



*Carefulness
in
Reception*

*Number Four in a series on
the holiness of Christian fellowship*

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NOTE: Many thanks are due D. Ryan for his editorial work on the series of papers on the subject of the holiness of Christian fellowship, of which this paper is Number Four.

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Preface

Among the ways of undermining the truth recovered during the 1800s is this one: receive only as much of the truth as is personally suitable¹ while rejecting that which calls for holiness in Christian fellowship. See examples of this in the first three papers in this series. Thus, responsibility for carefulness in reception at the Lord's table is mitigated or eliminated, and responsibility to avoid association with persons holding what is really fundamentally evil doctrine is removed. The objective, the agenda, whether consciously realized or not, is to broaden the Scriptural limits of practical fellowship beyond the Scripture limits. Thus, the Scriptures are tortured to fit the agenda of reception without carefulness.

Persons who had once been among those who are called "exclusive brethren,"² or if they remain among such but agitate for a wider fellowship, sometimes resort to misrepresenting what was taught during the 1800s. Such attempt to dignify their new-found unholiness in ecclesiastical practice by calling it 'the early practice of the brethren, from which we have departed.' These, having arrived at a new position of looseness in reception, now look upon 'the early practice' through the eyes of their perverted, new view, and try to impress their loose view onto 'the early practice'; and behold! there is the proof in the writings of early brethren! In reality, they have taken a position similar to Open Brethrenism (OB) which began in 1848.³

Others, realizing that they cannot really bend the facts to their purpose, simply reject 'the early practice' outright. *The Lake Geneva Conference Report*⁴ is an example of this. Some of these may have agitated looseness for some time, seeking to convert others to their view. Such views as in this *Report*, are blatantly evil; and if there is any faithfulness it must lead to division -- to separation from the evil, which is God's true *principle* of unity, practically.⁵

Both of these ways of undermining the work that God did during the 1800s present themselves as faithfulness to God. In reality, what is at work is the substitution of Christians for Christ. The degree to which Christians are substituted for Christ is the degree to which the departure takes place. But there is more to this.

1. For example: clerisy may be rejected, the truth of the pretribulation rapture may be accepted; etc.
2. There is no excuse but the crassest ignorance for anyone equating the expression "exclusive brethren" with the Raven/Taylorites.
3. The most complete documentation of the Plymouth-Bethesda matter is found in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, Defense of Truth, 1845-1850*, available from the publisher. This book of over 300 pages carefully documents the issues and has included material rarely seen and not heretofore appearing in print. Included is the exposure of the OB smearing of J. N. Darby.

Without directly naming Bethesda, an obvious reference refers to it as "the leavened lump" (*The Bible Treasury* 20:302, left column, second paragraph).

4. The major features of this *Report* are examined in previous papers in this series on the holiness of Christian fellowship and are available from the publisher.

5. Not all who separate from evil are gathered together to the Lord's name (Matt. 18:20). Yet there are sects that have been formed by separating from fundamentally evil doctrines. We thank God for every movement of His people in separation from evil.

What is really at work, underlying all this, is self. It is self that substitutes something for Christ; and substituting Christians for Christ allows a pious appearance that covers up the self.

Nor is this phenomena something new. Have we not seen what happened with early Christianity? Have we not seen what happened to the Reformation? Have we not considered the history of the Judges? Have we not seen in Malachi what happened to the recovery under Zerrubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah? The utter impudence of the self-condemning words in Malachi (“wherein”) by those who profess to continue in the Mosaic system is an appalling exposure of our hearts. They did not anymore acknowledge *their* departure than those do who reject, or pervert, the practice of the truth recovered in the 1800s, that there is one body, as well as the truth of holiness in Christian fellowship, maintained in practice by carefulness in reception.

The pretension of doing the will of God proceeds, while those more obedient (in various degrees) than themselves are condemned and/or mocked. They deceive themselves that they have experienced a *deliverance*, while in reality they have fallen under a *bondage of the flesh* to which they are insensible.

The pretension is that the practice of reception from sects in Christendom has changed. Some would say that even during the course of the 1880s the practice of reception was changed -- refusing to acknowledge that what changed was that heretofore orthodox sects became leavened; and, that it is wrong to receive from leavened communions.

Open Brethren (OB) try to make it appear that brethren changed the practice of reception consequent upon the Bethesda (OB) division in 1848 and that “exclusivism” began in 1848. This is the old trick of exactly reversing the fact. The fact is that Open Brethrenism began in 1848.

