerated on the score of sex or youth. Do not tell me that it is only a child or a woman. If Christ is in the question, all else must give way. Nor is this a sacrifice but real gain.

What has been remarked may serve to show us the all-absorbing consequence of what the Holy Ghost here takes in hand. Christ was undermined by those who held His name. It was a question of a true or of a false Christ. Sex was nothing now, youth not more to be considered -- all very important when things flow on regularly and in their ordinary channels. We all know how unbecoming it would be for either the one or the other to be put forward, still more to put themselves there; but the Holy Ghost addresses Himself to them here. And we shall see, as is always the case, that what might seem an anomaly in the word of God, when properly looked into, will prove to be full of grave instruction for all our souls. No other conceivable address would have been so appropriate for the second Epistle of John.

Had the present been written in general terms, like the first Epistle, much would have been lost; just as, on the other hand, I could scarcely, for my own part, imagine the first Epistle written to the elect lady and her children. All is precisely as it should be. There we find points of universal interest to the children of God, and it is a question of addressing all this family, fathers, young men, and babes. But here, where the tide of evil was now setting in strongly, where searching enquiries must be on foot, where not the ordinary evils only were increasing in an ever and rapidly accumulating volume, but the deepest peril for the basis of all our hopes, the warning is addressed fittingly both to the family and to individuals. Where the first Epistle noticed these things in a general way to all, here we come to greater precision in the evil, and here too we have to do with particular persons.

How often one has heard it urged that it is not for a woman to take upon herself to judge, and that no wise man can mean to say that these are questions for children -- that they are points of delicacy which most of all require deep

theological knowledge and mature judgment; and would you expect the assembly of God to judge such matters? But the Holy Ghost here appeals to a woman and her children, and they are bound to judge; if they do not, Christ is set at nought for their own ease. It was now a question of Christ -- the Christ of God. We shall see all this more clearly as we proceed. I am only now endeavoring to show the beautiful appropriateness of that which to a superficial eye might seem somewhat out of order in the address of this Epistle.⁷

The *elect* of God are the beneficiaries of the action of sovereign grace. Such need to take great care concerning the truth of the revelation of the Father in the Son.

“Whom I love in Truth.” J. N. Darby explains why he translated in v. 1, “Whom I love in truth,” omitting the article “the” before the word truth:

I have not added ‘the’ as in the A.V., because it is not in the Greek, and I do not think the force of it was meant to be there. It is not ‘truly love,’ though, as the apostle teaches us here, there can be no truly loving but in the truth. It is the character of the love; it was love in truth. (See v. 4.)

We have, then, both “love in truth” and “walking in truth.”⁸ These are characteristics needed for rejecting those who do not abide in the doctrine of the Christ. “Love in truth” means that truth characterizes the love. Truth gives character to the love. It is love formed and controlled by truth, truth governing its character and expression. Just so is it with our walk. A godly walk is a walk formed and controlled by truth.

Not only that, but in vv. 5 and 6 we shall see the other control on love; namely, obedience. It is love formed and controlled by obedience, obedience governing its character and expression. We will consider this below.

Here we note that there are two guards on love brought before us: truth and obedience. “Love” that violates these guards is not from God, nor is the reflection in the Christian’s walk of Christ’s walk when here on earth. It would be flesh masquerading as love. Considering this, we note that such false ‘love’ is a falsification of Christ in our walk. Really, it is a making provision for the flesh to fulfil some lust of it; perhaps a desire to be known as a nice Christian, or as a loving Christian (but at Christ’s expense).

There is an instructive expression in 2 Thess. 2:9, 10 where we read of those given over to believe the Lawless One (the Antichrist) “because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.”

And Not / only, but Also all Who Have Known the Truth.

7. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of Acts, The Catholic Epistles and the Revelation*, London: Broom, pp. 348-350, 1870.

8. In 3 John 4 we have John’s children “walking in the truth.” In 3 John 1, he says of Gaius, “whom I love in truth.”

... and not I only but also all who have known the truth, for the truth’s sake which abides in us and shall be with us to eternity (2 John 2).

It is a mistake to think that these words mean she was well-known -- known by *all* Christians; “*all* who have known the truth.” That is not the meaning. How can it be that John writes thus, that all who have known the truth love in such a way? It is a fact that not all love in such a way. Indeed, much that passes for true Christian love is not really that, but something that is self-serving. What is the answer to this apparent contradiction? The answer is that we must take into account that John’s epistles have an *abstract* character. Here is a quotation from W. Kelly, which he made concerning the first epistle, but which is entirely relevant to what we are considering here:

John is not here looking at modifications through circumstances, it is to be observed. He is not here looking at particular cases of unfaithfulness. John as a rule does not occupy himself with the details of fact. He looks at truth in its own proper abstract character apart from passing circumstances; and if you do not read John’s writings thus, especially the epistle before us, I am afraid that there is little prospect that you will ever understand them.

John’s words, then, describe the character of “love in truth.” The words “also all who have known the truth,” are an abstract expression based on the true character of the truth and love communicated by God to their souls.⁹ The expression denotes the character of that communicated truth and love “in its own proper character apart from passing circumstances.” Thus, the apostle’s expression does not address the mixed condition we often find in ourselves. That is the solution to the apparent contradiction. We shall take note of this characteristic of John’s epistles again when considering the words in v. 9, “has not God,” which also does not address the mixed condition in the souls of God’s children. However, some readers who might be glad of the help given here for understanding v. 1 may balk when this same approach is brought to bear on v. 9 if they have an agenda to evacuate 2 John of its true bearing on the meaning of “the doctrine of the Christ” and on the meaning of “partakes in his wicked works.”

There is another point to notice. “All who have known the truth” are of one family, the family of God. As *elect* she needs to have before her soul what

9. We are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). God’s seed is in us:

Whosoever has been begotten of God does not practice sin, because his seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God (1 John 3:9).

The “seed” refers to the new nature from God. *It* cannot sin; yet here we read that the person cannot sin: “he cannot sin.” What is true of the nature is here predicated of the person having that nature. In practice the believer may sin. It is essential that the reader apprehend the abstract nature of John’s epistles.

is due God Whose sovereign grace laid hold upon her for eternity, but there are other persons also who enter into consideration when considering “the doctrine of the Christ” (v. 9) and her responsibility (v. 10, 11). These others are “all who have known the truth.” Her conduct has consequences for them.

And, finally, this love by all is not based on personal attractiveness and pleasing personality. It flows from the new nature given by God Who is love. It reflects Himself.

For the Truth’s Sake. John addressed this letter “to [the] elect lady . . . for the truth’s sake” -- and in particular for the revelation of the Father in the Son, in truth and love (v. 3). He wrote not for love’s sake, but for the truth’s sake -- in particular for the doctrine of Christ (v. 9).

Which Abides in Us and Shall be With Us to Eternity. Unspeakably precious is this great fact, that what God has communicated to our souls abides in us, never to depart. It is our eternal portion and joy. This reminds us of our Lord’s words regarding the Spirit that He would send:

And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may be with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him, for he abides with you, and shall be in you (John 14:16, 17).

It is a mistake to take the words “he abides with you” as if the Spirit was there with the disciples when the Lord spoke these words. That could not be until after the death and resurrection of Christ. “He abides with you” is a statement of character: i.e., He is such a one as abides with you, is the thought. Having risen from among the dead, the Risen Stalk (cp. John 12:24) breathed into His disciples that they might have the Spirit as the power of eternal life in the Son (John 20:22). Thus they formed one plant with Him (John 12:24), the life of the Risen Stalk being in the grains of the plant. And we should note how connected John 14:16, 17 is with the truth which abides in us and shall be with us to eternity. He is the Spirit of truth; and He is in us and abides with us now and forever.

Grace shall be with you, mercy, peace from God [the] Father, and from [the] Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of [the] Father, in truth and love (2 John 3).

V. 3. Grace is God for us in all that He is (as light and love) in spite of what we are in ourselves. This grace is needed for our pathway. Mercy is also needed for trials in the pathway, God meeting needs as He sees fit, for which we can pray (Heb. 4:16). In the addresses in the Scripture epistles, mercy is included only in those addressed to individuals (see 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). It has to do with individual needs. So, this usage, as well as the fact that in the NT “elect” (v. 1) is used of individuals, shows that this letter is to an individual, as v. 13 confirms. We need Christ’s own peace (John 14:27) for our pathway here,

also, as we follow in His steps.

These three things come from God [the] Father, and from [the] Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, these divine persons are brought before us in accordance with the revelation of the Father in the Son, in Christianity. The distinction of persons in the Godhead, in their relationship, was hidden previously. It required that the eternal *Word* (the communicator of what God is) become flesh (John 1) in order to reveal those eternal relationships.

We should note also that “Lord Jesus Christ” speaks of Him according to His place and authority as man.

And from [the] Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of [the] Father. This expression is used only here. How it touches our hearts’ affections, and quickens our desire to love Him more, as well as to reject all that undermines His person. He is presented to our hearts in this way in view of the necessity for uncompromising rejection of those who bring not the doctrine of the Christ.

When we think of Him as Son of God, we are thinking of His person; while as Son of the Father we think of relationship. Both are true of Him, of course, and not one without the other. He was Son of the Father before incarnation and, of course, in incarnation as well. To deny His divine and eternal Sonship is part of “the deceiver and the antichrist” character (2 John 7). Denying “Jesus Christ coming in flesh,” does not merely mean denying the fact of the incarnation; denying the eternal Sonship is a component part of that denial and partakes of the character of that denial. “Jesus Christ coming in flesh” includes the truth that it is the Son of the Father Who so came.

“The Son of the Father” denotes His unspeakable, divine competency to express the relationship of Son and the Father, in Whose bosom He dwells from eternity to eternity -- never, ever, interrupted. And He came here to tell of what is in that bosom. Who but He Who dwells there can speak of it? He spoke of what He knew (John 3:11; 8:38; 12:50). “He that has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Every word, work, and way of the Son was wrought in the power of the Spirit and expressed the Father. The divine persons, distinct in person, act in unity of purpose and will:

The Son can do nothing of himself save what he sees the Father doing: for whatsoever things he does, these things also the Son does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son and shews him all things which he himself does . . . (John 5:19, 20).

“Can do nothing of himself” means that it is not possible for the Son to act independently. Moreover, the Son does those things that He sees the Father do. And then observe that the Father shows the Son *all* that He (the Father) does. Therefore it is that “He that has seen me has seen the Father.” He is divinely, infinitely, competent to do this, by nature and by relationship.

It was impossible for the Son of the Father to sin. To assert that it is

possible is to divide the humanity from the deity. What this evil idea really means is that Christ was two people, and if He had sinned, one of those people, the human one, would pay the wages of sin. It is really an attack on the incarnation. The Son took manhood into His person, such that Christ is one person, divine and human. His humanity never had an existence apart from the incarnation. The Son did not unite with a human person such that there were two persons. He took humanity in the womb of the virgin; and in that gospel which emphasizes His humanity in its unspeakable beauty and perfection, we read:

[The] holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the [power of] [the] Highest overshadow thee, wherefore that holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God (Luke 1:35).

As God He was holy, and as man also He was holy. It was holy humanity -- not innocent (ignorant of good and evil) as Adam's before the fall, or sinful as Adam after the fall. It was holy humanity, taken into His person, impeccable! Is it the truth of the incarnation to say that He took peccable humanity? Is it confessing "Jesus Christ coming in flesh"? Oh, you say, but it is not denying that the incarnation took place. In so many words, that is true, but we are inquiring into true meaning, not mere words that cover evil. So thus you will excuse this evil? Jesus Christ coming in flesh means He took humanity that could sin -- or even worse, that that humanity had a *drive to sin*, but that He overcame that drive? Well, God deliver you! Such is not "the doctrine of the Christ."

And what a *stupid evil* it is to say that when the Son "emptied himself" (Phil. 2:5) He divested Himself of omniscience. Our souls ought to be filled with horror and indignation at such notions. The Father shows the Son all things that He Himself does -- and that applies when the Lord Jesus walked here below, so that he who saw Him saw the Father also. Besides the blasphemy against the Son, it is an attack on the Trinity. Is it the confession of "Jesus Christ coming in flesh" to hold such wicked teachings? Oh, you say, but that person is not denying that the incarnation took place. Well, God deliver you. You are not really concerned about what is due the Son of the Father, though you profess to be so. Your controlling objective, really, is a broad 'fellowship,' withal perhaps pretending to concern about having right doctrine.

In Truth and Love. John insists upon truth. Love receives its right character and expression as it conforms with truth. When we reverse truth and love, a downward course has begun, and who knows where it will end us? But on that course we will attempt to evacuate, or at least mitigate, 2 John of its force concerning the doctrine of the Christ and what "partakes in his wicked works" means.

The order, "truth and love" follows the order in which God is brought before us in John's writings as light and love. In John's gospel we have light

introduced in John 1 and love introduced in John 3. This is also the order found in 1 John 1:5 -- God is light -- and 1 John 4:8 -- God is love. These are the two things God is stated to be. He always acts in accordance with what He is in His being. And, we ought to expect that His Word reflects what He is in His being. Moreover, we need to pay close attention to the order of these things. God has not revealed Himself in some haphazard and inconsistent manner. Departure from God's order, is often marked by putting love ahead of light, love ahead of truth. It is in the nature of the flesh in us to go contrary to God, to what He says, to the way and order, even, in which He has revealed Himself. Let us consider an example. Frequently, complaints include references to "speaking the truth in love"; i.e., the complaint is that the truth was not rightly spoken in love, as Scripture directs. What is really at work is the desire to get rid of applicable truth by claiming that it was not spoken in love. But what is being guarded and controlled in that Scripture is the abuse of love, as W. Kelly observed:

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." The expression seems deeper than what we have here. It is "being truthful in love," not merely "speaking the truth in love," though, of course, this is a very important part of being truthful, but it is not everything; and we all know that it is very possible not to be truthful in thought and feeling, where the words are quite correct. "*Being truthful in love*" implies truth in the inward parts.

We find here the two essential features of godliness which were found in Christ in infinite perfection. He was the light. Whatever He might say, He exactly reflected the full truth from God Himself; nay, He was it. We find a remarkable expression when our Lord was dealing with the Jews and bringing Himself out as the light of the world, in John 8. They asked Him what He was, and He says (according to the English version), "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning." But the true meaning is, "Absolutely what I speak unto you." There should be neither "at the beginning," but "absolutely;" nor "what I said," but "what I am speaking." If these words are weighed, you will find the force of them. Our Lord is exactly and absolutely what He utters; His words convey with infallible certainty what He is. *He* certainly was truthful in love. Our Lord's words so completely gave out the inner man, He was so perfectly transparent, that not one thing in Him deflected from the truth; nothing seemed to be but exactly what He was. And this because there was no sin in Him neither was guile found in His mouth. There was no object but God before His soul, as He says Himself: "I do always those things that please Him." And you may rely upon it, that it is having Christ before us as the object of our souls in everything practically, which alone gives us power of truth. The moment we have anything of our own as an object, so far we slip aside, and that comes out which is not the full truth, for Christ alone is the truth, and He alone gives us the truth in perfect love; and it is only in proportion as we are filled with Him, and have Him to the exclusion of all our own evil, that we ourselves walk in the truth. Let us have our hearts fixed on any one thing or person save Christ, evil slips out, and it is good for us to know and own this. It was never so with our Lord. He could say, "I have set

the Lord always before me.” And He has given us Himself always to set before us.¹⁰

Hopefully, these considerations help us to see something of what “the Son of the Father, in truth and love” means. He is the very embodiment of truth and love -- and in that order. Let us ever keep Him before our souls in that way and it will have a formative effect upon us. John speaks of this in an abstract way of the Christian in v.1. Not so of the Son of the Father, for in Him truth and love received their perfect expression in this world.

No True Walk but “in Truth” (vv. 4-6)

I rejoiced greatly that I have found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received commandment from the Father (2 John 4).

Not only would John rejoice in the salvation of a soul, here we find another kind of joy: finding those “walking in truth.” In v. 1 we observed “love in truth,” noting the significance of the omission of the article “the.” There “it is the character of love.” It was love in truth. Here, it is the character of the walk. It is a walk in truth. Mixture, shades of gray, are not found in the statement. “He looks at truth in its own proper abstract character apart from passing circumstances.” And a “walk in truth” reflects Him who is “the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” The truth produces a “walk in truth.” This entails practicing the truth (John 3:21). When saints walk in truth they are carrying out the *commandment* from the Father. This brings before us *obedience* (cp. 1 John 5:1-3). Thus, those walking in truth are characterized by truth, love, and obedience. These three things characterized Christ in His walk here; in Him perfectly and necessarily so.

John says he found *of* her children. She may have had very young ones not yet in this walk; or, John may have met some of the mature ones elsewhere.

And now I beseech thee, lady, not as writing to thee a new commandment, but that which we have had from [the] beginning, that we should love one another (2 John 5).

“From [the] beginning” refers, as does 1 John 1:1, to the beginning of God’s ways in grace in Christ. This love was manifested in Him, and also He gave His disciples commandment:

This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you (John 15:12).

Of course, all that He spoke came from the Father. He was competent to do so (John 3:13, 32). He spoke the Father’s words to the world (John 8:26, 40). All His words were from the Father (John 14:24) and what He heard from the

10. *Ephesians, in loco.*

Father He made known to the disciples (John 15:15). Even so the Spirit speaks, not independently from Himself, but also according to the unity of the divine persons (John 16:13). What He said in John 15:12 came from the Father. John wrote no new commandment, but what the Lord Jesus had said to His own.

W. Kelly remarked:

It was the old, but ever new word: old, because it was manifested in Christ Himself; new, because it is true in us as in Him. Divine love flows from love, and reproduces itself in all who know Christ the truth. But what is love? “And this is love:” not independency of each other, not agreeing to differ, or any of those inventions of men which are not only a departure from the truth, but in point of fact morally evil and injurious. “This is love, that we walk after his commandments.” You cannot separate it from Christ; you cannot separate it from obedience.¹¹

And this is love, that we should walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, according as ye have heard from the beginning, that ye might walk in it (2 John 6).

How was the love of Christ to the Father demonstrated?

But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father has commanded me, thus I do (John 14:31).

It is unthinkable that it would be otherwise in “the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” Thus, obedience and love are inseparably linked. This was true in Christ; is it true in you and me? Or, are we going to try to get around responsibility for the doctrine of the Christ and our responsibility not to be partakers in wicked works (vv. 10, 11), withal professing love for our brethren in Christ as well as for Christ?

“This is the commandment.” The commandments (plural) are comprehended under “the commandment.” The character and expression of love is controlled by “walk according to his commandments.” In John, the great test of love is *truth*. Indeed, the test of knowing Him is obedience:

And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments . . . Hereby we know that we are in him. He that says he abides in him ought, even as *he* walked, himself also [so] to walk (1 John 2:3-6).

Hereby know we that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:2, 3).

Yes, in John truth, love, and obedience form a lovely whole, as they did in “the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” The tendency in us is to shirk truth and obedience, covering the shirking with a mask that pretends to be love. The commandments of God express what He is in Himself, in His nature, as light

11. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and the Revelation, in loco.*

and love. Now, His seed abides in us (1 John 3:9). We have been begotten by this very One.

And this brings us an application of what we have been considering, as the opening word in v. 7, “for,” indicates. The person of Christ is under attack.