And so we hear of wanting to get back to “the original practice” of reception among “the brethren.” What that generally really means is a position of looseness and neutrality in fellowship -- to give it its proper name. It is just the opposite of a return to sound principles and to godliness in reception. There is nothing recent about using the matter of the unity of the Spirit to sanction *indifference* and *neutrality* (that is what it really is) to evil:

Jude directs us to have compassion of some, making a difference; this has always been enforced and acted upon, so far as I know. But when we find saints ignorantly linked with those who leave the door so wide open to evil, we do, and I trust ever shall, try to make them see and understand their danger, and the dishonor that is done to the Lord Jesus. I have lately been informed that some of these brethren, unable longer to resist the effect of the truth as to the unity of the Spirit upon many of the simple-hearted, are now advocating it themselves, but in such a way as to make it sanction and uphold what is really the utter denial of it. That is to say, just as, according to their reasoning, the name and profession of Christ ought to bind together individual saints in fellowship, without reference to their guilty association with evil; so the unity of the Spirit should be enforced as linking together the various denominations as such. Scripture speaks of many

members, yet but one body; it does not say many bodies, yet but one body.⁶

J. N. Darby remarked:

As to the attacks, notice that the spirit of the world is working in those who condemn the principles I press. Hence I agree entirely that we (when needed) deal with individuals; but then I should see whether they had the principle of inter-communion with evil. If so, they are in heart of the principle of the gathering which you avowedly reject. This is a part of their state before the Lord. And if knowing that the gathering they come from hold this principle, and I could not lead them to renounce it, and necessarily (consequently, if honest) the gathering, I could not receive them. Indifferentism⁷ under the name of charity is the great snare now, not avowed error, and it is wickedness of heart, and that is the fruit. If I found them bona fide ignorant, and in heart opposed to this horrible principle, for my part I could receive them; only I should plainly warn them of their error and inconsistency in going back where the principle they condemned was acted on; I assume them to be ignorant themselves of the fact. It is only your own principle . . . applied to indifferentism. For a poor ignorant saint might never have perceived a heresy in the teacher, and yet gradually have his mind infected; and so of indifferentism; and I have seen sad cases. Let us only remember that both are the influence of Satan over the mind, and we shall seek the deliverance of souls, and charity will not be content without it . . .⁸

In chapter 1 we will briefly review the truth that Scripture presents a certain view of *the body of Christ as on earth*. Is it not required by God that we practice in our walk what is true of us “in Christ”? We are to practice the truth of the one body seen on earth. And this involves the practice of reception in connection with practicing the truth that “there is one body” (Eph. 4:4), i.e., “the whole body” (Eph. 4:16).

And in chapter 2 we will have before us the remarks of J. N. Darby on the subject of *Union on Mutual Concession*, for this is man’s plan for union, though it may be hidden from himself.

Next chapter 3 will give us an overview of sound principles of reception and fellowship; and the subsequent chapters will augment what we have there and also consider some specific points in detail.

Honest hearts bowing to what the Scriptures require about rejecting association with evil (2 John; 2 Tim. 2; and 1 Cor. 5) will readily see that the assembly of God must exercise godly carefulness in reception, or else they surrender again to the evil they once refused.

Chapter 1

6. *The Bible Treasury* 7:240 (1869).

7. On such indifferentism, also see *Collected Writings* 20:205, 207; 4:192.; *The Bible Treasury* 9:223 (1873).

8. *Letters* 1:194 (1851). See also p. 224.

Reception and The Whole Body on Earth

In this chapter we will see that Scripture presents a view of “the whole body” (Eph. 4:16) as on earth. No principle of gathering so profoundly influences the practice of reception to the table by an assembly of otherwise orthodox Christians as their position with respect to what is meant by the whole body on earth. To some, “the whole body” (Eph. 4:16) is nothing more than a “mystic” or “spiritual” church which, almost by definition, has no implication for the practice or behavior of the saints of God on earth. To others, “the whole body” is nothing more than those saints of God who live in each small locality (sometimes restricted to those who worship God at a given so-called church building). Still others assert that “the whole body” in Eph. 4:16 means both the saints in heaven and those on earth, losing sight of the special way in which Scripture presents “the whole body” on earth.

Reception to the table is not the same as reception into the whole body, of course. Every one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, sealed with the Spirit, is made a member of the whole body. This is a divinely accomplished unity in one body which cannot be broken by man’s failure. The body has been formed by the Spirit and is maintained by the Spirit.

Responsibility comes into this matter in connection with the practice of the truth that “there is one body.” We are responsible to express in practice those things which are true of us; in this case, our membership in “the whole body” (cp. 1 Cor. 10:16, 17). When reception to the table is not in agreement with the true, Scripture view of “the whole body,” then that truth is distorted, and often unholy looseness prevails in practice.