No True Fellowship but in the Doctrine of the Christ (vv. 7-11)

For Many Deceivers Have Gone out into the World (v. 7)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, they who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh -- this is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 7).

In his first epistle the apostle had declared that it was “the last hour,” his way (or rather, the Spirit’s way through him) of speaking of the character of the epoch of the ruin of the church on earth seen in responsible testimony, the inspired history of which is foreshadowed in Rev. 2 and 3 by the seven selected assemblies meant to portray God’s thoughts concerning aspects of this ruin. And so, while John was still here, in the last hour already begun, there were many deceivers pretending to speak for God.

They Who do not Confess Jesus Christ Coming in Flesh (v. 7). W. Kelly has explained the difference between the way this is expressed here and in 1 John 4:2:

Here, we learn, went out into the world “those that confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh.” Christ’s coming is now expressed in the abstract present, rather than as the perfect of 1 John 4: 2 (the present result of a past action). This makes no difference practically for the truth, which in both cases is the confession of His person thus qualified. Accordingly, as there so here, to leave out the words “that is” gives the force better than in the Authorised and the Revised Versions. The truth of His person these misleaders did not believe. They do not confess Him. Not that they denied necessarily the historical fact of His birth, but they did not confess Christ’s person coming or come in flesh. For the deep and wondrous truth is that He who was the Son of God from all eternity should so come. Such is the confession of all who have life and are anointed by the Spirit of God. He might have come as an angel or in any other way possible, but for God’s will and glory He was pleased to come in flesh. This the misleaders opposed. It is the confession of Him whose divine and human natures united in one person. It is not all that Christianity means, but it is its basis without which redemption is impossible. For one not to confess

Jesus thus come is to be the misleader and the antichrist.¹²

“Jesus Christ coming in flesh” without the article “the” should certainly preserve anyone from the notion that the second coming is meant.

It is important that we see the connection of the statement that **He came by water and blood** with Christ coming in flesh. We ought to understand that 2 John 7-9 is about the person of the Christ, but that necessarily includes His work as receiving its infinite value and character from the glory of His person imparted to it. 1 John 5:6 bears directly on this point:

“This is he who came by (dia) water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by (en) water only, but by (en) water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness.” The testimony of the water and of the blood is twice expressed in this verse, but with a different Greek preposition each time. He came by (dia) water and blood; and then He came in (en) water and blood; that is to say, in the power of the water and of the blood. The former of these expressions (dia) indicates the character in which Jesus came here below; the latter (en), the power displayed by Him according to that character. Jesus came in a character of purification and expiation: “by water and blood.” He has wrought according to that character, and has accomplished purification and expiation in water and blood. Although the water and the blood both express the death of Christ, they set forth two results of that death. We are cleansed by the water of death (sanctification), and we are also cleansed by blood (justification).¹³

Thus is His work linked to the character of His coming into the world. “He came by {dia} water and blood” refers to the character of His coming in incarnation and thus the work on the cross is included in “Jesus Christ coming in flesh.” What does “coming in flesh” mean?

Hereby ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit which does not confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is not of God: and this is that [power] of the antichrist, [of] which ye have heard that it comes, and now it is already in the world (1 John 4:2, 3).

It is important to understand that this means more than an acknowledgment that the incarnation took place. Moreover, it is not a matter of time, or when He came. The issue is *the character* of His coming here. It is the personal confession of Him, the eternal Son of God, the Son of the Father, come here as having united humanity to Himself in indissoluble union, to carry out the Father’s will, including the cross. It is confessing Him as so come. It includes His coming in the character of what is signified by the water and blood.

The Irvingites did not deny the fact of the incarnation; but concerning their fundamentally evil doctrine that Christ took the carnal nature (though, they said,

12. *An Exposition of the Epistles of John the Apostle*, London: Weston, p. 403, 1905.

13. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 28:236.

He never sinned), W. Kelly remarked:

It may be in the recollection of not a few here that a generation ago there were manifestations of spirits (evil, I doubt not), which did not deny that Jesus came in the flesh. On the contrary, they seemed to lay the greatest stress on the fact of His incarnation, and chide the orthodox for want of heed to this truth if not of faith in it. The point of their own false doctrine lay in maintaining that Jesus took the flesh in the same condition of corruption in which all others are born, and that Jesus showed His perfection in subduing and purifying the flesh. Of course you will understand that my reference is to the Irvingite movement. To confess therefore *that Jesus is come in the flesh is not satisfactory.*¹⁴

The doctrine that Christ took the carnal nature (even if it is allowed that He did not actually sin) is not the confession of Jesus Christ come in flesh. It is not “the doctrine of the Christ.”

This is the Deceiver and the Antichrist. *The Deceiver and the Antichrist* is meant here. These words refer to two great objects that characterize him:

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. *He* is the antichrist who denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22, 23).

Little children, it is [the last] hour, and according as ye have heard that antichrist comes, even now there have come many antichrists, whence we know that it is [the] last hour. They went out from among us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would surely have remained with us, but that they might be made manifest that none are of us (1 John 2:18, 19).

This is the final Antichrist of prophecy. “*He*” is seen here first as denying the Jewish hope “that Jesus is the Christ.” As the coming director of religious affairs for the revived Western power, he will orchestrate the Jewish apostasy, denying that Jesus is the Christ. Moreover, the apostates of Christendom will also receive Him, and he will orchestrate the apostasy of Christendom also, denying the Father and the Son. He is the second beast of Rev. 13 and is the false prophet, the religious mouthpiece of Satan.

So John speaks of *the* Antichrist and also of many antichrists meanwhile. We must keep in mind the abstract character of John’s epistles. Things are light or darkness -- no shades of gray. He brings out the full and true character of everything. These many antichrists are precursors to the final one; they point to his coming. Departure from “the doctrine of the Christ,” all that is fundamentally implicit in the Son’s coming in flesh, “the Son of the Father, in truth and love,” partakes of the character of where all such departures point. Where do these departures point? They point forward towards its fullest development -- to *the Deceiver and the Antichrist. Listen carefully*; departures from fundamental truth *partake of the character* of the final Deceiver, the

14. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and the Revelation, in loco.*

Antichrist.¹⁵ It is serious error to confine the issue to ‘apostasy.’ It is serious error if you insist on the notion that all one has to do is believe in the incarnation -- making that the only test of fellowship and doctrinal orthodoxy. The truth about this is that fundamentally evil doctrines concerning Christ are, in their measure, attacks on the true character of the incarnation.

Is it so that 1 John 2:18, 19 can be used to prove that there are now no “antichrists” in the Christian profession, in Christendom? Unitarians deny the deity of Christ. Is Unitarianism antichrist, and would that be denying that Unitarians are in the Christian profession? What about, for example, “Jesus only” Pentecostals? “Jesus only” Pentecostals teach that there is only one person in the Godhead and He has manifested Himself in three ways, as Father, Son, and Spirit. What is your idea of what constitutes the Christian profession?

I suggest that where this matter is carefully considered, and the Lord’s honor really sought, the result will be that one must acknowledge that “the doctrine of the Christ” embraces much more than affirming the doctrine of the incarnation. Some do not want that to be so because that entails a restriction upon the practical expression of Christian fellowship. Some will see that “the doctrine of the Christ” means much more than an affirmation that the incarnation took place, but then attempt to limit the force of 2 John 10, 11 in some way or other.

See to Yourselves.

See to yourselves, that we may not lose what we have wrought, but may receive full wages (2 John 8).

“Yourselves” refers to those to whom the letter is written: the elect lady and her children, not an assembly which ‘will lose blessings’ if they fall for the deceit.’ It is very important that the elect lady and her children, and us also, of course, be before God concerning spiritual state, as “see to yourselves” indicates. Cp.

15. Regarding departure from “the doctrine of the Christ” having the Antichrist character consider this from W. Kelly regarding F.E.R.’s denial that the Lord Jesus had a human spirit:

... Yes, it is not truth, but ‘ideas’ for F.E.R. Is this to “abide in the doctrine of the Christ”?

It is to join Apollinarius of Antioch (the son). He too made the Logos simply form Christ’s Person, as F.E.R. does, and was therefore justly branded as an antichrist; so Nestorius was for dividing the Person, and Eutyches for confusing it: all of them, strict Trinitarians. For if the Logos had not been united to the soul as to spirit and body in the Christ, Christ was not and is not very Man as well as very God. Without that union there must have been two distinct personalities, the divine and the human. It is the union of both in one Person which alone secures the truth according to scripture. F.E.R. with shameless self-confidence vaunts his idea, which is plain heterodoxy. He does *not* “bring the doctrine” of Christ. The Son did not change His Person, but took up manhood into unity, and this in soul as in body (“F.E.R. Heterodox on the Person of Christ,” *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 3:79).

this with 1 Tim. 4:16:

Give heed to thyself and to the teaching; continue in them; for doing this, thou shalt save both thyself and those that hear thee.

1 Tim. 4:16 is not the salvation of the soul judicially before God; it is salvation, preservation, in our pathway concerning things into which we might stray and fall. Acts 20:28 should also be consulted. Our souls need to be in a self-judged state before God and watchful concerning compromise.

That We May not Lose What We have Wrought. This reminds us of 1 John 2:28 where he also says “we.” It is not “ye” losing what is wrought, but “we”; we apostles. Compare with this Phil. 2:16 and 1 Cor. 3:14. These texts all have to do with service.

But May Receive Full Wages. The apostle did not want to see a diminishment of the recompense for labor bestowed.

Whosoever Goes Forward and Abides not in the Doctrine of the Christ.

Whosoever goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ has not God. He that abides in the doctrine, *he* has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9).

“Whosoever goes forward” refers to:

What is called ‘development:’ he does not abide in what was from the beginning {JND footnote in translation}.

Observe also that the word “transgression” in the KJV is not the point:

“Transgression” is not the point, but development as to Christ, instead of abiding in the doctrine of Christ, His deity and humanity.¹⁶

To say in an exposition of 2 John that this is what the *cults* do, while true in itself, but leaving the matter thus, is not only an inadequate treatment, it is harmful to Christian holiness. To limit “abides not in the doctrine of the Christ” to what one labels a cult is a way to get rid of responsibility for fellowship with some who hold fundamentally evil teachings concerning the person and work of Christ.

There are three ways evil teaching is referred to in 2 John:

- a. Verse 7 refers to persons who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh.
- b. Verse 9 refers to one who “goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ.”
- c. Verse 10 refers to “If anyone come to you and bring not this doctrine.”

16. See W. Kelly’s critique of the Revised New Testament, *The Bible Treasury* 14:126 and 15:110 on 2 John for numerous text critical remarks on 2 John.

What doctrine? “The doctrine of the Christ” (v. 9).

A professed Christian who, say, denies the eternal Sonship, does not abide in “the doctrine of the Christ” as what was from the beginning. Confessing Jesus Christ come in flesh involves confessing the eternal relationship of Father and Son in the Godhead, and that the eternal Son came in flesh. To deny the eternal Sonship is to falsify the truth of the Trinity now revealed through the Son’s coming here in manhood. To make this denial is to hold to another god which is not the Trinity. It is important to realize that this evil denial is not the confession of the eternal Son come in flesh. It falsifies His person and it falsifies the Godhead in divine and eternal relationship. Such is another god which is not God. It denies that the incarnation was the incarnation of the eternal Son, and that would be a false incarnation.

It needs to be observed that confessing Jesus Christ come in flesh involves the true teachings regarding His person and work. It needs to be observed that “the doctrine of the Christ” involves the true teachings of His person and work. Verses 9 and 10a do not speak of the mere fact that an incarnation took place, and neither does v. 7. Restricting the teaching of 2 John to some such notion is an evil work in itself; an evil work attempting to relieve the Christian of his responsibility to reject, uncompromisingly, persons who hold a fundamentally evil teaching. It is a wicked attempt to get rid of the force of vv. 10b and 11.

“The doctrine of the Christ” speaks of the whole of the truth of Christ’s person, and necessarily involves His work on the cross. “This is he that came by water and blood . . .” (1 John 5:6).

Has Not God. Here someone may object that he knows someone who denies, say, the eternal Sonship and yet surely he is a real Christian, so he must have God. Well, God is the judge of that; and, it may be so, but that does not mean the denial of the eternal Sonship does not sin against “the doctrine of the Christ.” “Has not God” is true in an absolute way of “the deceiver and the antichrist.” Observe, fundamentally evil doctrine *partakes of* the character of the antichrist as a facet of the denial of “Jesus Christ coming in flesh.” “Has not God” is John’s abstract way of speaking of the meaning and character of going forward and of not abiding in the doctrine of the Christ. “*Has not God*” is absolutely so concerning “the deceiver and the antichrist.” John predicates of one who brings not the doctrine of the Christ what is true of “the deceiver and the antichrist” -- just as in 1 John 3:9 he predicates of the person what is true of the new nature, “he cannot sin”; and as he does in 1 John 2:9, 11, and 3:15 where hatred which comes from the old nature is predicated of the person. It is light or it is darkness -- no shade of gray, as often found in us believers. If we do not understand John’s epistles are abstract in character, we will generate wrong notions trying to explain such passages, leading ourselves astray, as well as others.

Those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh implicitly deny what is comprehended under the designation “the doctrine of the Christ.” A person may deny one of the truths comprehended under the designation “the doctrine of the Christ.” He thus partakes of “the deceiver and the antichrist” character of not confessing Jesus Christ coming in flesh. What accompanies “the deceiver and the antichrist” character is not having God, not having the Father and the Son. From this antichrist character, John abstracts “has not God” and states it of those not abiding in the doctrine of the Christ. Not abiding in the doctrine of the Christ has the character of “has not God.” This abstraction does not address shades of gray that may be so in a Christian concerning falling into fundamentally evil doctrine. This abstraction, “has not God,” states the true *character* of fundamentally evil teaching.¹⁷

17. A case in point is the well-known evangelical, John MacArthur, who recently changed his mind concerning his denial of the eternal Sonship. He now affirms the eternal Sonship. But he takes the view that the denial of it is not evil. In the MacArthur Study Bible, Nashville: Word, p. 1977, (1977), we read, concerning v. 9:

A failure to be faithful to the fundamental, sound doctrine of the faith (a proper view of the person and work of Christ, love, obedience) marks a person as never having been born again (1 John 2:23; 3:6-10; 4:20, 21; 5:1-3).

Now, for many years he denied the eternal Sonship but during 1999 he changed his mind and now affirms it. So, either he was not born again until 1999, or the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship is not a “fundamental, sound doctrine of the faith (a proper view of the person and work of Christ . . .).” Several observations are in order here. First, he is in error about it that a person who denies a “fundamental, sound doctrine of the faith” cannot be born again. He has not taken into account the abstract character of “has not God.” Next, the denial of the eternal Sonship is an evil, fundamentally evil, denial of “the doctrine of the Christ.” Third, he is still fundamentally unsound on the humanity of Christ:

Weaknesses {in Heb. 4:15} does not refer directly to sin, but to feebleness or infirmity. It refers to all the natural limitations of humanity, which however, includes liability to sin. Jesus knew firsthand the drive of human nature to sin (*Hebrews*, Winona Lake: BMH Books, p. 113, 1985).

“The drive of human nature toward sin” is called in Rom. 7:23 “the law of sin which exists in my members.” Of our Lord Jesus, it is written:

Who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; cp. 1 John 3:5; John 14:30; 8:46).

Instead, then, of affirming the intrinsic holiness of the humanity of Christ (cp. Luke 1:35), instead of acknowledging that Christ took humanity in a holy state, he teaches that Christ had sin in the flesh. No doubt he also excludes this (fundamentally evil) doctrine from affecting “the doctrine of the Christ.”

Wholesome warning by W. Kelly is helpful here:

But the sympathy of Christ with sin (or even with sinners as such) would be an opiate for sin, to us most perilous, to Him most dishonoring. Not so: His sympathy is with the regenerate in their great weakness, who hate sin, who have to endure the contradiction of sinners, and who are opposed by Satan acting on the flesh and in the world. This therefore is the needed and the spiritual consolation: “We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like

(continued...)

Now, Christians must stand in separation from fundamentally evil doctrine. The door of the house must be shut against it. The elect lady must shut the door and give no greeting. She must see to it that it is excluded from her house.

Fundamentally evil doctrine denies one’s profession of Christ. W. Kelly remarked:

. . . if we disown rightly (as he allows) an assembly which receives or retains those whose walk or doctrine denies their profession of Christ, it is a plain duty to refuse everyone who upholds or winks at that “wicked association.”¹⁸

You are gravely in error if you think that the denial of the eternal Sonship (which is not bringing “the doctrine of the Christ”) is a matter of opinion, or not subject to the treatment of 2 John 10, 11, 2 Tim. 2:21, and 1 Cor. 5. Doctrinal evil is the worst, because it professes to make God the author of the evil. The denial of the eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked is likewise not “the doctrine of the Christ,” for it means another atonement which is not another; for Christ was not annihilated on the cross as the punishment for our sins. That wicked denial is not confessing Jesus Christ coming in flesh, for “this is he that came by water and blood” (1 John 5:6). An evil doctrine of the atonement is a denial of one’s profession of Christ, a denial of life in Christ, for it is a false Christ and a false atonement.

He that Abides in the Doctrine, He has Both the Father and the Son.

This is the contrast with the first half of v. 9. It is clear from this that “the doctrine of the Christ” involves having not only the Son, but the Father likewise. Well, of course. Hence we read in v. 3 of “the Son of the Father in truth and love.” The truth about the Father is directly involved with “the doctrine of the Christ.”

If Anyone Come to You and Bring Not this Doctrine

If any one come to you and bring not this doctrine, do not receive him

17. (...continued)

as we are, without sin.” It is not merely that He did not sin when tempted, but that no principle of inbred evil, which we know so distressingly, was in Him. So, at the close of His career, the prince of this world came once more, but it was the same tale of perfectness, early or late: he hath “*nothing* in me” (John 14: 30). Socinianism denies the divine nature that *was* in Him; this scheme imputes what *was not* in Him, and what, if it were, would ruin alike His person and His work. Everyone, no doubt, is liable to error, especially if self-confident or trusting to human cisterns that can hold no water, to the disparagement of the fountain of living waters. But if any man of intelligence deliberately persevered with such doctrine as this, would it be right to regard him as bringing the doctrine of Christ? (“Christ Tempted and Sympathizing,” *The Bible Treasury* 20:238).

Concerning the erroneous notion about necessarily not being born again, this idea is shared by a brother Paisley (of the “Gospel Hall” independents) in *Words in Season* 77:200.

18. *The Bible Treasury* 12:143.

into [the] house, and greet him not; for he who greets him partakes in his wicked works (2 John 10, 11).

“This doctrine” refers back to “the doctrine of the Christ.” A question was asked concerning to whom this applies:

2 John 10 is not confined to teachers. It says, “If there come *any* unto you,” teacher or else.¹⁹

2 John shows us that the test of true love is the truth concerning the doctrine of the Christ. Someone has remarked:

Hence 2 John lays down in the broadest way, not this or that special form of antichristianism, but that if any bring not ‘this doctrine’ (i.e., the true teaching of Christ’s person), ‘receive him not into your house,’ nor salute him.²⁰

W. Kelly wrote:

The apostle now comes to the practical consequence. He has laid down the principle in the ninth verse: now comes the practice. ‘If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.’ Mark how it is put. It is not -- bring not the true humanity, or the proper Deity; because Satan might change the doctrine somewhat, so as to save appearances for the simple. Therefore it would not do merely to specify some one particular form of error, because then the devil would have only to evade that form, and there would be no resource.²¹

Do not Receive Him into [the] House. This refers to the house of the elect lady, of course. The propagators of fundamentally evil doctrine are not welcome in any house that is characterized by holiness in associations with professed Christians.