Numbers of times in Scripture the word “body,” referring to the body of Christ, is used to describe something on earth that does not mean the local assembly and does not include saints who are with the Lord above. And, while the word “assembly” is often used of something that is local, this word also is used to describe something on earth that is larger than the local assembly but which does not include saints now with the Lord. These Scripture uses of the word “body” and “assembly” are denied by some who are committed to the erroneous doctrine of independency of local assemblies. In truth, however, Scripture uses the designation “assembly of God” not only of the local gathering in a place but also of the assembly of God on earth, of which the local assembly is the expression of the whole, in the place where it is. The fact that the local assembly is a local expression of the whole assembly on earth indicates that the assembly of God on earth is *not* viewed as an *aggregate* of the local assemblies. Observe that in Scripture the word “members” is always used in connection with

the body and the Head. There is no such thing as *local membership* found in Scripture. We will review here some points in connection with these truths.

Matt. 16:18. Matt. 16:18 is usually acknowledged by all as a passage that refers to what Christ does and therefore speaks about what is true, and does not include untrue profession of Christianity. Presently, part of His assembly is on earth and part is in heaven. It is objected that Scripture does not speak in that way, namely, that part is in heaven and part is on earth. But do not be hasty. First, we see from this passage that the believers on earth are in this assembly spoken of here. Second, it leaves room for what we shall see below, that Scripture most certainly does present a view of the assembly as on earth.

Matt. 18:20. This Scripture has the local assembly in view. But it has a bearing on more than what is local, though that is not our subject just now.

1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13.

I have persecuted the assembly of God (1 Cor. 15:9).

... I excessively persecuted the assembly of God, and ravaged it" (Gal. 1:13).

What was the thing that Paul ravaged? He said that it was "the assembly of God." This persecution Paul carried on in many places (Acts 26:11). The words "the assembly of God" are being used here of something that is more than a local assembly, something that is larger than a local assembly, but which does not include saints in heaven. Some Christians were dead already (so, they were already in heaven) when Paul was carrying out his persecution of "the assembly of God." Those already in heaven were not being persecuted there in heaven. So the Word of God does, in fact, use the expression "the assembly of God" to describe something that is not the local assembly, and which Paul persecuted on earth, though some Christians were already dead and in heaven, where they could not be persecuted. But what if someone should make the following objections, as has been done:

You make the point that Paul could not persecute Christians that were in heaven. That is not scriptural for Christ, Himself, said to Paul on the Damascus road, "Why persecutest thou me?" Christ was in heaven when He said Paul was persecuting Him. What did He mean? We know that He will say in a coming day to those at the judgment of the nations, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40, 45). Anyone who persecutes a Christian persecutes Christ and since all believers are members of His body anyone who persecutes one Christian persecutes them all. That is the truth of the unity of the body. It cannot be divided, if one member suffers all the members suffer with it (1 Cor. 12:26). It is in that sense that Paul said he persecuted the church (the body). It would not be reasonable to conjecture that Paul said he persecuted every single Christian that was living at the time. When he wrote 1 Cor. 15:9 and Gal. 1:13, he understood clearly that the body was a unity and that when he was persecuting one member he was persecuting the whole body. Whether any particular member was on earth or in heaven or not even saved [yet] was inconsequential.

The reader should carefully consider the manner of this attempt to circumvent the truth is carried on. To such arguments, the following replies may be made.

Sheep, goats and brethren of the King imply nothing about how a body works. Matt. 25:31ff has reference to the judgment of living nations prior to the millennium and the “brethren” there are the believing remnant of Israel. Christ’s relationship to the remnant of Israel is not that of Head to members of one body.

Christ was in heaven when Paul persecuted the assembly of God, but the question at hand is *where was the assembly located that Paul persecuted*, not where was the Head. Where Christ was is not directly relevant to *that* question. Scripture affirms that the Head is persecuted when the members on earth are persecuted, but nowhere says that members in heaven (i.e., not the Head) are persecuted when members on earth are persecuted.

When Paul was persecuting one member, he was persecuting the whole body viewed as something on earth larger than the local assembly but not including saints already in heaven. Is it not astonishing to see how the objection involves one in what is so false, namely, that Paul persecuted the saints in heaven? And why does the objector make this absurd claim? It is because this matter would otherwise mean that there was something on earth that is called “the assembly of God” which is larger than a local assembly. And these objections are required in order to deny this great fact. Note also how 1 Cor. 12:26 is brought in to bolster the false view. Does not the above quoted objection really bring together Paul’s persecution of “the assembly of God” (implicitly acknowledging that this is larger than a local assembly), and connecting that with 1 Cor. 12:26, that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it,” thus implying that they are suffering in heaven? The last sentence quoted above uses the word “inconsequential.” In reality, it is most consequential that saints in heaven are neither persecuted nor suffering. The consequence of this is that we have presented in Scripture something on earth that is larger than a local assembly, and this great fact is at war with the erroneous doctrine of independency of assemblies.

1 Cor. 12:26. Of particular importance is 1 Cor. 12:26. Does this verse apply to members of the body in heaven? In other words, when Paul wrote that if one member on earth is suffering, then ALL the members suffer, was the martyr Stephen suffering in heaven? To this question, the author of the objections quoted above responded as follows:

The scripture does not say that and we have no right to infer that. The passage in 1 Cor. 12:26 is distinct from verse 27-31. The verses 14 to 26 are a discussion of the human body and its members. The truth relating to the members of the human body are only applied in principle to the spiritual body of Christ. Without stating specifically how the members in heaven respond to the members on earth we can assume, I suppose, that the principle is true. In the spiritual realm things are quite different than in the physical. I would have no problem with the thought that believers in heaven are concerned about believers on earth or vice versa. It is difficult for us earth bound creatures to enter into spiritual phenomenon with any degree of confidence. Certainly we know that God, who is spirit, is intimately concerned about His people’s cares on earth. We are enjoined, on the other hand, to take into account

what angels think about the way things are done in an assembly on earth (1 Cor. 11:11). We know that no believers in heaven are suffering but they certainly are quite capable of suffering empathetically, I am sure. We are told that when a sinner repents on earth there is joy in the presence of the angels and I would expect that that means that saints in heaven rejoice at sinners being saved on earth.

Here are more examples of what is required to get rid of the unwanted facts of Scripture. What this adds up to is the assertion that “persecuted the church” corresponds to “suffering empathetically.” He has invented two kinds of suffering for 1 Cor. 12:26. In the human body, when one member suffers injury, then the whole body may suffer much more than merely empathetically: fevers, chills, sweats, cessation of normal functions far from the site of injury, etc. Rejoicing in sinners being saved, being concerned like angels in how things are done elsewhere, empathy, etc. do not add up to “suffering” in heaven. This is acknowledged even by the author of the above objections, who wrote:

No, I did not say that if a member on earth suffers the members in heaven likewise suffer.

But this was certainly implied in the very first quotation. To claim that 1 Cor. 12:26 cannot mean the body on earth (“the whole body” of Eph. 4:16) distorts 1 Cor. 12:26, which does have in view the body on earth. The truth is that if one member suffers, then ALL the members do indeed suffer with it. It is clearly “all” because the verse states so. Hence, this suffering is not in heaven, but on earth. The implication is that there is a view that Scripture presents of the body here on earth in activity.

1 Cor. 12:28. In the same passage (1 Cor. 12) where we have seen a plain indication that there is presented a view in Scripture of the body here on earth (1 Cor. 11:26), Scripture again presents to us that view of the church on earth:

And God has set certain in the assembly: first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; then miraculous powers; then gifts of healings; helps; governments; kinds of tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

So 1 Cor. 12:28 brings before us the *assembly on earth* in which God has set apostles, prophets, teachers, etc., and that this reference to the church is neither to a local assembly nor to something that includes those in heaven. It is the assembly on earth; indeed, “the assembly of God” that Paul persecuted.

Eph. 4:16.

... from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to [the] working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love” (Eph. 4:16).

The force of the words, “the whole body,” tells us that each one part of that whole body is working for the increase of the body. Like the Scriptures cited above, Eph. 4:16 refers to something on earth in busy activity, namely the body on earth. The immediately obvious truth of this verse contradicts the denial that the assembly of God may be viewed as one whole body on earth, not including the saints in heaven already. Its plain statement is not an interpretation added to

Scripture. Here is what the objector wrote whom we have quoted above:

A careful reading of the verse will reveal that the point of the whole passage is that the body is to develop in Love. I do not think that the saints in heaven have reached the ultimate in that regard. They are growing in love still. The only difference between them and us is that they do not have the flesh to contend with as we do . . .

Here again is another example of the mental processing of Scripture. He is determined to get the saints in heaven into this verse just as in the case of the saints suffering, and “the assembly of God” being persecuted by Paul. We see the text of the verse read through the eyes of one who supports independency of assemblies so as to make the verse agree with his ideas at any cost. He seeks to dull the sharp edge by which it cuts through the system of independency of assemblies. The passage states “the whole body” and he wants to get the saints in heaven into this, or else the verse will mean, as is clearly true, the body on earth! The verse is about “*every joint of supply*” in activity “*according to [the] working in its measure of every one part.*” This is the working body, every part of it. This is not interpretation, but what the text states. We either accept what it states or we try to explain it away. It is obvious on the face of it that the verse means the “working in its measure of each one part” here on earth, not in heaven.