When people object to 2 John 10, 11, they are trying their best to excuse evil or to let it in . . . Annihilation seems plausible, because God is merciful, but I find personal atonement is thereby gone, and I set my face against it like a flint.²²

And Greet Him Not. What was the elect lady to do? Perhaps he is a ‘loving’ man, kindly and amiable, and much admired. Perhaps a ‘harmless,’ well intentioned man; perhaps even called a brother or a servant of the Lord of long standing. What was she to do? “Do not receive him into [the] house, and greet him not.”

A woman having the word -- as this epistle, for example -- was capable of judging his doctrine, and responsible to do so. Inexorable rigor was to be maintained, if the doctrine as to the Person of Christ was touched. The door

19. *Things New and Old* 17:140, 1874.

20. *The Bible Treasury* 15:224.

21. *Introductory Lectures . . . Acts*, etc., p. 361.

22. J. N. Darby, *Notes and Jottings*, p. 325, 326.

was to be shut against whoever falsified it. They were not even to say to him, “I salute you”; for they who did so became partakers of his evil work. It would be to help on the deceits of Satan.

Moreover the semblance of love which does not maintain the truth, but accommodates itself to that which is not the truth, is not love according to God. It is the taking advantage of the name of love in order to help on the seductions of Satan. In the last days the test of true love is the maintenance of the truth. God would have us love one another; but the Holy Ghost, by whose power we receive this divine nature, and who pours the love of God into our hearts is the Spirit of truth; and His office is to glorify Christ. Therefore it is impossible that a love which can put up with a doctrine that falsifies Christ, and which is indifferent to it, can be of the Holy Ghost -- still less so, if such indifference be set up as the proof of that love.²³

Thank God for every sister who so values the Christ of God. He is coming and His reward is with Him! W. Kelly remarked:

But here it stands firm yet comprehensive: if a man come to you, and does not bring this doctrine (that is, the doctrine of Christ) do not you receive him. No matter what may be the particular manner in which the enemy has warped his soul, and through him dishonored Christ; no matter what may be the peculiar nature of the false doctrine, -- if a man come to you, and bring not the divinely revealed doctrine, the Holy Ghost’s teaching of Christ in the written word, -- “receive him not into your house, neither bid him greeting.” That is to say, do not bid him a common salutation. There is nothing about “God speed” in the word (*χαίρειν*), though “good speed” might be tolerable. The stronger terms are merely put in by the English translators. It was the ordinary form of courteous greeting every day . . . Let us not reserve our warm feelings for our friends, and leave only indifference for the name of Jesus. He that greets kindly the man that brings not the doctrine of Christ is a traitor to Christ.²⁴ ♦

“If any one cometh to you and bringeth not this doctrine, receive him not at home, and greet him not; for he that greeteth him partaketh in his evil works.” Now here is one of the most distressing duties that ever was or can be laid on a Christian; and it is laid on the lady and her children peremptorily. Take this illustration. Many years ago a dear friend of mine fell into trouble through being in a Christian assembly which evaded judging similar error. This sister came to live where the assembly did judge the evil thoroughly; but she was slow to allow her responsibility as to it, pleading that she was only a woman, and what could she say or do? Such excuses may sound fair and fine; women might thus act laudably in matters wherein they are not so reserved as they might be. Who expected or hoped to see the evil to be duly judged on that ground? I reminded this “elect lady” of 2 John. This silenced her, for she was intelligent and experienced as well as God-fearing.

23. J. N. Darby, *Synopsis* 5:357, 358.

24. *Introductory Lectures . . . Acts*, etc. p. 362, 363.

The issue was that she stood convinced of having shirked her bounden duty.

²⁵ ◆

In reply to a reader, C. H. Mackintosh wrote:

What, think you, would the blessed apostle have said to the elect lady if she were to go “for the summers” to partake of the hospitality of a lady who does not believe in the divinity of our Lord Jesus? We confess we are amazed at your question. We cannot understand how anyone with a spark of loyalty to Christ could think of being the guest of a blasphemer of His Person. You say that “your friend on each of her visits has not shunned to exalt, in a very special manner, the Godhead of the Lord Jesus; but with no apparent success.” How could she expect success, when her acts contradict her words? Were she faithful to tell her friend that she could no longer be the guest of one who blasphemes her Lord, she might look for some practical result. Better far to die in some obscure lodging in London, than accept change of air on such miserable terms.²⁶

F. W. Grant wrote:

There might not be positive sympathy with his *views*, but yet the careless putting sanction upon them by want of outspoken refusal; thus he that simply greeted him partook in his evil works. It is exceedingly strong language; and in these days, when man’s will is free, and his thoughts are so abundant, hard it may seem to know how to carry it out; but the apostle makes no question of the responsibility. It was that of every private Christian; not something for teachers to settle merely, or for the assembly to have to do with, (however much, of course, it might have to do with it,) but every one was responsible to act whether others acted or did not act. Christ was to be first, and Christ was to be all. No other, nothing else, could be considered. There is no examination hinted at as to the state of soul of the one thus characterized as a deceiver. It is no question of his state of soul at all; whether, after all, he may at bottom be better than the doctrine he brings would show. The question is simply of his doctrine. He is to be judged by his *words*, not by his thoughts or motives; and it is evident that this is with the apostle a point of such special importance that it is that which gives character to his epistle here. It is what is peculiar to and distinctive of it. It is something which needs to be added to what is more formally doctrinal in the first epistle. There is to be no toleration whatever here. Toleration would only be the permitting of that which would destroy Christianity to the bottom, and rob every Christian of that which makes him this.²⁷

Compromise is treason to Christ.

Where the doctrine of Christ is at stake, one must not hesitate: compromise is treason to the Lord; and if we are not true to Christ, we shall never be true to anything that God has revealed to us. The honor of God is centered in Him

25. *Exposition of the Epistles of John*, pp. 404, 405.

26. *Things New and Old* 18:311 (1875).

27. *Numerical Bible*, *in loco*.

through Whom grace and truth came to us. Therefore, if one come, not bringing this doctrine, even had he been once the dearest Christian friend on earth, she and her children were under the most solemn obligation to ignore him for Christ’s sake. Here lies the present call of God. If he does not bring the doctrine of Christ, close the door, have nothing to do with an antichrist. To those who do not value Christ’s name and word it must seem outrageous, especially in these liberal days, where man is all and Christ is little or nothing; and even professing Christians are so ready to say nothing about it. ‘What a pity to disturb unity by these questions! Is it not their chief duty to hold together and avoid scattering, which is the shocking evil? Besides, he is such a nice and dear brother, who may see fit to give up his little notion if you do not fan it into a flame.’ THESE ARE THE NEUTRALS, MORE DANGEROUS THAN EVEN THE BEGUILED MISLEADERS.²⁸

But what if she or you or I, reader, disobey the revealed will of God about it, deliberately refusing to judge evil, condoning it under the plea of love, or what not? Hear the plain statement of God about it: “He who greets him partakes in his wicked works.” Instead of the sister uncompromisingly standing with Christ against the evil, she is indifferent to it. That is just what it is -- indifference to the honor and glory of the Son of the Father. Nay, it is helping it on.

For He Who Greets Him Partakes in His Wicked works. The Dallas Theological Seminary commentary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (NT), says

But a deceiver is not even to be given a greeting of welcome, since to do so would be to share **in his wicked** (ponērois, “evil”; cf. “the evil one” [to ponēron], 1 John 2:13-14) **work**. “Welcome him” (2 John 10-11) is literally, “Say ‘Greeting’ to him.” In Greek “greetings” here is *chairein*, related to chairō, “to rejoice, to be glad.” Chairein was used as a cordial address of welcome or farewell, something like “I am glad to see you” or “I wish you well” (cf. Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1) (p. 908, 1983).

The fact is that during the 1800s those called “exclusive brethren” brought out most fully such responsibilities -- doing so in the face of ever increasing heterodoxy. What the *Commentary* says is true. But they have mitigated its force in several ways: first, by accepting the view that 2 John is addressed to a church; second, by silence concerning what should be done concerning matters of fellowship with those who disobey -- while making clear the guilt.

Note, too, that vv. 9, 10 say not a word about her believing the evil doctrine.²⁹ She may not believe it. THAT question is not raised at all. The point is not that. *The receiving and greeting of the bearer of evil doctrine concerning the Christ* is the point. Doing this makes the sister a partaker of his wicked works. She is, in God’s eyes, fellowshiping with the evil. She is morally guilty

28. *Exposition of the Epistles of John*, pp. 404, 405.

29. See Appendix 1 for remarks on the failure of many evangelicals on 2 John.

before God of complicity with the evil. The point, I repeat, is not that she imbibed the error itself. She may refuse the error and accept the bearer. "Partakes in his wicked works," says God. You are guilty, too, says God. You are guilty by association. Association with doctrinal evil defiles. *Your indifference and treachery to Christ which is thus within you forms the link, makes you "koinoneo with his wicked works."* The word for "partakes" is *koinoneo*, to make *one with*, to make *common with*. You, by greeting and receiving one who brings not the doctrine of the Christ, are one who "partakes in his wicked works." You are giving comfort and aid to such a one showing that you are *indifferent* (for that is the meaning of such conduct) to the honor and glory of the Christ of God. That is the state of your soul. You may *say* that you are not indifferent, but your actions show that you are. C. H. Mackintosh wrote:

What is the difference between a teacher of fundamental error and one who knowingly receives him or wishes him God speed? Does the law distinguish between a traitor and one who knowingly conceals him? Could you have fellowship with a man who denies the Person or work of Christ? Is it not very striking to notice how much more alive people are as to bad morals than bad doctrine? A scandalous liver is justly rejected; but a man may deny the deity, or the eternal Sonship of Christ, and be received and honored in the highest circles of so-called Christian society. A man who picks his neighbor's pocket is justly sent to the treadmill; but a man may blaspheme the Son of God, and yet be looked upon as a respectable Christian! How is this? Because man thinks more of his respectability than he does of Christ.³⁰

W. Kelly wrote:

Further, 2 John is decisive that it is not enough to be personally sound in the faith. Even a woman, the elect lady, is instructed by the apostle as to her own direct responsibility, if any one sought her house or fellowship who brought false doctrine about Christ. "If there come any to you, and bring not this doctrine [of Christ], receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." That is to say, the principle is distinctly laid down, that the person who religiously countenances those who confess not the Christ of God, becomes a partaker of the *evil deeds* of the deceiver, even without necessarily imbibing the *evil doctrine*. Indeed, a spiritual mind would feel that dreadful as it is to be misled for a time into such heresy, he is incomparably more guilty who, professing to hold the true doctrine of Christ, consents to fellowship with the man who denies it. "Now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

Now this is the attitude of "Brethren" towards the alleged blasphemer and his partisans. *If we suppose for a moment that the blasphemy is a fact*, 2 John not only vindicates the course complained of, but shows that it is an imperative duty, which admits of neither hesitation nor compromise. Had the

30. *Things New and Old* 19:83, 1876.

elect lady, spite of the apostolic warning, deliberately received one who brought not the doctrine of Christ, she would have at once become identified with the guilt of the deceiver, and its consequences. In vain the plea that she was herself a godly Christian, and sound in faith: still the Word pronounces -- a "partaker of his evil deeds." She would, knowingly in this case, for her own ease have committed herself to an act of high treason against the Lord; she would have yielded to overt communion with that which to the last degree dishonored His person: and thus, till she had cleared herself from the sin, in the sight of God and man, she would have sunk morally to the level of an accomplice. If she had better light, so much the worse to behave as if she had none. To receive her, under such circumstances, would be to participate in similar wickedness; it would be receiving her not to the glory of God, but to His shame, because it would be barefaced indifference to the affront put upon His Son. And "whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." "Brethren" have given pretty strong proof that they do not make light of ecclesiastical evil, by separating from all associations which involve departure from God's Word; but they refuse to put such questions on the same platform with deep, damnable, fundamental denial of Christ. The Word of God, not any theory or rule of ours, is the warrant for both. Did we follow our thoughts or our natural wishes, it is folly to suppose that we should pursue a course which separates us from hundreds and thousands, who would desire to be with us on condition of our letting them tamper with this treason against the Lord. Does such a course look much like anxiety for numbers?³¹

Another has remarked:

Hence 2 John lays down in the broadest way, not this or that special form of antichristianism, but that if any bring not "this doctrine" (i.e. the true teaching of Christ's person), "receive him not into your house," nor salute him . . . It is the most heinous sin, with which the Christian has to deal, and very precisely was the turning point of our great breach in 1849.³² For v. 11 extends the partaking of evil deeds to all who have fellowship with those who do not bring this doctrine.

The reasoning that questions and undermines it is mere unbelief, in direct opposition to God's object in the church; which is bound to purge out

31. *The Brethren and Their Traducers*, London: Morrish, pp. 21, 22, n.d. See also his *The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism*, pp. 1-3. See "Indifference to Christ: or Bethesdaism," *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 20:205-208.

32. {The writer referred to what the assembly at Bethesda, Bristol, England did, when they accepted an infamous document since known as *The Letter of the Ten* (signed by 10 leaders there) stating the principle that association with evil does not defile a person if he has not personally accepted the evil. This was the beginning of Open Brethrenism. See my book, *Precious Truth Revived and Defended through J. N. Darby*, vol. 2, 1845-1850 for full documentation. The godly refusal of Bethesda's evil principle was mockingly called "exclusivism." There is more on this subject in Appendix 3.}

all leaven (doctrinal, Gal. 5:9, as well as moral, 1 Cor. 5). It is in principle to build again Babylon on the ruins of the pillar and ground of the truth, and more worthy of a worldly man than of a soul that loves Christ and God's word. Yet I doubt not that real Christians have been and are beguiled into this indifference to Christ. But this makes it the more urgent that all who are true to His glory should prove their love to God's children, not by the faithless allowance of the worst evil in a person because he may be a Christian, but by loving God and keeping His commandments. And this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.³³

J. N. Darby remarked:

'If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.' To do so would be encouraging and helping him; it is to tamper with my own conscience, because I am allowing something to be Christ which is a false one, and the deepest dishonor to God. If I show this appearance of love where the truth is not, it is not Christ at all; it is denying Him, and saying that what is false is as good as what is true. It is helping the Antichrist and not the Christ. "Him that biddeth him God speed" (that is, literally salutes him on going away), "is partaker of his evil deeds." It was a sign of recognition and companionship.³⁴

F. W. Grant said:

Here there must be, therefore, the intolerance of love itself; and we see most clearly what association means here, even of the lightest kind. It gives to the person who tolerates, the character of that which he is tolerating, and the very piety of the one who did this would necessarily be only a more deceptive cover under which the evil would better work. For how much is the careless unconcern, even of those who seem to be pious, everywhere responsible!³⁵

Now, there are saints who refuse fellowship with evil doctrine and hence with the bearer of evil doctrine; on the other hand there are saints who have fellowship with him. The latter are morally guilty before God of complicity with the wicked works by their manifest indifference to the Son's honor. Another has said, "But surely, if a thief's evil deeds are thievings, to be a partaker of his evil deeds is to be partaker of his thieving. Is there any difficulty in understanding that?" What, then, is the course of those who show such fellowship to the bearer of this evil doctrine? They "partake in his wicked works"? What wicked works? They partake in the wicked works of spreading evil doctrine concerning the Christ. This is just what this bearer of evil doctrine was doing. God says that by receiving and greeting such, we are partaking in his wicked works. Some may

33. *The Bible Treasury* 15:224.

34. *Collected Writings* 28: 247.

35. *Numerical Bible, in loco.*

not believe it so, but God has spoken. Faithfulness to the honor of Christ will resent such actions and disassociate from those who bear such doctrine and from those who partake in their wicked works, whether they imbibe the teaching or not. This is the course of those who refuse fellowship with dishonor to Christ and the propagation of a false Christ.

Most comments and expositions on 2 John fall short of dealing with the matter of what this association does.

True Joy by Love in Truth and Walk in Truth (vv. 12, 13)

Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink; but hope to come to you, and speak mouth to mouth, that our joy may be full. The children of thine elect sister greet thee (2 John 12, 13).

What he had written took precedence over the other things he desired to communicate. In this there is instruction for us: first things first -- love in truth and walk in truth will not tolerate evil doctrine concerning Christ's person and work, permitting no show of indifference or neutrality, for otherwise such is the soul's moral contact with the evil that it imbibes the character of assistance in wicked works, making itself koinoneo with those wicked works. Counting on her faithfulness in this, John looked forward to a visit to such a house kept by "love in truth" and "walk in truth" for "the Son of the Father, in truth and love." That is where he expected that "our joy may be full."

The elect lady had a sister in the flesh who also was elect. Sad it is if there is question if one is of the elect or not. John spoke of both these sisters as elect. It was his privilege to convey greetings from the children of the elect lady's elect sister, to her. Such is one of the joys in the family of God.

Galatians 5:9

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil (Prov. 16:17).

Doctrinal Evil and Moral Evil

In Eph. 2:3 we learn that there are two broad areas of sin: bodily sin and mental sin. We are more aware of, more used to thinking about, bodily sin. We realize too that a personable, amiable, agreeable person may be a fornicator. We seem to understand this. But when the issue of doctrinal leaven is raised among the people of God, discernment flees from many, as history repeatedly has shown. Doctrinal leaven often involves someone well known. It may be an able teacher, a loved evangelist that God has used, or one who has had a noted path of

service. He may be a personable brother; he may have ministered precious thoughts of Christ before the saints and shed tears in doing so.

But emotion is not holiness. Pleasing personality is not holiness. Erudition, as well as ignorance, is not holiness. Dwelling on what is called positive ministry, to the exclusion of corrective ministry, is not holiness. Holiness is separation from evil to the Lord and calls for self-judgment of ways and thoughts. We must have Christ before us as our model. All that He did pleased the Father. Consider Him as portrayed by W. Kelly in the following quotation:

Yet is it certain that anger in the true and godly sense of abhorrence of evil formed part of the moral nature of our Lord Jesus. There is no greater fallacy of modern times among not a few Christians than the exclusion of holy anger from that which is morally perfect. Our Lord Jesus on one occasion looked round about with anger; on another He used a scourge of small cords with indignation; so also He thundered from time to time at religious hypocrites who stood high in popular estimation. The Christian who does not share such feelings is altogether wanting in what is of God, and also in what becomes a man of God. I grant you that anger is too apt to take a personal shape, and consequently to slide into vindictive as well as wounded feeling. It is not necessary for me to say that there was an entire absence of this in our Lord Jesus. He came to do the will of God; He never did anything but that will -- not only what was consistent with it, but only that. But for this very reason He too was slow, not of course to form a judgment, but to execute it on man; indeed, as we know, He refused it absolutely when here below. He could await the due time. God was then displaying His grace, and, as part of His grace, His long-suffering in the midst of evil. And there is nothing finer, nothing more truly of God, than this display of grace in patience.³⁶

We trust that with many Christians engaged in the palliation of leaven and the consequences of association with it, it is truly ignorance and that the Lord will open their eyes.