How simple it is, really, to see that 1 Cor. 12:26 relates to this: “If one member suffer all the members suffer with [it] . . .” It is that same body on earth. None of this contradicts that there is another true view of the body seen in its completeness, in glory. Every Scripture is perfect in its place. These Scriptures we have been discussing have their bearing and application also -- and they require that we seek to practice them in spite of our failure, not explain them away.

Thus is the Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). The subject before us is very large but the object is to keep this chapter short. Yet we should glance at one more Scripture before passing on.

For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also [is] the Christ (1 Cor. 12:12).

This is the same body that we learn in 1 Cor. 12:26 suffers. It is not about saints in heaven. It is the body on earth and the Head in heaven, viewed as “the Christ.” The Scripture does not view the saints in heaven as in the present activity of the body. The Scripture does present a view of the body in its activity here, and this has a bearing on our responsibility in giving expression to the truth of God in our practice.

Reception from Laodicea and Thyatira. And finally, regarding Laodicea and Thyatira, the objector quoted above was asked the following question: Since Laodicea was “a true local assembly,” as shown, you say, by the call to repent, then that would mean that Thyatira was a true local assembly also, as called upon to repent. Would you use letters of commendation to and from such assemblies as Laodicea and Thyatira if they were in neighboring towns where you live? He

replied:

Definitely we would, I hope, receive commended persons from either. Their reception might be with some conditions attached such as not being permitted to preach false doctrine.

This unfaithfulness in reception is consistent with the independency-of-assemblies system. Such would recognize letters of commendation from Thyatira and Laodicea as valid letters coming from assemblies regarded as being gathered to Christ's name. They know that there is evil doctrine tolerated at Thyatira, yet they would receive a letter of commendation and the person commended -- with the caveat, perhaps, that they not be permitted to teach false doctrine. And it follows that the person was not leavened by being in the assembly at Thyatira. Such hold the doctrine of Bethesda.⁹ They hold that a person is not leavened by breaking bread with leavened persons. They hold that an assembly cannot be leavened until every person in it has personally imbibed the leaven. These things are the result of their views and denying these consequences of their views will not change the fact that their doctrines do have such consequences, at least for those who have eyes to see the evil of this. Independency is a system that mitigates and/or eliminates the responsibility for evil associations. There are some *groupings* of those who hold to independency, and there are some *variations* in views of how to handle the subject of leaven leavening the lump; but the end result is the same, whatever exact way some may prefer concerning how to arrive there.

Rev. 2 and 3 are used by independent brethrenism to support independency, which has resultant consequences and we may appreciate the above candid response about Thyatira and Laodicea. It would be beyond the scope of this short chapter to take up that entire subject at this time. J. N. Darby wrote in his masterful examination of B. W. Newton's *Thoughts on the Apocalypse* in 1845:

And if He was walking among the candlesticks judging, it was clear it was not the candlesticks as the divine type of what they were in God's mind that He would judge. The candlesticks were God's idea of them. The report is of things that are -- what man had actually made of them here below. Christ judicially brought what the Spirit saw to bear on what man had produced (*Collected Writings* 8:25).

Summary. In order to appear to have Scripture support for rejecting the truth that Scripture presents a view of the body on earth, and also of the assembly on earth, the following tack was used:

1. Matt. 25:40, 45 was dragged into the discussion, which has to do with the Jewish remnant. And this was used in an effort to rebut the statement that Paul did not persecute Christians in heaven (cp. 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13). There was failure to show that Paul persecuted Christians in heaven though it was said, "You make the point that Paul could not persecute Christians that were in heaven.

9. See *Precious Truth Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, 1845-1850*.

That is not scriptural for Christ, Himself, said to Paul on the Damascus road *Why persecutest thou me?*” Yet it was not shown that because the Head feels it, the saints in heaven were persecuted by Paul. The thing Paul persecuted is “the assembly of God,” and obviously, that is on earth. Of course, that fact is destructive of independency.

2. Then a “empathetic suffering” of saints in heaven was brought forth to parry the force of “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” as meaning on earth only. This implicitly acknowledges that it is not the local assembly, or a local body, that is meant (there is really no such thing as a *local body*) -- but this is needed to get rid of the fact that this is only on earth, because otherwise it means that Scripture does present a view of the body as on earth. And that fact also is destructive of independency.

3. I Cor. 12:28 also speaks to this matter because the gifts are not set in heaven nor in a local assembly. God set them in the assembly on earth.