C. H. Mackintosh remarked:

What is the difference between a teacher of fundamental error and one who knowingly receives him or wishes him Godspeed? . . . Is it not very striking to notice how much more alive people are to bad morals than bad doctrine? A scandalous liver is justly rejected; but a man may deny the deity, or the eternal Sonship of Christ, and be received and honoured in the highest circles of so-called Christian society . . . man thinks more of himself and his respectability than he does of Christ.³⁷

By the fear of Jehovah men depart from evil (Prov. 16:6).

Ye that love Jehovah, hate evil (Psalm 97:10).

36. *Lectures Introductory to . . . the Minor Prophets*, p. 282.

37. *Things New and Old* 19:83 (1876).

Doctrinal evil and moral evil³⁸ are both evil from which the saint must separate. However, evil doctrine is worse. Some seem to think moral evil is worse. Perhaps they think of the infamy done to themselves before they think of God, as those did in Judg. 19-21. As we see there, Israel had to learn what was due to God, and learn also the spirit in which evil is to be judged.

Evil Doctrine Is Worse than Moral Evil Because it Purports to Come from God And Thus Makes Him the Author of It

A comparison of Paul's opening in 1 Cor. 1 and Gal. 1 shows that doctrinal leaven is worse. "If the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Another said:

To make a sin of immorality to be a subject for the assembly to judge, and a sin of doctrine a subject for an apostle to judge is sheer ignorance. In either case it is the word of God's grace alone which can shew us what is immoral for a Christian and what is the truth which has to be kept. But in neither case is it other than the Spirit in the assembly which is POWER with us to act and to put away, if there is to be blessing; for if an apostle had acted without the assembly its conscience would not have been cleared, and if Paul, as he feared, had had to act at Corinth IN SPITE OF the assembly, then it would have been to destruction (2 Cor. 10:8), and not for edification. The Spirit of God, to a pure conscience, is quite enough of POWER to enable an assembly to put away evil. His presence too is our warrant for doing it. False doctrine is LEAVEN of the worst kind. Read 1 Cor. 5:6,7,8 and you will see the call to purge out all leaven, that we may be an unleavened lump.

Observe authority and power are two distinct things.

For those who have professed to separate themselves from the so-called churches unto God, and the word of His grace, to vindicate the toleration of leaven of any kind (in word, in doctrine, morality, or practice) is to build again the things which they have destroyed, and to make themselves transgressors (Gal. 2:18). They are self-condemned too, and are to be rejected. When the question is about doctrine, no doubt can remain. See Titus 3:10, 11; and 1 Cor. 2:19, Gal. 5:20, 2 Pet. 2:1.

Finally, to use the name of the Church as a cover for evil or error of any kind is, I believe, a great sin, and is to dishonour the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For God's Church is the habitation of God through the Spirit, and contains the children of the Father and the Bride of Christ. That there is a spirit abroad who is counterworking, in every way he can, the Spirit of God in His gracious efforts in these days to gather together

38. I use the terms conventionally. Evil doctrine IS a moral matter also. The distinction intended is illustrated in Lev. 13: leprosy in the body and leprosy in the head.

in one the children of God who have been scattered abroad, I know. The adversary will be judged, and so will all those who work under him for this wicked end. That some are ignorantly going out in this current “in their simplicity, and they know not whither they go” (2 Sam. 15:11), I also believe. Such I would, if possible, pull out of the fire (Jude 23).³⁹

The Character of Paul’s Approach to the Galatians

Some Christians say that whenever Paul corrected the saints he first commended what he could concerning their walk. This is not true. This false idea might stem from mere want of instruction from the Word of God, and we are all in need of instruction. But I fear that there are many cases where this false idea is put forth in connection with a case of evil in order to palliate the evil and to use the false idea as a tool against those who desire to see the evil purged out.

Let us examine two cases of a question of leaven to which Paul addressed himself and observe what, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, he did.

The Corinthians had a fornicator amongst them, as well as other serious problems. In Paul’s opening words in 1 Cor. 1, there is commendation. Commendation of what? -- their walk? No. He commended what the grace of God had imparted to them, but he commended nothing in their walk, nothing in their response to the grace of God.

The Galatians were giving ear to evil teachers, teachers of doctrinal leaven. Look at Gal. 1. Did he commend anything in their walk? No. Did he even commend what the grace of God had imparted to them? No! Notice then the difference in how he addressed the Galatians compared to the Corinthians. This IS significant. It shows that doctrinal leaven is worse than moral leaven. This difference is even typified in Lev. 13 where we have leprosy amongst the people of God. There is leprosy in the body (moral evil) and leprosy in the head (evil doctrine held) and leprosy in the beard (evil doctrine taught). The one with leprosy in the head is pronounced “utterly unclean” (Lev. 13:44).

The reason that doctrinal leaven is worse than moral leaven is because it is professed that the doctrine comes from Scripture, thus making God the author of it. Secondly, if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psa. 11:3).

So the idea that Paul always commended what he could in the walk of those he addressed is false. Sad it is when this idea is the setting up of “love and grace” as a ‘sanctified’ cover for unholiness and evil. The inspired apostle showed love, true love, love according to God’s thought in writing just as he

39. *The Present Testimony, New Series* 1:400-401 (1868).

did. Let us beware of the habit of sparing self. We thus spare it in others also, just as Saul spared Agag (1 Sam. 15:9). Paul then, after a brief introduction, immediately denounced and reprobated the attack on the gospel. Their very listening to these evil teachers was bad enough and they stood in danger of accepting the evil system.

Why Did Paul Not Tell the Galatians to Excommunicate the Teachers of the Evil Gospel?

The question above is usually raised by those who teach that persons who hold doctrinal evil (doctrine of a fundamentally evil character) should not be put away from among God’s saints. It would be almost unbelievable to think that Christians could sink so low did we not know something of the depravity and wretchedness of our own incurable heart. May our gracious God preserve us from our own inclinations.

The question above ASSUMES something. It assumes that the evil teachers were in fellowship. But we are not told this in Scripture. If they were in fellowship, “a little leaven leavens the lump” is sufficient instruction for any spiritual mind to discern what needs to be done (1 Cor. 2:15; 1 Cor. 5:2; 2 John 9,10; Rev. 2:14,15, etc.). The spirit in which this should be done is taken up elsewhere.

The argument for allowing such in fellowship is based on Gal. 5:12 which says, “I would that they would even cut themselves off who throw you into confusion.” It is alleged, therefore, that the Galatians were not to exclude them, i.e., cut them off. I believe the evil teachers were outside and Paul’s desire is that those evil teachers cut themselves off from any connection with the Galatians.

2 John 9, 10 says that we should not greet, or allow in our home, an evil teacher, and persons say that we may “break bread” with them and not be defiled! Some use Gal. 5:12 to support this idea. The denial that association with leaven in the assembly defiles is a very, very serious matter. Not only is the truth of unity expressed in the breaking of bread not understood at all, but the nature of God as light is thus misrepresented.

The same truth, namely, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9; 1 Cor. 5:6), applies both in the case of moral and in the case of doctrinal evil. We may change the adjective before the word evil, but it remains evil. And if it is evil, i.e., leaven, this direction of Scripture applies: “Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:7).

Revelation 2 and 3

A wise [man] feareth and departeth from evil (Prov. 14:16).

It is said that we find much evil in some of the assemblies noted in Rev. 2

and 3. And, in an effort to hinder separation from evil, it is pointed out that there is no command to separate from the said evil. The reply to this terrible and unholy argument is given in the following extracts from others.

Moreover, the argument is singularly unhappy, if judged by that view which, to you, “appears the correct one.” For, on the protracted scheme of the Apocalyptic churches, Thyatira gives us Popery under the symbol of Jezebel; and you have yourself strongly and repeatedly insisted on the Christian’s separation from THAT unclean thing. If, therefore, the epistle to Thyatira forbids not to come out from this evil, the other epistle cannot be said to bind us up with evils elsewhere, when remedy is refused and the godly, if they abide, must do or sanction that which is, in their eyes, false and iniquitous. I entirely coincide with you that to stay in communion with Romish error is to lose all power for witnessing. Why should it be a virtue to stay in communion with that which we account Protestant error? In either case, it would be heartless indifference to truth and holiness. On the scheme you accept, Popery has a place in these churches, prophetically viewed quite as much as a national Establishment; and if it be right, as you own, to separate from Popery, spite of no command from the Lord to Thyatira, it cannot be wrong to separate from nationalism because of no such command to Sardis or Laodicea.⁴⁰

I have no doubt that in Thyatira is the Spirit’s picture of popery. Do you think people should continue in that? I do not enter into the Seven Churches, because adducing such passages of obscure interpretation to judge the path of plain separation from plain iniquity, is at once condemnation of those who do so, but as you do [enter into the Seven Churches], I ask you this: do you think you should remain in Laodicea to be spued out of Christ’s mouth? It {the false use of Rev. 2 & 3} proves too much and therefore nothing. You must not be surprised if others decline principles which lead to such a course.⁴¹

Even if one does not accept it that Revelation 2 and 3 gives us a foreshadow of church history, if separation from evil is wrong, he should go back to Rome and affirm that the Reformation was a mistake.

It is instructive to note that there WAS a separated number of saints in the city of Thyatira. “But to you I say, *the rest* who are in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I do not cast upon you any other burden; but what ye have hold fast till I shall come” (Rev. 2:24, 25).

The Scripture never warrants the idea of more than one assembly in a city or town. We see this, for example, in the address in several epistles. We see this again in the candlesticks in Rev. 2 and 3. Galatia was a province; hence we

40. W. Kelly, *God’s Principle of Unity*, pp. 35, 36.

41. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 20:208.

may speak of the assemblies in Galatia. But in a large city saints gathered together to the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, though meeting in several places in the city, were part of the assembly of God there. In the time of ruin in which we live, the few gathered together to Christ’s name do not compose the assembly of God in such and such a place, since usually other members of the body live there too. Those so gathered seek, however, to carry out divine principles which cannot be ruined and are gathered by the Spirit on the ground of, i. e., on the basis of, the truth that “there is one body.”⁴²

Another has said this about the faithful in Thyatira, who refused connection with the doctrine of Jezebel:

A question may here arise. Does this epistle sanction the continuance of God’s people in that which is wrong, for there is no hint for them to leave the assembly? Other scriptures point out what the action of God’s people should be with reference to evil in doctrine and practice (1 Cor. 5; Titus 3:10; 2 John). Here however we have the whole local assembly addressed, from which according to God’s thoughts we can never get free, as long as we are in the place where it exists. For the assembly at Thyatira comprehended every soul in that city which professed to be a disciple of Christ. To separate from the church there would have been to unchristianize themselves, which they could not do, though separation from evil is a positive christian duty. This those termed by the Lord “the rest” had clearly done. They were apart from evil and because they kept aloof from participation in it, they received this token of His approval, whilst enduring the odium of those from whose ways and doctrines they dissented. A new church they did not attempt to form, nor could they, for there was but one in the place, however many might have been the houses in which the members of it met. To have attempted to form one would have manifested their want of intelligence about the church of God. To have acquiesced in the evil, because there was but one church which God owned, would have indicated ignorance as to the nature of God, and of that which should characterize His children.⁴³

Actually, we thus see that a reason to leave (not the assembly of God in Thyatira, but) the evil is given in the words addressed to “the rest.”

A. C. Ord has pointed out a lesson from the address to Pergamos:

A. But does it seem Christlike to exclude so many for the faults of a few.

B. It is for their own sin they are excluded; but you are also seriously wrong in your ideas of our blessed Lord, and -- abusing His blessed character in His personal grace to sinners -- make Him tolerant of evil in His Church, which He never can be. He would deny His own nature were He to be so. Have you forgotten the scourge of small cords with which He drove the intruders out of the temple? Was that grace? Surely something else was required when the

42. See *Letters of J. N. Darby*, index, “Church in a City.”

43. *The Bible Treasury* 9:240.

condition of God's house and the "holiness which becomes it forever" were at stake. Again, what is His sentence upon the church at Pergamos? ⁴⁴ Does He not condemn *the whole body* for the selfsame conduct for which you are now arraigned, because they had those among them who *held* (He does not say taught) the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes? They allowed these persons among them though they did not accept their evil doctrines as a body, and the Lord calls on them to repent of their indifference, threatening that otherwise He will come to them quickly in judgment, besides fighting against the individuals in question. They did not hate the evil, but He did, and "the *fear of the Lord* is to hate evil." Did you hate these things as you ought, you never could allow such connection with them, or plead for it.

A. But I have always taken the addresses to the seven churches as showing how much evil could exist in a church; for the Lord does not disown them or call upon the saints to leave any of the seven He addresses.

B. The Lord calls to repentance, and whilst that call sounds and until it is rejected, of course, it would not be the moment to quit them. But if that word is unheeded, what then? Would you stay to be spued out of Christ's mouth? For that is what He threatens in one case -- to take away the candlestick in another. Is not that disowning their church position and relationship, and their consequent claim to recognition by the faithful? Your argument is precisely what I have just seen in a letter from a clergyman, addressed to one who was uneasy about her position in the Establishment, in order to induce her to remain in it. You do not seem to understand the posture the Lord here assumes, which is that of Judge, passing sentence, not that of a Lawgiver, framing laws or explaining details of conduct for individual guidance, though He adds, "He that hath an ear let him hear"; so that the individual is to bow to the word of Christ and be faithful to it at all costs, when the body fails to listen to the call. You will forgive me for saying, your use of this passage reminds me of Satan's use of the Psalm in the temptation in the wilderness, for the Lord makes His glory the standard and judges everything by it that does not come up to that standard or is inconsistent with it, and you turn it into a reason for bearing with what He condemns, and inciting others to do the same; thus you are exactly in opposition to the Lord in the solemn judgment He here passes.

A. You do not surely mean that *any* practical evil which may exist in a body of Christians, destroys their title as a part of the Church of God?

B. Only where it is known and sanctioned, for then *the fundamental principles and essential nature* of the Church of God are denied. God cannot and will not sanction sin where He dwells. When the evil committed by Achan was pointed out, and thus became known to the children of Israel, then it was that God said He would not be among them *any more* except they destroyed the accursed thing from among them. Previous to this, its existence produced weakness and defeat, "they could not stand before their enemies,"

for God could not put forth His strength amongst them on account of it. Has God changed His own eternal nature and become tolerant of evil? Or is it the society of Christians that has become all-important, so that we are to sacrifice His presence to theirs? Impossible that He can abide what denies His very being and glory, and is the cause in those who know Him not, of everlasting exclusion from His presence. He declares He "will be sanctified in those that come nigh Him." "He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are *round about him*" (Psa. 89:7). The moment sin in principle is admitted, or the truth denied, or false doctrine acquiesced in, it is no longer the "house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Even leaving their first love, the Lord calls on the Church at Ephesus to repent of, or He would take away the candlestick, which would be to disown them as His light or witness -- the sole end of the Church's existence as a body on earth -- and it would then cease to have any claim as such. Let me read you a passage from a tract of great value, entitled, *Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity*:

If the body refuse to answer to the very nature and character of God, and the incompatibility of that nature with evil, so that it becomes really a false witness for God, then the first and immutable principle recurs -- the evil must be separated from. Further, the unity which is maintained after such separation, becomes a testimony to the compatibility of the Holy Ghost and evil, that is, it is in its nature, apostasy; it maintains the name and authority of God in His Church and associates it with evil.

A. But the Lord does not hold one Church responsible for the rest, and it does not seem to me that we are at all involved in what is done elsewhere.

B. You forget that the Church is not seen here at all in its unity, or as the body of Christ, of which He is the Head, for He is *outside* it, judging of its state as His candlestick or light-bearer on earth, which it was set to be. Your reasoning betrays your ignorance of what the Church of God is, in its nature and constitution. The moment the existence of a divine person, the Holy Ghost here on earth, is understood as the essential characteristic of the Church, its unity, fellowship, and the judgment of evil necessarily follow. The Holy Ghost cannot act differently in different places, for He is ever one and the same, and forming the body of Christ, *produces by His presence* a unity such as subsists in the natural body; thus and thus only do the epistles ever treat of the Church of God. "There is one body and one Spirit" (cp. Eph. 4:3, 15, 16; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13). The presence of God necessarily gives unity, and the corporate responsibility we have been speaking of. It was so in a lower sense even in Israel of old in the passage to which we have referred, so that God said after the sin of Achan, "*Israel* hath sinned and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; for *they* have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen and dissembled, and *they* have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, because *they* were *accursed*; neither will I be with you any more except ye destroy the accursed from among you" (Josh. 7:11, 12). The whole nation was charged with the guilt which existed among them; the whole

44. His words are, "I have *against thee*, that thou hast them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I *hate*. Repent, or I will *come unto thee* quickly," etc. (Rev. 2:14, 15).

nation suffered for it, and was held responsible for its extermination. The unity which the Holy Ghost produces now in the Church of God -- though flowing from the same cause -- the presence of God -- is not national as it then was, but of a much deeper and closer character. It is threefold: we are *living* stones of the temple in which God dwells, as the Apostle Paul says, "buildd together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," and thus the whole building grows unto an "*holy* temple in the Lord;" secondly, there is the unity of the body of Christ, which also results from the presence of the Holy Ghost, forming the one body united to its Head in heaven; this, unity is still closer and more intimate, as my body is much nearer to me than the house I live in; and, lastly, that which flows from connection or association at the Lord's table, and fellowship in His death, and being united in His name, so that what is done in that Name in one place, is done as to the principle of it for all, and is binding on all; reception, discipline, and other acts done in any given place are valid for the whole, and gifts are common to the whole. If this is not recognized, the unity of the Church of God is denied and the presence of a divine person in it is entirely disowned.⁴⁵

J. S. Oliphant wrote:

It has been said, that Paul owned the assembly at Corinth though there was very great evil unjudged there. Paul did not however own the *state* of the assembly but judged it and the evil, and to spare them deferred going to Corinth (2 Cor. 1:23), and feared and trembled about the Corinthians as to how they would receive the first epistle, which he wrote that he might know the proof of them whether they were obedient in all things (2 Cor. 2:9; 7:5).⁴⁶ It has been also said that the epistles to the assemblies in the Revelation show that they were all acknowledged, though evil was there unjudged. But the subject there is not communion, nor confidence in an assembly to commend and receive saints, but the responsibility of assemblies standing *professedly* and as to privilege in assembly position in the world. The responsibility of a Christian to God, as a Christian, does not cease because he gets into such a bad state of soul that his character denies his christianity, and he is not therefore owned or trusted as a Christian. His responsibility to God is measured by his light and privileges, not by his walk. Confidence amongst Christians, on the other hand, is begotten by walk and character. So with what is called the Church or Christendom now. The state of Christendom is described in Rev. 2 and 3, the present state more especially in ch. 3, and Christendom is responsible as having assembly privileges; but because it is addressed as the assembly in responsibility, and told that its candlestick will be removed, and that it will be spued out of Christ's mouth, is that a ground for confidence? What a supposition! It is no question of communion or confidence, but of *judgment threatened*, the responsibility being measured by the light and privileges of Christianity, by

45. *Collected Writings of A. C. Ord*, Morganville: Present Truth Publishers, pp. 6, 7.

46. When he heard from Titus of their obedience and that the first epistle had had the desired effect, then he could say (2 Cor. 7:16) "I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things."

original standing departed from, and by the searching judgment of the Holy One who walks in the midst of the candlesticks. I am not saying that any individual or assembly of Christians is perfect, or comes up to the standard which should ever be before both one and the other, namely, Christ; but that when either one or the other persistently denies, in walk or in doctrine, in ways or associations, the character of a Christian in the one case, and the character of God's assembly in the other, those who love Christ and care for His name are *bound to refuse to acknowledge* or have communion with what is inconsistent with the profession of his name. Nor am I saying at what period confidence, either in an individual or an assembly should cease; God guides faith aright by His Spirit and His word.⁴⁷

J. G. Deck at first had not reacted faithfully regarding the Bethesda (1848) division, but was led to see his error. He wrote:

But some have argued, "Paul did not separate from the Church of Corinth, nor warn other Churches against inter-communion with them." Of course he did not. The Corinthians did what the Lord commanded the Churches of Ephesus and Thyatira and Laodicea to do; they *repented*, and *put away the evil*. The case would have been entirely different, if they had *refused* to enquire, to judge, and to purge it out. They would then have stood in quite a different position before God. Indeed, I would ask brethren who appeal to this case of Corinth, whether they really and seriously intend to say, that they themselves would continue to hold intercommunion with a gathering, where such evil as this existed, *after it had refused to listen to their godly remonstrance to put it away*. If not, how can they righteously make the use they do of the fact, that Paul did not separate from the assembly of God at Corinth, or call on others to do so, because evil existed there, which evil they put away with godly sorrow when he dealt with them about it?

I now come to the case of the seven Churches. I desire to dwell a little at length on this portion of the word of God, because the argument of my former letter was mainly founded upon it; and I have seen that argument repeated elsewhere.⁴⁸ It is deeply humbling to have to confess my shortsightedness in reasoning as I did from these Epistles; which, so far from supporting my position, I now see, entirely subvert it.

In the first place, I bow to the correctness of the following remarks told to me on the argument of my letter.

I do not think, that you can justly reason from Christ's dealing with a

47. If I leave an assembly, gathered in accordance with scripture, where the truth is held, and what is contrary to the truth is judged, I leave an assembly where Christ's presence is, I act in schism, and ignore the name and presence of Christ. If, on the other hand, I stay in an assembly where that is openly and willfully tolerated, which is contrary to the truth and inconsistent with the true ground of communion and the holy name of the Lord Jesus, I connect myself and the name of Christ with the evil allowed, and deny the true character of the assembly and its responsibilities (A Letter on Bethesda Fellowship; With an Appendix on the True Basis of Communion, London: Morrish, pp. 63, 64, sec. ed., revised).

48. *Principles and Results*, by R. Ball.

Church to my dealing with it: 1st. Because God can bear with evil which I ought not. Witness his bearing with the world and with Babylon, out of which I am called to come (Rev. 17). 2ndly. Because in many cases He can judge the wicked only, by a discriminating judgment in power; as in the cases you refer to in Rev. 2, 3; and which He will do at the end of the age -- which I cannot. Hence a conclusion from his judgment to mine is unsound. *We* do not remove candlesticks either; though the Lord may validate our acts as to it; binding what we bind, or loosing what we loose, if it be according to His mind. But we ought, i.e. a body of saints assembled in Christ's name ought, to answer the appeal of the Spirit to these Churches; and *repent*, if there be evil; and consequently not continue in the evil.

Secondly, in my reasoning on these Epistles, I entirely passed by the question, as I have already stated, as to what the path of faithfulness would have been, if these Churches *refused to repent*. If they listened to the appeal of Christ, and put away the evil, there could not be a question as to remaining in fellowship with the body. But what, if this were not the case? For it must be remembered that this was the *practical* question at issue at the time my letter was written. "How are assemblies to be dealt with, wherein corruption is found? Are they to be separated from? Are all coming from them indiscriminately to be rejected? Are all gatherings also to be rejected, who may receive from gatherings where such evil exists? What saith the Spirit to the Churches? Have we instructions from the word of God?" (*Letter*, p. 9).

Now, if I had said, that if evil was known to exist in an assembly of Christians, their degeneracy claimed service; such service as we see rendered by the Apostle to the Corinthians, the success of which filled his soul with thanksgiving; such service again, as we see ministered by Him in these Epistles, who walked among the golden candlesticks, in making solemn appeals to their hearts and consciences to repent, and put away the evil; I should have rightly divided this portion of the word of God. If I had also said, that if this service was owned of God, and the corruption and evil were confessed and put away, [as we saw at Corinth] that then there would have been no cause for separation from such an assembly; but, on the contrary, a closer knitting of heart and fellowship than ever; who could have gainsaid it? But I went beyond this. I not only omitted altogether from consideration the Epistle to the Laodiceans, which would have settled the question at once as to corporate rejection; but I argued that no such thing {as corporate rejection} was recognized in Scripture.

For besides the question, "How are assemblies to be dealt with, wherein corruption is found?" there is another very grave and solemn one, How are assemblies to be dealt with, *wherein corruption is refused to be judged and put away*? Supposing those Churches *refused* to repent; refused to judge and put away the evil; what then would have been the path of those individuals among them who desired to be faithful to the Lord? "He that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," what was to be *His* course, if the body refused to repent? Ought he to continue to have fellowship with it, or to be separate from it? How ought other assemblies to act in such a case? For example: the Church at Ephesus, when the Lord addressed it at the time of

John's vision at Patmos, had evidently not arrived at that point of declension where separation from it would have been the path of faithfulness to Christ. He still owned it as a golden candlestick. But it had fallen; for it had left its first love. Solemn indeed was His word to the assembly; while at the same time He owned all that was for God in it, "Repent, or I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, *except thou repent*." I do not stay to inquire here what this threatened judgment to the assembly implies; but I only ask, Could it have been a path approved of the Lord, who, on the failure of the body addresses the heart and conscience of the *individual*, to have remained in communion with the assembly, if by its refusal to repent, it had consequently exposed itself to the execution of the Lord's judgment against it? Would not communion with such a body, in that case, have been to have partaken of its sins, and consequently of its judgment?

Again, in the cases of Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, etc. where there was not only *inward* declension as at Ephesus but manifest *doctrinal* and *moral* evil, the same reasoning applies with still greater force. No question that service as to their degeneracy ought to be the *first* step; but suppose it had failed, and that these assemblies had refused to repent, and put away the evil that was among them: what then?

Suppose that Pergamos had not put away those 'that held the doctrine of Balaam,' and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes; and that Thyatira had still suffered Jezebel to teach, and seduce the servants of Christ to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols; what, in such a case would have been their corporate position before the Lord? Would they not have morally become partakers of the evil they refused to judge and to put away? Would they not thereby have become identified with it; and guilty, not only of carelessness of what became the Lord's house, as in the first instance in letting in the evil, and tolerating it when there; but of rebellion against the Lord's authority by refusing to purge it out? The very call of the Lord to repent, proves that their present state was evil; but what would it have been if they had refused to obey that call?

But the case of the Laodicean Church shows still more clearly the unsoundness of my reasoning. In this Assembly we find no reproof from the Lord on account of any outward immorality or false doctrine. It was evidently in their own sight in a flourishing condition, "rich, increased with goods, and in need of nothing." There is no notice either of persecution from without, or trouble from within. But however fair in their own eyes, He, that is the faithful and true Witness, threatens to spue them out of His mouth. And what was their sin? Lukewarmness. "They were neither cold nor hot." A mere negation as some may say; but it was the awful negation of lack of zeal for God; the besetting sin of these last days, but not the less evil and offensive, wherein "because iniquity abounds, the love of many has waxed cold." Oh let us remember, that this sin above all others deserves and provokes his righteous indignation. "*Repent*," He says, "or I will spue thee out of my mouth; be zealous, therefore, and *repent!*" Now let me ask any loyal heart, in case the body continued in its state of self-complacency, highmindedness, and lukewarmness, and refused to repent; ought the saint that listened to his Lord's

voice and opened the door, to go on with the lukewarm body? Could he continue in the fellowship of its worship? Could they be led by the Spirit? Could they pray in the Holy Ghost? Could He, who came to glorify Christ, guide the prayers, the praises, the fellowship, and service of such an Assembly? Ought he then, who heard “what the Spirit saith to the Churches,” to remain in fellowship with an Assembly which Christ was about to spue out of his mouth? Would he not, by partaking of its sins, become partaker of its plagues? Ought he not rather to be separate from the evil that the Lord was about to judge? Is not the direction as binding *now* upon the man of God, as it was in the days of Timothy, where the form of godliness exists without the power, “from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

These very epistles, then, prove most clearly that there is such a thing as *corporate rejection* on the Lord’s part -- the rejection of whole bodies or assemblies, where there has been departure from him, and, after testimony against the evil, refusal to repent? And, consequently, they prove that cases may occur now, as well as then (sorrowful and deeply humbling as they must always be to one that loves the Lord’s glory and the Lord’s people), when, after service and testimony have failed, the path of faithfulness to Christ, as well as safety to ourselves, may call for separation from an assembly of Christians, because of their *corporate* condition before the Lord. This I failed to see when I wrote that letter, save in the case already referred to in the note, p.11.

Bear with me, while I repeat again, that the question before us is not the ground of reception into the Church, but of godly discipline and faithfulness to Christ. Discipline can only be exercised on those already recognized as Christians. Neither is it the question, whether degeneracy or failure in an assembly demands service, rather than separation. I fully and heartily grant this. But the question is, as I have before stated, May not an assembly, such as Sardis and Laodicea, so depart from Christ in principle and practice, that, after service has failed, separation from it becomes a positive duty to Christ, and the only way of escape from participation in the evil, and the Lord’s judgment because of it?

To use the words of a brother, from whose letter I have before quoted:

Supposing a body refuses to act in discipline; supposing after service as to its degeneracy, or in spite of remonstrance, or *in any way which shows deliberate principle*, it will accept of false doctrine, or of false practice (specially as to what concerns Christ’s glory, though all really does), what am I to do then? Am I to walk with it; that is, accept myself also in my own acts, the sin of which the Holy Ghost calls me to repent? I admit such a case ought never to be. The reasoning with Mr. Kelly quoted in my former letter was on the ground that the *principle* and *system* of the Churches *were God’s own*. Is that the case where doctrinal dishonor to Christ, heresy, or immorality are accepted as admissible in the Church of God; that is, as compatible with Christ’s house? Is that *God’s* principle and system? Surely there can be but one reply -- that cannot be God’s system, which would tolerate or sanction anything that is contrary to the holiness and the truth of God, or the glory of His only-begotten and beloved Son!

Thus it is a false idea that asserts that Rev. 2 and 3 indicates that we may be in

association with leaven. From where do such unholy and antichristian notions come? Rev. 2:14, 15 teaches us, in effect, that we may not allow among us those who HOLD evil doctrine. It does not say anything about teaching it. Persons must not HOLD doctrine which is leaven.

In agreement with Rev. 2 and 3, another has said:

To have among us those that hold false doctrine and those that teach false doctrine is in either case as strongly rebukable as to have those that do the evil things which result from false doctrine, and the allowing any such thing among us is here rebuked of the Lord.⁴⁹

The call to us is to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Many Christians have a hearing problem which results from a heart problem. There is a state of soul that precludes a true and faithful hearing. Our Lord Jesus has warned us, “Take heed therefore HOW ye hear” (Luke 8:18). We do not see the force of Scripture for some moral reason and state of soul. We must be careful about not only what we hear, but HOW we hear, i. e., in what state of soul and with what attitude we hear. The diligent application of Luke 8:18 and 1 Cor. 3:10 would preserve us from ungodly notions and ways.

Appendices on 2 John

Appendix 1: Evangelicals’ Failure on 2 John

PARTAKES IN HIS WICKED WORKS

Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary, 1, 2, 3 John*, Waco: Word, p. 334 (1984), who thinks a church is being addressed, wrote:

Being “a partner” in the evil deeds of the heretics by thus saluting them (κοινωνεῖ, literally, “shares”) implies an active participation in their errors.

That vitiates the true force and leads to unholiness in personal associations. See how the well-known Anglican evangelical, John R. Stott, who also takes the view that John’s letter is addressed to a church, limits the force:

Secondly, John’s instruction may well relate not only to an ‘official’ visit of false teachers but to extending them an ‘official’ welcome, rather than merely private hospitality . . . In the third place, John is referring to teachers of false doctrine about the incarnation, and not to every false teacher. This verse gives us no warrant to refuse fellowship to those, even teachers, who do not agree with our interpretation of apostolic doctrine in every particular (*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, The Letters of John*, rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 216, 1998).

49. *The Present Testimony* 15:397.

You should see that this makes room for fellowship with persons who deny various fundamental doctrines regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is another ‘evangelical’ undermining:

In view of vv. 7-9, the community needs to understand how to treat the false teachers when they come to the remaining Johannine house churches bringing their heretical Christology and attempting to win them over to the schism and away from the Elder. **If anyone comes to you** refers to the practice of both the false teachers and the Elder’s friends of visiting around the circuit of the several congregations in the Johannine orbit for which the Elder is responsible . . . **Anyone who welcomes him** implies more than just a greeting; it includes cooperation in and help with the mission of those who have divided the community (*New International Biblical Commentary, 1, 2, and 3 John*, Peabody: Hendricksen, p. 158, 1993).

These treatments are typical ‘evangelical’ ways of treating 2 John. What is involved in saying this letter is addressed to a church is a two-fold undermining of holiness in associations: (1) limiting the meaning of “the doctrine of the Christ” strictly to the incarnation as a fact; (2) claiming that the greeting means, or indicates, approval. This opens the door to evil associations regarding fundamentally evil teachings. No wonder that we see an atrocious mixture in what is called evangelicalism. For just one example of a mixture, consider the Promise Keepers.

The *Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 365, 1981), on this passage falls into the same character as the above quotations, and the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 369, 1966) likewise falls far short.

Appendix 2: Open Brethrenism’s Failure on 2 John

PARTAKES IN HIS WICKED WORKS

William MacDonald (Open Brethren) does not really deal with the implications of this matter:

To show them hospitality is to take sides with those who are against our Savior . . . But when we do know a man to be a false teacher, it would be disloyal to Christ to befriend him (*Believer’s Bible Commentary*, New testament, Nashville: Nelson, p. 1147, 1990).

Neither does Donald L. Norbie, of Open Brethren, in writing on 2 Timothy, concerning 2 Tim. 2:21:

So one who would be useful to the Lord must keep himself morally and doctrinally pure. To associate with false teachers is to defile oneself (2 John 10-11) (*2 Timothy and Titus*, Kansas City: Walterick, p. 42, 1992).

It is left sufficiently vague while such treatments seem to deal with the matter.

Neither does F. F. Bruce (Open Brethren) deal with the implications, but

uses the occasion to ridicule Edward Cronin who terminated fellowship in 1849 with A. N. Groves, because of ANG’s support of Bethesda (*The Epistles of John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 142, 1970).

“Truth, Love, and Obedience. A Meditation on John’s 2nd Epistle,” *The Believer’s Magazine*, New Series 19:110 is quite unsatisfactory also.

Alex Joyce, Bible Reading Outline, in *Truth and Tidings* 44:323, wrote:

V 10 OUR ATTITUDE towards false teachers:

keep them out of our houses
don’t even wish them a good day
doing nothing to promote their evil purposes

V 11 have no fellowship with their evil deeds.

Bad belief is always accompanied or is followed by bad behavior.

Doctrinal apostasy and moral apostasy are twins, never separated.

That is an outline of a Bible Reading on 2 John!! See how it avoids the responsibility about being a partaker. To continue: Ian Paisley, in “Expository Gleanings in John’s Second Epistle,” *Words in Season* 78:200, wrote:

No quarter should ever be given to those who propagate evil doctrine concerning the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus. Even to say Godspeed to such is to be a partaker with him in his evil deeds.

So what? For all that, he does not tell his readers the real consequences. The above writers are from the ‘Gospel Hall’ circle of independents. Let us now look at *The Witness*. C. F. Hogg, in answer to inquiry concerning 2 John 10 did say:

“The receiver is as bad as the thief,

but does not deal with the implications of this for fellowship with others (*The Witness* 60: 159).

Hy Pickering answered a question thus:

WHEN DOCTRINE “NOT PROVEN”

Question 1744. Would it be right to invite a person who holds that the Everlasting Punishment of the Wicked is not proven in the Scriptures to take part in the ministry of God’s Word in any Assembly of Christians?

Answer. Certainly not. As well invite a questionable burglar to your home for tea; or a modernist into a Bible reading. If the person is not clear on one of the most important of Scripture Truths, why not leave him till he considers and makes up his mind on the subject.

The leaven of “doctrine” is noted in Gal. 5:9-12. The treatment of those holding evil doctrine is detailed in 2 John 9, 10. Let anyone *questionable* be kept off any platform till he is fully assured.

Here is a “platform” person who brings not the doctrine of eternal, conscious punishment. Keep him off the platform! The real answer is: *excommunication*; connect Gal. 5:9-12 (a little leaven leavens the whole lump) with 1 Cor. 5 and

excommunicate him or the assembly is a leavened lump. *That* is the godly assembly treatment. 2 John 9, 10 is personal responsibility and where not carried out, such a one having made himself one with the evil by indifference to it, being thus a partaker of wicked works, must likewise be dealt with. Open Brethren cannot bring themselves to say such things because they *all* affirm that the lump cannot be leavened until all in an assembly are doing the evil! So the assembly is not leavened by the toleration of a leavened person within. Yet, 2 John 9, 10 shows how a person can make herself a partaker of the wicked works of another, without imbibing the evil doctrine, yet it is said that this cannot happen in an assembly by the toleration of such as teach evil doctrine. What? break bread with such, but you are not made “a partaker of their evil deeds”? Can you be serious?

Consider another implication in this quotation. “The treatment of those holding evil doctrine is detailed in 2 John 9, 10.” But 2 John 9, 10 is really about one’s own house -- and the writer quoted leaves the door of God’s house open here.

R. E. Harlow, of Open Brethren, published a paper, *Weeds, Leaven, and the Brethren Movement*.⁵⁰ He wrote:

The following statements⁵¹ from “assembly” teachers detract from the glory of the Lord. They can be documented in writings or tape recordings.

A. OMNISCIENCE

“The Lord did not retain omniscience.”

“The omniscience is all on the Father’s side.”

“To be just like His brethren it would be required that He leave the credit card of divinity behind . . . He did not have the credit card of omniscience here.”

“This knowledge was bestowed on Him progressively and gradually, steadily increasing in accordance with His age, of childhood, youth and manhood, under the training and education of the Father through the Spirit.”

“Assuming that it was impossible for Him to sin . . . it is also possible that He did not know that this was the case.”

“It is inconceivable that the Lord could have anticipated Gethsemane . . . a totally unexpected event . . . unanticipated . . . totally unforeseen.”

The Gethsemane experience “plays a part in perfecting Jesus.” In Geth-

50. Kansas City: Believer’s Bible Lessons, n.d.

51. {For many of the evil doctrines that he quotes, the reader will find help in the following, available from Present Truth Publishers:

The Eternal Relationships in the Godhead.