4. Next, since Eph. 4:16 speaks of “the whole body,” and in spite of the fact that it speaks of each one part working, showing that “the whole body” as contemplated by this Scripture means here on earth, the system of independency of assemblies requires circumventing the meaning. So the text is studied more and the result of such study is to bring into this the notion of the saints *growing in love in heaven*, so as to bring them into what is meant by “the whole body.” And thus Christians satisfy themselves that they have gotten rid of the thought of “the whole body” in activity, working, on earth. The fact is, the truth of this is destructive of independency.

5. Finally, views on reception from Laodicea and Thyatira show the practical outworking of independency dealing with (or rather refusing to deal with) evil associations.

The Scriptures teach local responsibility, not local independency.

Chapter 2

Compromise of Truth, and Reception

Often there are words drawn from John 17 to foment (an ungodly) “union” at the expense of God’s truth and the claims of His holiness. Such “union” may be considered as a kind of reception, but it is evil; and so, John 17 is used in getting ready for the appearance of the whore of Rev. 17. Union on mutual concession is of the world:

They are not of the world, as I am not of the world (John 17:16).

Union on Mutual Concession

An extract from J. N. Darby

The first point with which I shall occupy my reader, is that of the idea of union on the principle of mutual concession with respect to the divers views which are found among Christians, and of conciliation by these means. This principle has a great repute and a very fair appearance; but it is profoundly evil and presumptuous. *It supposes that the truth is at our disposal.* Phil. 3 teaches quite a different principle: there is no idea of concession nor of any arrangement in expressing the truth so as to reconcile different views. It is said, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." It is not, Let us lower down the truth to the measure of him who has not come up to it; it is not two persons ignoring which of the two has the truth, or content to suppose the possibility of error in giving up more or less what they hold, in order to express themselves so as to be agreed: all that is an infringement upon the authority of the truth on us. "And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." There is no question here of concessions, but of the revelation from God to enlighten him who is not perfect in the truth. "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." There is no question here of concessions, but of walking together in the things we possess, with regard to which, because recognized as being the truth of God, there is no giving up anything, all being subject to it. In that case, there is no concession, either on one side or on the other, for all possess the same truth, having already attained to it in a measure, and they walk together minding the same thing. The

remedy for the diversity of mind which may remain is not to make concessions (how deal thus with the truth?) but the revelation from God in favor of him who is ignorant, as we are all of us on divers points.

But I shall be told, On that footing, one will never come to an agreement. Where will you find in the word such a thing as coming to an agreement? To come to an agreement is not the unity of the Church of God. The truth is not to be modified, and we are not called to force our imperfect views on anyone. I must have faith, and one must have the same faith, to walk together; but in the things received as the truth of God by faith, I can make no concession; I may bear with ignorance, but I cannot arrange the truth to please another. You will tell me, In that case, how walk together? Why lay down grounds of unity which require either unity of views, or so evil a thing as concession on such or such a truth? As to the things on which we possess the truth, and with regard to which we have faith, we have the same mind, we walk in them together. If I acquire some knowledge more, I bear with the ignorance of my brother, until God reveals the thing to him. Our unity is in Christ Himself. If unity depends on concessions, it is only a sect founded on human opinions, because the principle of the absolute authority of the truth is lost. They will tell me, that true Christians will never yield on fundamental points. I was going to say "I understand"; but it is not so. There are many who are agreed in spite of the errors which affect the foundations; I know that others would not; but this does not prevent the fact that the principle of concessions is in nowise authorized in the word, denies the authority of the truth on us, and pretends to be able to dispose of it for the sake of peace.¹⁰ The word supposes the bearing with ignorance, but never concessions, because it does not suppose that men could make a rule different from itself, in order to come to an agreement. I receive a man "weak in the faith"; but I do not yield anything to him as to the truth, even on such a point as eating herbs; I might perhaps deny essential truths by so doing. Such a case may happen, where to observe days might lead to doubt of the Christianity of him who does it. (See Gal. 4:9-11.) There might be another case where I could only say, on this very point, "let every man be fully persuaded," Rom. 14:5, 6, etc.

10. Here is the thing better expressed than I could do it myself:

"There is something which is more compromised among us than the truth; it is its value and its claims. We are less far from finding the same dogmas in the scriptures, than from giving them the same authority over us; and we may be allowed to affirm that the questions on which Christians are divided would soon be settled, if they drew near to the Bible with the intention of taking seriously all the truths it proclaims. Alas! while we read, the devil murmurs in our ear. All that is not equally pressing, equally obligatory; we are commanded to bear with the weak; Paul made himself all things to all; he consented to offer sacrifice and to circumcise Timothy: on the other hand, edification goes before dogma; the principal dogma itself goes before the secondary dogmas, etc. One voluntarily opens the ear to a language which appears plausible and prudent; which appears not to attack a single truth, but which is only the more calculated to render them all powerless. From afar, one bows before each truth, but if it comes near to us, if it requires us to act, to sacrifice anything, at once the present truth is ranked among the truths that are out of season." *Archives*, Sept. 22, 1849.