Could Christ Sin?

The Collected Writings of A. C. Ord.

semane, “The Lord Jesus . . . prayed that He might escape the second death.”

B. OMNIPOTENCE

“Christ never acted out of His deity.”

“The New Testament does not teach that He could take on human nature and continue to act as God.”

“The Lord worshiped God . . . has the same resources as Adam . . . needed to pray.”

“But this power was not of Himself, because He had emptied Himself of His divine omnipotence which He possessed in the heavens.”

“To say that the child Jesus exercised from His cradle the care of Providence over the entire universe is of course monstrous.”

C. HOLINESS

“Hebrews 4:15 says He lived His life without sinning . . . ‘apart from sin,’ not meaning ‘without the ability to sin,’ but ‘without having, in fact, sinned’ . . . Jesus experienced temptation in just the same manner as we do . . . this sinlessness was the result of ‘conscious decision’ on His part in the midst of intense conflict.”

“Adam and Jesus experienced genuine temptation . . . Christ defeated Satan in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

D. SELFCONSCIOUSNESS

“Do you believe that Jesus Christ didn’t know he was God for any period of His life? . . . Yes, there was a growing awareness of who He was.”

“The Growing Messianic Consciousness (doctrine) is completely within the realm of orthodoxy.”

E. DEITY

“After emptying Himself of His Divine Condition He took on human nature.”

“He never drew upon His divine attributes.”

“He had emptied Himself of the Divine condition and took on the human nature or condition.”

“He gave up His equality with God.”

“‘I and the Father are One’ means only a unity of purpose and attitude,” like Adam and Eve, or Paul and Timothy.

The Son “was inferior . . . subordinate . . . not equal to the Father.”

“Relinquishing in incarnation equality with God as a visible personal prerogative . . .”

“The Son has taken a new place relatively, that is inferiority to the Father.”

“There is a sweet mutuality of affection of Father and Son but they are not coequal.”

“Son of God is equivalent to King of Israel . . . synonymous with Messiah.”

“The Word **was** God . . . ‘the Word became flesh’ . . . to avoid saying ‘God became flesh.’”

The Apostles “ascribe unique deity to the Father alone.” “Ultimate deity is ascribed to the Father.”

Christ “had the spirit of a man and so was able to commune constantly with His Father.”

Immediately after these quotations, prefacing some inadequate remarks about what “elders” should do about this, he wrote:

These doctrines are more like the leaven in Matthew 13 than weeds. They have a tendency to spread and defile the whole lump.

There is a staggering amount of leaven in these statements. At the very least, the Open Brethren assemblies where these things are tolerated are leavened lumps. In such cases these doctrines do have “a tendency to spread,” but his statement, “to spread and defile the whole lump,” is an assertion that the tolerated presence of such leavenous teachings has not already leavened the lump. The Open Brethren position is that all in the assembly must believe the teaching before the assembly is defiled. Proof of this will be given in the third pamphlet in this series on the holiness of Christian fellowship, some proof of which is published already.⁵²

Here is another quotation from R. E. Harlow who cataloged the above evil teachings:

In this connection we must be careful to avoid “circles of fellowship” and the old exclusive doctrine of endless defilement.” [But see W. Kelly, *The Bible Treasury* 12:143; and *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:219, 222, 224.] Thus a man might be a born-again Christian and a member of a modernist church, without really condoning false doctrine.⁵³

Where did this start? A letter signed by 10 leading brethren from Bethesda (1848) says:

Even supposing that those who inquired into the matter had come to the same conclusion, touching the amount of positive error therein contained, this would not have guided us in our decision respecting individuals coming from Plymouth. For supposing the author of the tracts were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation truth; especially as those meeting at Ebrington Street, Plymouth, last January, put forth a statement, disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts [July 3, 1848].⁵⁴

G. H. Lang wrote:

52. *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, Defense of Truth, 1845 - 1850*, Morganville: Present Truth Publishers, 1994.

53. R. E. Harlow, in *The Corporate Christian Testimony of Believers in the Assemblies of North America*, p. 15, (1958).

54. W. Trotter, *The Origin of (so-called) Open Brethrenism*, p. 59.

Thirty-five years later, in a letter dated from Bristol, Dec. 19th, 1883, Mr. James Wright [successor and son-in-law of G. Muller of Bethesda] reaffirmed this [*Letter of the Ten*, para.6] by saying, “the ground upon which we receive to the Lord’s table is soundness in the faith and consistency of life of the individual believer. We should not refuse to receive one who we had reason to believe was perfectly sound in the faith and consistent in life merely because he, or she, was in fellowship with a body of Christians who would allow Mr. Newton to minister among them . . .”⁵⁵

We see it alleged here that a person who is in fellowship with such an one as the blasphemer against Christ, Mr. B. W. Newton,⁵⁶ is “consistent in life”! Notice also the palliation of the evil association in the use of the word “merely.” W. Hoste was very candid when he wrote:

. . . we totally reject the collateral theory of defilement.⁵⁷

E. K. Groves (son of A. N. Groves) told us about the discipline he learned at the time he was among exclusives:

The discipline I had learned to hold was, not only to avoid those whose walk was evil, and doctrine unscriptural, but equally to renounce fellowship with those whose walk was blameless and doctrine pure, if these transgressed in holding such fellowship.⁵⁸

Another of the Open Brethren, Ian McDowell, summarized thus:

To sum up -- did association with Newton at Plymouth defile the Woodfalls? “Open Brethren” say, not, for they were personally free of his doctrinal errors.⁵⁹ “Exclusive Brethren” say, yes, for he was ecclesiastically associated with him (i.e., being “one body” with him at Plymouth).⁶⁰ This is “the Bethesda Question” and its divisive result.⁶¹

2 John 10 says, “he who greets him partakes in his wicked works.” E. K. Groves said, “whose walk was blameless.” Which is right? the Apostle John or E. K. Groves? A system is in question here, note well. At any rate, he gave up the truth that evil associations leaven, and became a follower of Bethesda.

F. F. Bruce (OB) quoted the statement by A. N. Groves:

55. *The Local Assembly*, p. 10, (1929).

56. I have amply documented B. W. Newton’s blasphemous teachings alleging **Christ’s circumstantial distance from God** in my *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, vol. 2., and shows that he continued to teach this blasphemy for years after the Bethesda division.

57. *Rejudging the Question*, p. 4.

58. *Bethesda Family Matters*, p. 163.

59. {I have disproved this oft-repeated assertion, that his partisans did not imbibe his evil teachings, in my *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, vol. 2.}

60. {Thus there were two charges. Some who held B. W. Newton’s doctrine were received, as well as others received who were linked by fellowship with him.}

61. *A Brief History of the Brethren*, p. 30.

I would infinitely rather bear with all their evils than separate from their good. and says that this expresses the “open brethren” ideal.⁶²

Having set aside a basic truth of holiness in associations, these writers speak of such persons as “consistent in life” and “blameless in walk.” It is by undermining purity that they so speak of persons who are in a defiled connection.

All who break bread with those who teach leavenous doctrine are even more partakers of the “wicked works” (2 John 11) than those who only greet them. Persons who teach leavenous doctrines are “vessels to dishonor” (2 Tim. 2) and in order to be a vessel to honor, one must purge oneself from the vessels to dishonor (2 Tim. 2:20, 21). Thus, one who is not purged from vessels to dishonor is not himself a vessel to honor. This subject is treated at length in the second paper in the series on the holiness of Christian fellowship.

Appendix 3: The Lake Geneva Conference Report’s Attack on 2 John

Many Christians want to shirk the responsibility for their associations, and want a broader “fellowship” than Scripture sanctions. They also shirk responsibility for the holiness of Christian fellowship under the guise of being loving and claiming that they are obeying the Word of God. The Scriptures which expose the evil of the unscriptural path of unholy associations must be adjusted and perverted so as to remove their true meaning and practical bearing. And thus God is made the author of what is, in reality, their unholiness in personal and corporate fellowship.

The most complete way to get rid of the condemning force of 2 John against any fellowship with evil teaching regarding Christ and His work is this: define what is said in such a manner as to virtually remove its application as having in view teachers of evil doctrine concerning the person of Christ who are among Christians. Thus, for example, a person who denies the eternal Sonship of Christ, or who denies the conscious, eternal punishment of the wicked,⁶³ or who denies that Christ had a human spirit, or that when the Son “emptied” Himself (Phil. 2:5) He divested Himself of omniscience, etc., would not come under 2 John 9, 10. But, in fact, such teachings are not bringing “the doctrine of the Christ” and are leaven. So the evil perversion of 2 John 9, 10, in effect and in reality, condones being a “partaker” of these “wicked works” but defines the passage in such a way that this is removed from the passage.

62. *Who Are the Brethren?* p. 6.

63. Was Christ *annihilated* on the cross as the punishment for your sins?

If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psa. 11:3).

A recent assault on 2 John 9, 10 by signatories of the Lake Geneva Conference Report, March 1999 opens with a chapter, “Hermeneutics: The discipline of Understanding.” It also has a chapter called “Fellowship: Finding the Limits.” At the end of this chapter there is a footnote on 2 John 7-11 which shamelessly illustrates not only their false “hermeneutics” and false “limits”; it concisely shows their antagonism to holiness regarding Christian personal and corporate responsibility -- and demonstrates the agenda pervading that conference for which it is claimed that “On March 1, 1999 the Lord brought together 28 brethren who responded to a general invitation to study the Word of God,” who, it says, “constantly prayed for the Head of the Church to lead us in His will” (p. 3). The results show that it was *the flesh* that *called* the conference and the *flesh* that *led them*, if not worse. Clearly, the agenda was to examine the Scriptures to find ways to get rid of the Scripture teaching of defilement by association. Let us come to the note on 2 John, here quoted in its entirety:

Note:

After the conference, a question was raised concerning the teaching of 2 John 7-11. Like other passages we have reviewed in this report, the context of 2 John does not permit its use as a proof text for defilement by association. The focus of the passage is apostasy, and the apostle’s warning addresses the danger of implied endorsement of the teachings of these apostate teachers (who denied the incarnation of the Lord Jesus). Thus, those who welcome them are partakers in their evil deeds because their welcome implies a *defacto* endorsement. Since the apostle is warning against apostasy, it would be unwarranted to use this passage as a basis for barring from practical fellowship believers who clearly evidence life in Christ, but who observe different ecclesiastical practices (p. 44).

1. *The focus of the passage is not apostasy.* The focus is “**the doctrine of the Christ**” (v. 9). Above, a few parts of what constitutes the doctrine of the Christ were named. The signatories want to direct your thought away from *that* in order to focus on what will allow the widest possible fellowship without it involving association with evil. That is the objective, clearly stated in the words, “the context of 2 John does not permit its use as a proof text for defilement by association.”

Observe what the conferees have done here. They have defined “the doctrine of the Christ” to mean “apostasy,” i.e., those “who denied the incarnation of the Lord Jesus” as a fact. The result is that they have excluded from the meaning of “the doctrine of the Christ” everything except the incarnation as a historical fact. That is an evil definition out of their own minds -- not of the Spirit of truth.

In their attempt to mitigate the true force of 2 Tim. 2:19-21, the signatories say:

... e.g. Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17) were both apostates; cp. 1 Timothy 1:20 (p. 18).

Again, this is merely an *assumption* about them being apostates: if the delivery of Hymenaeus to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20) shows that he is an apostate, then the man of 1 Cor. 5 was an apostate too, because he also was delivered to Satan. Yet they acknowledge that:

It is very significant to note that the man *was* a believer, a fact later established in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (p. 34).

The result of their system is that a believer may be an apostate and a believer at one and the same time, while Heb. 6:4-6 shows that “it is impossible to renew again to repentance . . .” an apostate. Yes, indeed their use of Scripture *is* significant -- signifying the evil of their self-serving views of apostasy forced on Scripture to support their evil views of ‘fellowship.’ The signatories no more know what apostasy is than they know what the holiness of Christian fellowship is.

Furthermore, since the man of 1 Cor. 5 was a believer and was leavened, a person may be a believer and leavened by fundamentally evil doctrine (cp. footnote 17 on p. 21), which, of course, this system will not have since it is deliberately inclusive of what we should know is fundamental evil concerning “the doctrine of the Christ.”

2. The next thing the conferees attack is the responsibility of the elect lady (and of all saints). Her responsibility is that if anyone comes to her and “bring not this doctrine” -- the doctrine of the Christ -- “do not receive him into the house, and greet him not; for he who greets him partakes in his wicked works” (vv. 10, 11). As the conferees forced a perverted meaning on “the doctrine of the Christ,” so here they force on this warning the perverted meaning that such greeting “implies a *de facto* endorsement.” They say this to remove the responsibility of not giving greeting to those who go forward, who bring not the doctrine of the Christ, by those who have not imbibed the evil -- by those who do not give a *de facto* endorsement.

3. Finally, the objective they want to reach is stated: *not* “barring from practical fellowship believers who clearly evidence life in Christ, but who observe different ecclesiastical practices.”

- a. So, if we were to ask these conferees that if James Taylor, Sr. or C. A. Coates, for example (both Apollinarians, also deniers of the eternal sonship, etc.),⁶⁴ should come to one of their assemblies, would they receive such? Likely they would want to squirm out of facing this by flippantly replying that such persons would not come. Or, if C. A. Coates came to their house, would they have him in and greet him? Would they have to their house one who denies the eternal Sonship? Doing that in a case of one

64. For proof, see *The Eternal Relationships in the Godhead*, available from the publisher.

who abides not in the doctrine of the Christ makes one a partaker in his wicked works. The word for partakes is *koinoneo*, to make one with, to make common with -- most solemn, except to palliators of evil, who try to get rid of this fact one way or another.

- b. The conferees hold the doctrine of Bethesda and its infamous *Letter of the Ten* wherein the leadership and the congregation endorsed receiving those coming from under the ministry of B. W. Newton.⁶⁵ Thus, if a congregation “breaks bread” with James Taylor, Sr. or C. A. Coates, or B. W. Newton, that congregation, having the “ecclesiastical practice” to do so, the conferees would receive persons coming from such a congregation. It may be that the conferees will say that they would examine such persons first in order to be sure that they have not imbibed the evil (?) teachings. But in any event, they deny that persons can be defiled, or leavened, by breaking bread with such persons (as well, as we have seen, by having them in the house and greeting them). Thus, a great principle that the conferees imagine they have found in Scripture is this:

It is sin (from within) that makes one unclean. Any attempt to apply this principle to ecclesiastical differences of practice has no basis in scripture and therefore evidences a sectarian spirit, which is itself a sin (Galatians 5:20). Therefore, it is not possible to be ‘defiled’ by expressing fellowship with believers of other traditions simply because they observe different ecclesiastical practices (p. 44).

Everything is reduced to some unimportant difference in ecclesiastical practice. Observe that this is calculated to swamp out the difference between an orthodox sect and a non-orthodox sect; or between a congregation that has no evil teaching among them and a congregation that has a teacher of evil doctrine among them. This is an important point to note. “Exclusive brethren” last century received persons coming from orthodox sects, but not from places where leaven was tolerated. And as

65. *The Letter of the Ten*, signed by 10 leaders of Bethesda (including George Muller and Henry Craik) and publicly endorsed by the great majority there, said:

For supposing the author of the tracts {B. W. Newton} were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation truth . . .

There were some who locally withdrew from Bethesda and remained on the ground of being gathered together to Christ’s name, as previously. The most complete, documented history of what *really* went on at Bethesda is found in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, Defense of Truth, 1845 - 1850*, Morganville: Present Truth Publishers, 1994. J. G. Bellett’s view of Bethesda is this:

I could not refuse to say that such principles of Church action as this would make any place a defiled place, in Levitical language, leprosy would be detected by the priest to be in the house (*A Letter as to “Bethesda,”* Sept. 18, 1849).

time went on the leavening spread and reception became increasingly difficult and restricted. This was noticed by “exclusive” writers but loose persons who quote “exclusive” writers in an attempt to claim that principles of reception were changed, avoid bringing this out clearly. We note that, in effect, the signatories are really refusing such a difference in practice. What this means is that they will receive persons leavened by fellowship with leaven. That is, they will receive those coming from under a ministry that includes evil teaching concerning fundamental truth; as Bethesda did in receiving persons from where B. W. Newton taught, when it was known that he was teaching evil doctrine concerning Christ. Moreover, he was not in apostasy.

- c. Their ‘fellowship’ is with a false Christ, and this affects their view of the breaking of bread. Their leavenous paper (p. 34) said:

Since the basis for fellowship is Christ, the man was expelled because he did not evidence this essential relationship with Christ.

The reason the signatories say this is because their system of fellowship is founded only on life in Christ -- rejecting the bearing of doctrinal evil and association with it as having to do with practical fellowship. Hence on p. 23 there is a heading which reads, “Fellowship not based on doctrine or practice,” followed on p. 24 by a heading, “Christ: the sole basis for fellowship.” What “Christ”? Their ‘fellowship’ includes a false Christ; for example, one who is not eternally Son in the Godhead, and includes the Christ in the quotations from R. E. Harlow in Appendix 2. And as they have fellowship with those who doctrinally have a false Christ, so do the signatories have a corresponding breaking of bread. Would not the words *minimize* and *devalue* insufficiently apply to the special place the breaking of bread has when we consider the following extract?

Believers are called into a fellowship with God through Christ, and, on that basis, with one another. This fellowship has many practical expressions, of which the breaking of bread is only one. Scripture grants no particular status to this specific expression (p. 47).

Well, that fits their evil system of “fellowship.” It goes along with the indifference to a true Christ. This indifference comes out of them, out of their hearts.

Moreover, the first sentence confuses the distinction between 1 Cor. 1:9 and 1 John 1:3 which have to do with the church and the family of God respectively. Really, their fellowship is a fellowship with evil.

Appendix 4: What About the Lord’s Table and Supper?

What? -- I cannot have one who is unsound on “the doctrine of the Christ” in my house, in which *I* dwell, but I may welcome him at the *Lord’s* table? What

an audacious perversion of the holiness of Christian fellowship! Yet this has been said to be right; and under the pretense that since it is the *Lord’s* table, we cannot debar one. Moreover, since having such a one in the house, or giving him a courteous greeting, makes one a partaker of (makes you *one with*) the “wicked works,” breaking bread with him does not do that? What a notion of fellowship in the breaking of bread that is!⁶⁶ Give some thought to this.

If a person does not hold the evil teaching and knows it is evil, but continues to transgress 2 John 9,10, her behavior is worse than blindness as to the evil. What is the moral state of a woman who says that she sees the leaven and continues to associate with it? Another has said:

I am aware that it is stated that we can deal with conduct (with morality), but not with these questions. But this is what appears to me so excessively evil. Decency of conduct is necessary to communion; but a man may blaspheme Christ -- THAT is no matter: it is a matter not of conduct, but of conscience. It is hinted that perhaps if it be a teacher, he may be dealt with. In truth, the apostle desires even a woman not to let such a person into her house. It is not therefore so difficult to deal with. Just think of a system that makes blasphemous views of Christ, which may amount to a denial of Him, to be a matter of private conscience, having nothing to do with communion! . . . Now this principle is worse than false doctrine; because it knows the falseness and blasphemy of it, and then says it is no matter. I do not own such meetings as meetings of believers . . .⁶⁷

J. A. VonPoseck wrote:

And if the apostle enjoined the Corinthians not even to take a common meal at the same table with that incestuous wicked person, could he have intended to say, think ye, that they quietly might sit down and break bread with those who attacked the very foundations of the Christian faith, nay, the person of Christ Himself and His work? What! associate and break bread with them at the table of the Lord (Whom they had blasphemed) to “show His death till He come”! The very thought of such a Judas-fellowship is so revolting to every

66. F. C. Jennings went with Open Brethrenism. He labored with casuistic reasonings and what I consider misrepresentations of those he was once connected in practical fellowship to get others to join in. He wrote some stunning words about 2 John in order to overthrow the real bearing:

For fear of this complicity {“with the most fundamental wickednesses of Christendom”} you do not admit us to the Lord’s supper with you. But it is not written, “receive him not to the *Lord’s* supper,” but “receive him not *into your house*.” Have you never done that with any of us? Do you not do that frequently? It is not written “for he that *breaks bread* with him is a partaker of his evil deeds;” but “he that *biddeth* him God speed (the ordinary salutation) is partaker of his evil deeds.” Have you not, do you not, do that constantly? (A Last Appeal, New York: Fitch, p. 5.

One has to really see it stated to believe some sink so low.

67. *The Bible Treasury* 3:142.

Christian sentiment, that I need not say more about it.⁶⁸

Sad to say, this godly “Christian sentiment” is very little in evidence amongst the professed people of God.

Sometimes a Christian does not want to go so far as the *Lake Geneva Conference Report* (see Appendix 3) but still wants to lower the force of 2 John. Let me give an example of how this is done. On May 6, 1959 I wrote to E. F. (a traveling preacher among Open Brethren, and assistant editor of *Help and Food*) concerning 2 John 9-11 and he replied by saying that:

“they become a partial partaker of his evil deeds.”

Where did the word “partial” come from? It came from the flesh that tries to weaken a Christian’s responsibility for his association with leaven. Here is something better from Samuel Ridout:

Much question has been raised as to how far this treatment is to go, of those who while themselves personally sound (if that can be called soundness which does not instinctively resent dishonor to our holy Lord) do receive or greet the bringer of false doctrine . . . the apparently sound and pious, in going on with error which they have not personally imbibed, are more dangerous than the openly evil; for they mislead others by their example. Furthermore, the scripture before us declares that the one who greets is a partaker of the other’s evil deeds. Most certainly then they illustrate the apostle’s word, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” and are themselves exposed to the same treatment as the false teacher. Most unquestionably this applies to all real fellowship, at the table of the Lord and elsewhere. Doubtless too, if we were more simple and spiritual, we would, in love and faithfulness show by our refusal to greet those neutral how abhorrent to God is all tampering with unholy denials of His Son. Nor will it be out of place to call attention to the fact that in these closing days of the Church’s history, there seems to be a revival, in one form or another, of the early blasphemies as to the Son of God. Let us warn one another against the least carelessness as to this. There can be tolerance of many things -- weak and faulty apprehension of dispensational and other truth -- but no unholy touch of the Person or Work of our blessed, adorable Lord should be tolerated for a moment.⁶⁹

To have in the assembly persons who transgress the directions in 2 John 10, 11 means breaking bread with those who are partakers of wicked works. Such need to be refused. Failure to do so characterizes that assembly as complicit in this indifference to the Son of the Father.

One of the Open Brethren, W. Roger, in answer to a question, wrote:

A person who holds the doctrines indicated in the question {“that baptism by immersion is necessary to salvation, and who deny the conscious eternal punishment of the wicked”} is in error that is fundamental; and if he were a

68. *The Bible Treasury* 19:92.

69. Note in the *Numerical Bible*, *in loco*.

member of the assembly, would, or should, be put away from their fellowship. How then could it possibly be the mind of the Lord that any member of the assembly should associate with such a one? It is a case to which the principle laid down in 2 John 10, 11 would very definitely apply.⁷⁰

Is this answer, quoted here in full, adequate? No. Note that he did not explain what the principle in 2 John 9, 10 is. Moreover, he would not say that that assembly would be a leavened lump. So while admitting that such doctrines come under the ban of 2 John 9, 10, he has not explained the results of violating that ban. It is a politic answer, though he realized that there is a connection between 2 John 9, 10 and the assembly. Compare his answer with an answer by W. Kelly:

Q. 1 Cor. 11:20. As it is argued that, in refusing the title of some professing Christians to partake of the Lord’s supper, we make it “our own,” not His, I wish to know what is His revealed mind.

A. All depends on whether the professing Christians are “leavened” or even worse. The New Testament is clear that “leaven” includes both moral corruption (1 Cor. 5) and doctrinal (Gal. 5), neither of which is compatible with the communion of saints. They are “unleavened” in Christ and are commanded to purge out the old leaven that they may be a new lump in consistency with their standing. So runs His word in the scripture which specially treats of discipline in the assembly. The Galatian evil was yet more dangerous though different. But more hateful to God than either is the case of those who allow such as bring not the doctrine of Christ; and all the worse if they have the reputation of piety. The elect lady and her children (2 John) are charged with no heterodoxy, but are bound not even to receive into the house one who falsified Christ. To salute him knowingly was to partake of his evil deeds. How much more to join with him in the Lord’s supper! Such a supper would have become not “their own” merely, but *anti-christian*. It is precisely because it is the Lord’s supper that no one should be welcome there who is known to be deliberately dishonoring the Lord. Doubtless he that does not bring the doctrine of Christ (the truth of His person as come in flesh) is an enemy of the darkest dye; and no principle can be falsier or less holy than that piety or orthodoxy gives immunity where that evil is allowed, or fellowship with such an one, no matter what the plea. It would be “our own supper,” if the Lord’s authority were supplanted by our own will; but if it went so far as to allow any who undermine His personal glory, it becomes their enemy’s. It is Christ’s dishonor to screen and condone the sins of those that bear His name, and far worse than belonging to a sect, evil as this is.⁷¹

70. *The Believer’s Magazine*, New Series 40:78.

71. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 1:96.

Appendix 5: Some Other Ways in Which Doctrinal Evil is Palliated

And truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey
(Isa. 59:15).

HOW CAN HE BE A CHRISTIAN IF HE HOLDS EVIL DOCTRINE?

There is a specious, *unholy* argument that to charge a Christian with evil doctrine is to deny that he is a Christian. This false idea is equivalent to saying that charging the man in 1 Cor. 5 with evil conduct is to deny that he is a Christian. But 2 Cor. 2 proves this view false because the leavened man turned out to be a brother.

A man's heart might be better than his head. But if his head is leavened, the leaven must be purged out from, and by, the assembly.

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING THAT IS RIGHT

Where a person holds leavenous doctrine and must be put away, there is usually a palliation of evil by various means. This has been the history of doctrinal controversy. There is a respect of persons; and justification is sought for not treating the doctrine as leaven. This reminds me of the words of H. H. Snell:

When a sentence is brought before Mr. F. E. Raven's supporters which they cannot defend, they bring one of his true sentences to meet it. But this is a corrupting principle; and it is clear that no amount of truth added to it can neutralize or justify one unscriptural sentence about our adorable Lord. On the same corrupting principle Mr. J. S. Oliphant speaks of some taking a sentence out of Mr. Raven's letters, and speaking of it as bad doctrine; as if a thousand additions of the truth could correct one false statement. If this mode of proceeding be admitted, then there will be no end to the propagation of false doctrine.⁷²

J. N. Darby wrote:

The more the question treated in the following tract is weighed, the more important it will be found; and the doctrine taught in Mr. Newton's "Remarks" to be the destruction of the gospel of truth, and to subvert the foundations of Christianity. The denial that it is meant so to do is nothing to the purpose. Mr. Irving denied it just as stoutly; *but a man's teaching is to be judged by what he teaches, not by his own opinion about it.* What Mr. Newton teaches subverts the truth as to Christ. If he says it does not, it only proves that he does not know the truth which it clearly does subvert. *The largest expressions of piety and holiness prove nothing.* They were found in Mr. Irving's writings, and much most blessed and precious truth too: few writings could be named where there is so much. It is well known how widely Mr. Prince's books were circulated, how highly they were

72. N. Noel, *History of the Brethren* 2:536.

appreciated, and how many were supposed to be converted by him. Now all acquainted with the circumstances know the horrible blasphemies in which it all has ended. *And now persons who examine the books judge that they find all through them the germ of the present horrors.*⁷³

EXPLAINING WORDS AWAY

In a letter dated Nov. 19, 1891, H. H. Snell wrote to one who was defending a person charged with holding evil doctrine, as follows:

But to my mind you spoil all: for what you declare to be "most objectionable," you excuse by saying, "I am sure you do not hold what it implies."

How could you pen such a sentence? The point is, what does *Scripture* say? There we find a teacher is held accountable for what he says. Paul as an apostle delivered two persons to Satan "that they may learn not to blaspheme." They had been uttering what was blasphemy. He also refers to some in another epistle, who were "*Saying* (observe *saying*) that the resurrection is past already," and he adds that "their *word* will eat as doth a canker." Another apostle wrote, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this *doctrine* (the doctrine of Christ), receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (see 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17, 18; 2 John 10, 11). Our Lord's words also were, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

How could anyone then who was walking uprightly before the Lord, either request, or receive "explanations" of words which dishonor Him?

On Jan. 13, 1892, he wrote:

Few things are more distressing to a servant of the Lord, than being brought into collision with his brethren; especially with any he has long known and respected. But when "the momentous subject of the Person of Christ," and the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel are in question, it is impossible to keep a good conscience by silence. Our Lord's words were, "He that is not with Me, is against Me" (Luke 11:23).

In November 1890, J. Dunlop wrote:

The question has been asked, "How is it that whenever any one goes to England and visits R. that they always come away convinced that he is all right?" The answer is, because they act in self-confidence and in disobedience to the Word of God, which says, in Romans 16:17, "*Mark them,*" and "*avoid them,*" not "*visit them.*" We do not need to go to England and see anybody, in order to judge F. E. R.'s written statements, put out by himself, as we have them here, and the Word of God, which we are responsible to judge them by.

Another wrote:

73. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 15:34.

Mr. J. G. Deck says: “in a work of Satan NEUTRALITY is impossible: if there is an attempt to shun the responsibilities and sorrows of a path of entire decision for Christ, the spiritual senses become *deadened*, the heart hardened, the conscience *torpid*, the judgment *perverted*, and soon *hostility* to the witnesses against the evil succeeds indifference to the truth.”⁷⁴

W. J. Lowe wrote, in 1891:

There is no dependence to be placed on any statement where false doctrine is held--its working is stamped by the character of Satan, from whom it really proceeds. When the doctrine is exposed, the first effort is always to deny that it is held, and the excuse of misrepresentation is eagerly clutched at. When shown to have been stated and maintained, it is explained away and covered up with statements of truth; then it is gradually adopted, and finally gloried in; and at length this is accompanied with contempt for those who do not hold it With spiritual delusion, the person under the power of evil is unconscious of it, and becomes unable to detect the difference between truth and falsehood . . .⁷⁵

LET HIM “WITHDRAW” IT

Another sad feature of dealing with evil doctrine is the way in which “withdrawal” is used as a cover-up and substitute for repudiation. Repudiation and repentance will manifest themselves by the soul having a sense of Psalms 51 and 2 Corinthians 2:7, and expressly judging the leaven. God looks for “repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth” (2 Timothy 2: 25). The true course would be to make a clean judgment of, and break with, the evil doctrine as was made by J. E. Batten respecting the doctrine of B. W. Newton (see *The Origin of (so-called) Open Brethrenism*, pp. 22, 23, by W. Trotter). But instead, so often the same teaching is put forth in better sounding words. Apropos to this is the following remark by J. N. Darby:

Mr. Newton having addressed “A Statement and Acknowledgment” respecting certain doctrinal errors to very many brethren (so, indeed, as to have reached, directly or indirectly, almost all), I desire to make some remarks upon it. I do not doubt many are quite able to judge of its value. Still, as there are very many ignorant of the real point and bearing of the error, and on whom the idea of an acknowledgment would act so as to set their mind at ease, and that from a disposition (which everyone would hail) to receive in grace the confession of error or fault, I feel it right for the sake of the beloved church of God, to weigh its value. I am aware that I shall be considered relentless . . .⁷⁶

He well knew he would be regarded as relentless for exposing the leaven and insisting that the leaven be judged. Thus instead of all bowing to the purging of

74. Quoted in *The History of the Brethren* 2:567. Emphasis was added by N. Noel.

75. Quoted in *Brief History of Ravenism*, p. 14.

76. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 15:181.

the leaven, those used of God in exposing it are denounced and calumniated, perhaps accused of sowing discord among brethren or of a heretical course. They are labeled unloving, rigid, hard and relentless. We need not doubt that persons can do these things and behave like that: it happens. But let us beware of using these labels as a tool. Let us be aware too that emotional, loving people are quite able to palliate serious matters when they are not involved, thus caring little for what is due to Christ, and yet can with difficulty throw off a grudge when personally offended. This often goes together. Sparing the flesh in oneself causes us to spare it in others as Saul spared Agag.

MANY GODLY BRETHREN DO NOT REGARD IT AS EVIL

Another form of palliation of evil is the objection raised to its exposure because many godly brethren do not regard it as evil. Let the following statement by J. N. Darby serve as a warning against the snare of this notion:

If the Spirit of God be really working in his {B. W. Newton’s} mind, the pointing out the deficiency of this will not hinder his going farther; and as the evil is confessedly very great, and specially as it is sought to be excused by the fact that many brethren did not find it out, it is worth while, for the sake of simple and unsuspecting minds, to enquire seriously if it is really abandoned, and to what extent.⁷⁷

Evil teachers are known to modify and alter their language and cover up the evil by connecting true statements with their doctrine. Again, JND said:

The author, as is his known custom, after making statements which subvert the faith, seeks by modifying, by making statements which are entirely different appear to be the same, or substituting one for the other, smothering up what was said by expatiating on recognized truths, to confound the minds of the simple, and escape the discrediting detection of the doctrines he has taught. Happier would it be to let it all alone; but it is due to souls that it should be known.

THERE HAVE BEEN PROCEDURAL ERRORS

Here is reference to a case and mode of palliation:

Nothing shows more the deplorably low moral state of saints, or the spiritual incapacity to discern the true bearings of that by which God is testing us, than the arguments which are used, and listened to, to justify continuing in association with evil. Greenwich, it is said, is not to be separated from, because every ecclesiastical form has not been gone through with reference to it. What are ecclesiastical *forms* when Christ is in question, or the saints of God themselves in danger, from the enemy’s power? “Have ye never read,” says the Lord, “what David did when he was an hungered, and they that were with him?” When the heir, the object of God’s counsels, was rejected, or his title and need was in question, did God hold to the forms or

77. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 15:181.

order of His house being maintained? No, the Lord puts His sanction on David's act, when he took of the showbread, which "was *not* lawful" for him to eat, and gave it to them that were with him. And He adds, "in this place is One greater than the temple." Are these forms to be weighed in the same scale with the Son of God, the Lord of all? Is the superstructure of more consequence than the foundation itself -- the One on whom the Church of God is built, and on whom all its safety, stability, and integrity depends? Under ordinary circumstances it is right enough to enter a man's house with all the deference and respect due to him. But if the house is on fire, and it is a question of rescuing the inmates, nobody thinks of knocking at the door and asking permission to enter. To force a way in and drag them out anyhow, is, at such a time *the only right thing*. "Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire" (Jude 23).

We add here some thoughts expressed by Mr. Darby on these points when passing through a similar crisis:

Never let the question of ecclesiastical subtleties swamp a broad principle of right and wrong. But I shall never be brought to such wickedness as to treat acceptance of blasphemers as an ecclesiastical question. If people like to walk with them or help and support the bearing with them at the Lord's Table they will not have me . . . I do not accept the setting aside my spiritual liberty; we are a flock, not an enclosure. (*Ecclesiastical Independency*, J.N.D.).⁷⁸

LET US ONLY CONDEMN IT

Another form of palliation of evil is indifference; or at best a condemnation without active resistance. Regarding Eli, another said:

"What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me." "And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord: Let him do what seemeth him good. Yes, in many respects this seems to have been an amiable, aged priest. Was it not even human kindness, or parental kindness? He might call it love, as many have done in this day. They have called it love to allow and pander to the false doctrine and evil they condemn. Have they not even slandered those who have sought to exclude the evil and give it no shelter? Oh, let us all take this solemn lesson of Eli's house to heart! Remember, brethren in Christ, judgment will begin at the house of God, as it swept away the house of Eli at the close of the history of Shiloh."⁷⁹

Eli's remark, "it is the Lord: Let him do what seemeth him good," is not pious. It is an unholy substitute for failure to rise in devotion to Jehovah and use his authority to put away the evil. Surely we see in his falling back when he heard

78. A. C. Ord, *The Glory of the Person of Christ*, p. 61. Now available in *The Collected Writings of A. C. Ord*, available from the publisher.

79. Charles Stanley *From Egypt to Shiloh*, p. 29.

that the ark was taken a sign that at bottom he loved Jehovah. He remonstrated with his wicked sons (1 Sam. 2:23) but he restrained them not (1 Sam. 3:13). No wonder the godly Hannah cried to Jehovah for a man-child. She became a Nazarite (Num. 6; 1 Sam. 1:15), and wanted a Nazarite son from Jehovah (1 Sam. 1:11) to purge the evil at Shiloh perpetrated by the house of Eli. May God grant that the numbers of Hannahs be increased!

DON'T BE OCCUPIED WITH EVIL

Often when doctrinal evil is exposed, Christians slight the exposure, if not actually opposing. This lays the ground for the further development of trouble among the people of God. If we do not judge ourselves, He will judge us (1 Cor. 11). The following quotation contains a wholesome warning.

OCCUPATION WITH EVIL. It is an evil thing to simply know evil without having to act in respect of it; it always tends to defile and lower the sentiment or habit of mind. Under the law he who was occupied with the cleansing of him who had touched a dead body was unclean until the evening; because he had had to say to it, though himself otherwise clean. We have to remember that we are judged by the law of liberty; we are always free to do right and avoid wrong, because God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation give a way of escape that we may be able to bear it. We all fail in one way or another, but there is power to avoid it where there is watchfulness and prayer. It is not always at the moment one caught the strength. Habitual and diligent seeking God takes out of the power, or out of the way, of evil. Do not suffer a light appreciation of evil. There are many things we know are wrong and judge ourselves for; yet we are not sufficiently in the presence of God to judge in their true light. And hence the root and power are not destroyed -- I mean practically.

THEY ARE SO FEW THAT TOOK ACTION

It happens sometimes that discipline is carried out where relatively few are gathered together unto the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the numbers involved may be made an occasion of objection. The extreme of this is to suppose a man and wife composing an assembly and that, say, the man becomes guilty of leaven. How can the wife put him away? Well, why raise the point? To palliate evil. There is no difficulty for which the Word of God is unequal. "Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). This verse will dissolve the assembly in this case. Let her continue with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). God always opens the way for His people to be separated from evil. Separation from evil unto the Lord is the foundation principle of holiness. Arguments and reasonings that lead to connection with evil NEVER proceed from the Spirit and Word of God.