Sometimes the whole of Christianity depends upon something which can be borne with in other points of view; Gal. 2:1-4. I repeat, there is no trace in the word of a system which suppresses a part of the truth so as to have a common confession, but the contrary. There was the perfect truth, and God revealed what was wanting, when it was otherwise. They were of one mind and they walked together, and there was no need of concessions. One did not pretend to such things as required them; that is, the Bible does not suppose what one has the pretension to do. It is to mutilate the truth that it may be adopted by many. The word, therefore, and especially Phil. 3, condemns this arrangement of mutilated truth, with a view to get them to be adopted by everyone; for this is to dishonor God and His truth. These are means for forming a sect, composed of those who are agreed on the points laid down as grounds of union. It is never the unity of the Church of God; it will be an orthodox sect, if they are agreed on fundamental points, yet always a sect, even if it should take in a greater part of a nation, because it is a body formed on the agreement to which men have come on certain truths; but it is not the unity of the Church of God. In a confession of faith there is no question of bearing with individuals who are ignorant on certain points, nor of acknowledging together that one is lacking as to the knowledge thereof, nor of enlightening those who are so; but of declaring the truth one possesses, that others may, by agreeing with that declaration, join themselves to such as have adopted it as a ground of union. That all may adopt it, the profession of the truth must be reduced to the measure of ignorance of all those who come in, if they are sincere in that profession; but that is not bearing with others, but persons, as I have said, who dispose of the truth of God by a human compromise. Is that the unity of the Spirit?

And, again, pay attention to this. If I know the truth and make a concession so as to unite myself to others in a common profession, my concession is just simply yielding the truth to him who will not have it. If I, with others, make concessions because we only have opinions and are ignorant of the truth, or have no certainty as to it, what a monstrous pretension to lay down, in that state of ignorance, a rule to be imposed on others as a ground of the unity of the Church, under penalty of not forming part of it! I may be told, But, instead of this, you impose your views, as being sure of the truth. Not at all; because I believe in a unity which already exists, the unity of the body of Christ, of which every Christian forms part; whereas you establish union on views on which you have come to an agreement. You will tell me, You are indifferent then as to the truth. No; but you have used improper means to guard it, by imposing the profession of a part of the truth as a basis of unity. Some Christians in Paris, already in the truth, as I suppose -- these brethren in Paris are gathered on the ground of the unity of the body of Christ. By the power of the Holy Ghost and by discipline the body is guardian of the truth as of holiness. If any one upholds error and we have been unable to make him give up that error, he is not received or he is excluded. It is a duty towards Christ, Head of the Church, and towards His sheep dear to His heart. If it be only ignorance, one bears with it, and one seeks to enlighten.

That discipline may be exercised with the divine wisdom which the word supplies, and in the manner as well as in the measure, for which it gives us the necessary instructions. What I complain of is, that men have substituted another unity for the unity of the body of Christ, and thus a truth which is not secondary is compromised, and the true unity is rendered impossible.¹¹

11. *Collected Writings* 4:237 (1852).

Chapter 3

An Over-view of the Subject of Reception and Fellowship

Guards Connected With the Word “Receive”

Now him that is weak in the faith receive, not to [the] determining of questions of reasoning (Rom. 14:1).

“Weak in the faith” does not mean unholy in walk and/or associations. Rom. 14 concerns Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds walking together. The “weak” in this chapter means Jewish Christians with scruples about certain matters concerning a system (Judaism) once sanctioned by God. There is a comely consideration for their conscience. Note also that this is no basis for the observance of heathen holidays. W. Kelly’s remarks on this chapter in his exposition of Romans is very helpful.

Rom. 15:1-7 continues with this same line of truth, and we read:

Wherefore receive ye one another, according as the Christ also has received you to [the] glory of God (Rom. 15:7).

The two verses quoted are addressed to those already breaking bread together. Obviously, “receive ye one another” does not mean receiving someone to the Lord’s table. Rather, it means mutual reception of those already at the Lord’s table with respect to those things spoken of in Rom. 14-15:7.