HE IS DESTROYING HIS USEFULNESS

A very sad thing to observe is that when evil is exposed by someone, servants of the Lord sometimes say of him, "he is destroying his usefulness." Sometimes

his “usefulness” is being destroyed by those who say such things, so far as the tendency of their words goes. Those who say such a thing when evil is being exposed show that they have “service” before them as an object, and not Christ. “Usefulness” is the prime consideration. And suppose separation from evil does “destroy” someone’s “usefulness.” “Many first shall be last, and many last first.” God is going to reverse human judgment in *many* cases and those who have been “useful” at the expense of a foundation principle of conduct of the children of God will be surprised that God will honor those who honored Him (1 Sam. 2:30), and will find out that He really meant it when He said, “Obedience is better than sacrifice.”

HIDING EVIL

Suppose a man is getting a divorce. Scripture knows but one right ground -- fornication. He is asked what his ground of divorce is: he refuses to say. What? -- concerning a question of possible leaven he refuses to satisfy the consciences of his brethren in Christ? He must be refused as a wicked person. Another refuses to answer his brethren’s questions about his belief concerning a fundamental doctrine. What is he hiding from his brethren? He *brings not* the doctrine of Christ (2 John 10). He must be put away as a wicked person.

1 JOHN 1:3 SHOWS THIS PASSAGE CANNOT MEAN A BELIEVER

There seems to be no end of wretched notions spued out on the pb-forum on the Internet. Here is one:

If one holds that this passage applies to be {sic} believers, what is the connection? If it is an act of fellowship, we have fellowship with another believer whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, if we are both in the fellowship with the Father and His Son (1 Jn 1:3) (Sept. 1999).

This fraudulent use of something positional reminds me of the use made of Gal. 3:28, that since there is neither male or female in Christ (positional truth) therefore 1 Cor. 14:34 is to be set aside. Well, neither are there parents and child in Christ and therefore children who are in Christ may set aside Eph. 6:1?

Moreover, since the wicked person excommunicated according to 1 Cor. 5 turned out to be a brother (2 Cor. 2), then the above statement could be applied by its author to himself and such an excommunicated one.

Appendix 6: The Exposure of Evil Doctrine

If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be full of light (Matt. 6:22).

The following was written by W. Trotter:

Men may subvert the faith without denying *in terms* the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. The Judaizing teachers in Galatia had not laid aside the name of Christ, or ceased to acknowledge Him in word as the Savior. But they taught doctrines which, if true, made His death unnecessary and vain.

And both Peter and Barnabas were for a little season drawn into the snare. But what said Paul of those subverters of the faith? “I would they were cut off that trouble you.” “Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” The assertion that “the resurrection is passed already” was not the denial *in terms* of what our faith rests upon; but it was the assertion of that which, if believed, took away from the soul the only resting place for faith. “If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ is not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” Paul knew nothing of the false charity of the present day. He delivered Hymenaeus to Satan that he might learn not to blaspheme. And though there may be no one in the present day to exercise discipline in that form, the obligation of saints to be separate from such blasphemy, and from all those who practice and allow it, is as solemn now as then.⁸⁰

Thus the Corinthians were held responsible for the correct deduction made from the denial of the resurrection of the dead. It was not that the Corinthians denied the resurrection of Christ. But the believers are the harvest, and to deny the resurrection of the harvest means that the resurrection of the firstfruits of that harvest is thus denied by implication.

Evil doctrine often spreads because leaders refuse to judge the true character of the evil. They palliate it in various ways and the consequence of this is that they sanction the evil, whether or not they intended to do so; and such often get ensnared in some aspects of the evil doctrine, if not wholly embracing it. A. C. Ord remarked:

It is alarming to see evil doctrine spreading in this way; and men of weight and character in the Church of God becoming involved in it, and lending their authority to unsound statements such as these, on the fundamental truth of the Person of Christ; instead of repudiating such assertions, and lifting up a warning voice to all they can reach against them. What hope can there be for the mass, who are sure to follow where their leaders are not afraid to tread, and who are equally sure to go beyond them. Our brother -- at the first refused to allow of any defining or separating Eternal Life in its existence and manifestation in the Person of our blessed Lord. (See Appendix B in *The Manifestation of the Divine Nature*, p. 45.) But there is no safeguard against the power of evil for the saint, but total repudiation of and separation from it. “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” Those who practically lend it their sanction, cannot expect to escape its taint.⁸¹

How does God expose evil teaching? W. Kelly remarked:

But God works by means, and if there is a false teacher who brings in what is evil, there are true teachers who are able to discern it; and though he may

80. *The Origin of (so-called) Open-Brethrenism*, p. 50. Formerly called, “The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda.”

81. *The Person of Christ*, p. 28.

try to wrap it up in pleasing forms, yet the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church works against Satan, and by different members He unveils and brings out the true character of the evil thing before the assembly of God, and all are able, who are walking with God, to pronounce a divine judgment upon it when once it is exposed. If we had to make a railway we should not know how to begin the work; but when the railway is made, we can tell perfectly well the use and value of it, and can judge well enough for practice whether it is a good one or not. So with the Church of God. Though all may not equally discern and expose what is evil, God gives some who can, and afterwards all readily form a judgment upon it. These gifts are indispensable to the Church as a whole, though I do not say that wherever there is an assembly of God, it is absolutely necessary for their walking together that there should be such or such persons raised up in their midst. But we can bless God for this provision for the wants of His Church, as long as He has a Church here below.⁸²

The Lord may use any believer to call attention to evil.

Conclusion

Transgression of 2 John makes one a partaker of wicked works. The command not to greet (a seemingly small thing) forbids all greater expression of fellowship. To break bread with such as bring not the doctrine of the Christ is to make of the breaking of bread something lower than such a greeting!

Those who hold that known leaven, unjudged and tolerated, does not leaven a company of Christians and make them a leavened lump, assert, in effect, that Christ in the midst and leaven can go on together. Allowed leaven, they must believe, does not hinder Christ's presence as in Matt. 18:20, therefore. Such a company of Christians would, in effect, be meeting together on the basis of (on the ground of) sanctioned evil, whether they realize it or not. They would have Christ in the midst to sanction this -- so far as the tendency of their belief is concerned. The teaching implies that God and manifested leaven in the assembly can go on together. Why, the unholy idea is an attack on the very nature of God as light! Think of it!

Cavils raised about Christ being in the midst where there are uneven tempers are just dust for the eyes and expose more fully the hearts of the advocates of these notions. Clearly, not every matter is one of excision. We are considering things that the Word of God denounces in the most solemn terms, things which are leaven and must be purged out. It is not a question of the shop or office. It is a question of Christian fellowship and hospitality, and of faithfulness to the Holy and the True, and of the Lord's table.

82. *Lectures on Ephesians*, p. 188.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump means that tolerated evil leavens the whole lump even if all are not fornicators, etc., or even if all do not imbibe the evil teaching. It only requires one wicked person to be tolerated to change the practical character of the lump from a new lump to a leavened lump.

Anyone coming from a leavened lump is, obviously, leavened. The only way to free oneself from this is to judge it and self before God. But if one comes from a leavened lump and wants to break bread, pleading that he personally is not committing a sin such as is named in 1 Cor. 5, or that he does not imbibe the evil doctrine tolerated where he comes from, let us remember that he is part of a leavened lump, partaker of wicked works. And let us treat him as such, remonstrate with him, and refuse him. All that knowingly receive from such a company of Christians put themselves on the same ground of indifference to Christ. This indifference and neutrality is in the heart and such a person is defiled by the toleration of an evil association, which springs from that heart.

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Read *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:288, 289 (Stow Hill ed.), concerning many ways in which Satan works, and "The Enemy's Work" in *The Bible Treasury* 14:6-10.

Scripture Index, Old Testament

Num. 6; 1 Sam. 1:15	66	1 Sam. 1:11	66
Num. 7	1	1 Sam. 2:23	66
Josh. 7:11, 12	40	1 Sam. 2:30	67
Judg. 4:5	3	1 Sam. 3:13	66
Judg. 4:9	3	1 Sam. 15:9	35
Judg. 19-21.	33	Prov. 14:16	36
Ruth	3	Prov. 16:6	32
Ruth 2:8; see 2:22	3	Psa. 11:3	34, 53
Ruth 3:11; Prov. 31	3	Psa. 89:7	39
		Psa. 97:10	32
		Isa. 59:15	61

Scripture Index, New Testament

Matt. 6:22	68	Rom. 12:9	i
Matt. 12:37	62	1 Cor. 1	34
Matt. 18:20	69	1 Cor. 1 and Gal. 1	33
Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 5:4	i	1 Cor. 1:9	i, 57
Luke 1:35	11	1 Cor. 2:15; 1 Cor. 5:2; 2 John 9,10;	
Luke 8:18	45	Rev. 2:14,15, etc.	35
Luke 11:23	62	1 Cor. 3:12.	19
John 3:11; 8:38; 12:50	10	1 Cor. 5	29, 48, 54, 55, 60, 61, 67, 70
John 3:13, 32	14	1 Cor. 5:6, 7, 8	33
John 3:21	14	1 Cor. 5:7	35
John 5:19, 20	11	1 Cor. 5; Titus 3:10; 2 John	37
John 8:26, 40	14	1 Cor. 10:16-18	i
John 12:24; 20:22; ch. 17; etc.	i	1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2	i
John 14:16, 17	9	1 Cor. 14:34	67
John 14:24	14	2 Cor. 1:23	40
John 14:31	14	2 Cor. 2:7	63
John 14:9	11	2 Cor. 2:9; 7:5	40
John 15:12	14	2 Cor. 5:21; cp. 1 John 3:5;	
John 15:15	14	John 14:30; 8:46	22
John 16:13	14	2 Cor. 7:16	40
Acts 20:28	19	2 Cor. 10:8	33
Rom. 7:23	22	Gal. 1.	34
		Gal. 2:18	33
		Gal. 3:28	67

Gal. 5	60	1 John 3:9	8, 15, 21
Gal. 5:12	35	1 John 4:2	16
Gal. 5:9	29, 31, 35	1 John 4:8	12
Gal. 5:9-12	48	1 John 5:2, 3	15
Eph. 2:3	31	1 John 5:6	16, 21, 23
Eph. 4:3, 15, 16; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13	40	2 John 1	4
Eph. 4:3, 15, 16	40	2 John 2	8
Eph. 6:1	67	2 John 3	10
Phil. 2:5	11, 53	2 John 4	13
Phil. 2:16	19	2 John 5	14
2 Thess. 2	2	2 John 6	14
2 Thess. 2:9, 10	8	2 John 7	10, 15
1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4	10	2 John 7-9	16
1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17, 18;		2 John 8	19
2 John 10, 11	62	2 John 9, 10	35, 48, 58, 60
1 Tim. 2:12-15; Eph. 5:24	3	2 John 9-11	59
1 Tim. 4:16	19	2 John 10	1, 23, 67
1 Tim. 1:20	54	2 John 10, 11, 2 Tim. 2:21,	
2 Tim. 2	53	and 1 Cor. 5	23
2 Tim. 2:19-21	54	2 John 10, 11	19, 23, 24
2 Tim. 2:20, 21	53	2 John 11	53
2 Tim. 2:22	67	2 John 12, 13	31
2 Tim. 2: 25	63	3 John	2, 5
2 Tim. 3:1-5	44	3 John 1	5
Titus 3:10, 11; and 1 Cor. 2:19,		3 John 4	7
Gal. 5:20, 2 Pet. 2:1	33	3 John 8	1
Heb. 4:15	22	2 Pet. 1:4	8
Heb. 4:16	10	Jude 23	65
Heb. 6:4-6	55	Rev. 1	1
1 John 1:3	57, 67	Rev. 2:14, 15	38, 45
1 John 1:3, 4	i	Rev. 2:24, 25	37
1 John 1:5	12	Rev. 2, 3	42
1 John 1:6, 7	i	Rev. 2 and 3	36, 37, 45
1 John 2:3-6	15	Rev. 13	18
1 John 2:9, 11, and 3:15	21	Rev. 13:11-18	2
1 John 2:18	1	Rev. 17	3, 42
1 John 2:18, 19	18, 19		
1 John 2:19	1		
1 John 2:22, 23	17		
1 John 2:28	19		

Index of Subjects, Names , and Some Titles

<i>A Brief History of the Brethren</i>	52
abstract character of John's epistles	18
Achan	39
Antichrist	8, 16
Antichrist and also of many antichrists	18
Antichrist, final, of prophecy	2
Apollinarius of Antioch (the son)	18
apostates of Christendom	18
association with doctrinal evil defiles	27
associations, letter signed by 10 leading brethren from Bethesda (1848)	51
Ball, R.	42
Barak	3
Barker, Glenn W.	5
Bellett, J. G.	3
Bethesda	41
<i>Bethesda Family Matters</i>	52
Bruce, F. F.	47, 52
candlestick	39
cannot sin	8
Christ, came by water and blood	16
Christ, divide the humanity from the deity	11
Christ, doctrine that Christ took the carnal nature	17
Christ, His sympathy	22
Christ, the doctrine of the Christ	9, 18, 21, 54
Christ, true or a false Christ	6
church is not seen in its unity in Rev. 2 and 3	39
Coates, C. A.	55, 56
complicity with the evil	27
compromise is treason to Christ	26
Daniel's 70th week	3
Darby, J. N.	1, 7, 17, 24, 25, 29, 30, 37, 51, 61, 63, 64
Deborah	3
deceiver and the Antichrist, the	17, 21
Deck, J. G.	41, 63
distinction of persons in the Godhead	10
doctrinal evil and moral evil	31, 33
doctrinal evil is the worst,	23
doctrine, evil doctrine	68
doctrine, evil, exposure of	68
doctrine, evil, is worse than moral evil	33
doctrine, false	39
doctrine, fundamentally evil, Christians must stand in separation from	22
doctrine of the Christ, the	9, 18, 21, 54
doctrine that Christ took the carnal nature	17
Dunlop, J.	62
ecclesiastical form	65

elder, the	4
elect	10
elect sister	4
Eli	65
Eli's house	66
emotion is not holiness	32
establishment,	38
eternal Son of God	17
eternal Sonship	10, 20, 21, 22, 28, 55
Eutyches	18
Evangelicals' failure on 2 John	46
evil, complicity with the	27
evil, do not receive him into the house.	24
evil, doctrinal and moral	31, 33
evil doctrine	68
evil doctrine, exposure of	68
evil doctrine is worse than moral evil because	33
evil doctrine, not this or that special form of antichristianism	23
evil doctrine, Satan might change the doctrine somewhat	24
evil doctrine, three ways evil teaching is referred to in 2 John	20
evil, ecclesiastical	29
evil, how are assemblies to be dealt with, wherein corruption is found	43
evil, occupation with	66
evil teachers	64
exclusive brethren	27, 56
exclusivism	29
F., E.	59
false prophet	18
fellowship, a broad	12
fellowship as members of one body,	i
fellowship, false "hermeneutics" and false "limits"	53
fellowship, greet him not	24
fellowship in the family of God	i
fellowshipping with the evil	27
form, ecclesiastical	65
Gaius	1, 5, 6, 7
Gaius' house	3
Galatians, character of Paul's approach to	34
God, has not God	21
God speed	25
grace	10
Grant, F. W.	1, 26, 30
Greenwich	64
greet him not	24
greeting, God speed	25
Groves, A. N.	47
Groves, E. K., (son of A. N. Groves)	52
Harlow, R. E.	48, 51, 57
has not God	21

hermeneutics, false, and false limits	53
Hogg, C. F.	48
holiness	i
holy sanctuary	3
Hoste, W.	52
house of God,	39
Hymenaeus and Philetus	54
indifference, your	27
innocent (ignorant of good and evil) as Adam's before the fall	11
Irvingite movement	17
J. S. Oliphant, J. S.	40
Jennings, F. C.	58
Jesus Christ coming in flesh, a facet of the denial of	21
Jesus only Pentecostals	19
Jewish apostasy	18
John, the great test of love is truth	15
John's epistles are abstract in character	8, 18, 21
Joyce, Alex	47
Kelly, W.	4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 32, 51, 60, 69
Kothathite service	1
koinoneo	28
Lady, "beloved"	5
<i>Lake Geneva Conference Report</i>	59
<i>Lake Geneva Conference Report's attack on 2 John</i>	53
Lang, G. H.	51
Laodicean Church	44
last hour	2, 4
Lawless One	3, 8
leaven, a little leaven leavens the whole lump means	7, 8
leaven, persons must not hold doctrine which is leaven	45
letter signed by 10 leading brethren from Bethesda (1848)	51
<i>Letter of the Ten</i>	51
Lord Jesus Christ	10
Lord's supper	60
Lord's table and supper	57
love, in John, the great test of love is truth	15
love in truth	7, 8
love, semblance of love which does not maintain the truth	24
love, speaking the truth in love	12
love, true Christian	8
love, whom I love in truth	7
Lowe, W. J.	63
lukewarmness	44
MacArthur, John	21
MacDonald, William	47
Mackintosh, C. H.	25, 32
McDowell, Ian	52
mercy	10
mercy (v. 3) points to an individual	5

misleaders	16
Muller, G.	51
Muller, George, and Henry Craik	56
Nestorius	18
neutrality	63
neutrals, these are the neutrals, more dangerous than	27
Newton, B. W.	52, 56, 63
Newton, B. W., doctrine of	63
Nicolaitanes	38
Noel, N.	63
Norbie, Donald L.	47
oneness in life and nature	1
Open Brethrenism, beginning of	29
Open Brethrenism's failure on 2 John	47
Ord, A. C.	37, 65, 68
Paisley, Ian	22, 47
Paul's approach to the Galatians, character of	34
Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis	43
Pickering, Hy	48
predicates of the person what is true of the new nature	21
Raven, F. E.	61, 62
Raven, F. E., denial that the Lord Jesus had a human spirit	18
<i>Rejudging the Question</i>	52
Ridout, Samuel	59
Roger, W.	59
ruin	4, 37
ruin of the church on earth	1
Ruth	3
Saul spared Agag	35
seed, refers to the new nature from God	8
self-serving	8
sentimentality	2
<i>Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity</i>	39
seven churches	36, 38, 42
Shiloh	66
Smalley, Stephen S.	5, 46
Snell, H. H.	61, 62
Socinianism	22
Son, eternal Son of God	17
Son of the Father in truth and love	13, 23
Son of the Father	10, 11
Sonship, eternal	10, 20, 21, 22, 28, 55
Stott, John R.	46
Taylor, Sr., James	55, 56
teachers, evil	64
<i>The Believer's Magazine</i> , New Series 19:110	47
<i>The Local Assembly</i>	51
<i>The Witness</i>	48
Thyatira gives us Popery	36

Thyatira, the faithful in	37
triad	3
triad will do.	2
trinity	20
truth and love, the order	12
truth, importance of	
truth, speaking the truth in love	12
truth, walking in truth	13
<i>Truth and Tidings</i> 44:323	47
Truth, for the truth's sake	9
Unitarianism	19
usefulness	67
VonPoseck, J. A.	58
W. Trotter, W.	51, 63, 68
water and blood, He came by	16
<i>Weeds, Leaven, and the Brethren Movement.</i>	48
<i>Who Are the Brethren?</i>	52
wicked works	30
woman and her children	7
woman having the word	24
<i>Words in Season</i>	22
<i>Words in Season</i> 78:200	47