Yet, the principles that we learn in this passage do have a bearing on receiving to the Lord’s table someone who is weak in the faith *as spoken of in this passage*. Moreover, the “glory of God” is brought to bear. For example, a leavened person cannot be received to the Lord’s table to the glory of God. Rather, that would be to His dishonor. A person as in 2 Tim. 2 who is not separated from the vessels to dishonor could not be received without dishonoring God. Such evil reception would be false to the way Christ has received us to the glory of God. The *glory of God* is a guard!

In Philemon we read:

. . . whom I have sent back to thee: [but do thou receive] him, that is, *my bowels* (Philemon 12).

If therefore thou holdest me to be a partner [with thee], receive him as me

(Philemon 17).

In effect, the letter of Paul to Philemon is a letter of commendation. Commendation, and letters of commendation, should come from persons faithful to Christ. "Receive him as me" illustrates this. It is a lovely guard and also very touching to our souls when we consider the words "that is, my bowels."

We should also note the peremptory demand of faithfulness to the true Christ of God found in 2 John:

If anyone come to you and bring not this doctrine, do not receive him into the house, and greet him not; for he who greets him partakes in his wicked works (2 John 10, 11).

Here, the guard is "this doctrine," i.e., "the doctrine of the Christ" (v. 9). Greeting one who does not bring the doctrine of the Christ makes one a partaker of the wicked works of such a professed Christian. "Partakes" is *koinoneo*, meaning 'to make one with.'¹²

Finally, we note another guard in 3 John where we read:

We therefore ought to receive such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth (3 John 8).

3 John does not, of course, contradict 2 John, or any other Scripture. If the elect lady of 2 John refused to obey the commandment of the Lord (2 John 10, 11) she would be a partaker of wicked works. Is that being a fellow-worker with the truth? Rather, it would make her a fellow-worker with wicked works.

Receiving persons, whether as individuals or by the assembly, should display these guards that we have briefly considered.

Reception to the Lord's Table

Answering a question regarding "Reception to the Lord's Table," W. Kelly gave a somewhat summary view (elements of which will be amplified in other chapters):

The true standard by which to try the question is the claim not of a Christian, but of Christ, as revealed by the written word; and this in spirit, not letter. Compare 1 John 5:2.

Now the question raised of late years among us is one of value for the Christ of God, or of indifference to His dishonor indirectly if not directly. An ecclesiastical error of episcopacy, presbyterianism, or independency is quite subordinate. A known saint of proved godliness, being a member of these ostensibly orthodox societies, we receive if seeking to break bread; but we should require him first to clear himself if false doctrine were taught where he goes. Still more peremptorily should we refuse one who came from a heterodox party, as

12. These matters are taken up in the first paper in this series: *An Exposition of 2 John with Some Comments on Gal. 5:9 and Rev. 2 & 3.*

Campbellites, Irvingites, etc., even if he were said to be ever so pious and possessed personal soundness. Scripture is too plain: he is a partaker of their evil deeds, and we decline to license his lukewarm and leavened state. The assembly can rightly be nothing else than the pillar and support of the truth, without becoming a party to Christ's shame, and, in these last days especially, a trap for unwary souls. The present ruin of the church in no way alters the responsibility, though the sphere be only two or three on that ground; otherwise it is at best a human society, exposed to Satan instead of shielded of the Lord, even were each soul there a saint.

It would be well to say plainly where the many simple Christians are, whose only disqualification seems to be that others call them "Open brethren." If known to be only so called and not such really, they would claim and have help to guard them, from the snare they are exposed to, by teaching them truth more fully. All would welcome a call for care in this way. One such company lately came before us; and God was pleased to clear their way; and they are happily in fellowship, gathered to Christ's name, instead of floating without divine principle or centre. Another recently presumed to be such proved to be O.B. A third, for which simplicity was vaunted, the O.B. declared to be "a bad meeting," and too loose for them, though individually admissible. But those of us, who moving most about have the best means of information, do not know of these undefiled meetings; and we are certainly guiltless of refusing any such persons. Also, if we believe scripture, we are sure that Christians may be defiled by a lax principle which glosses over evil generally, and particularly in doctrine. It is a deep fall when a Christian sinks below even the law of God -- "though he wist it not, yet is he guilty." Could we any longer, in dealing with so delicate a case, trust the spiritual judgment of one so dull in hearing God's word? Only he who is firm in truth can safely show grace. Such looseness as this is really to have slipped away from God's principles into a practice never yet sanctioned; and may it never be!

Nor is it ignorant souls that have given us trouble, but rather people more or less intelligent, anxious for their ease or zealous for their friends, but heartless as to Christ or the responsibility of those gathered to His name corporately. Of this character is the argument from those within guilty of intimacy in private with such as are publicly rejected. How sad, instead of censuring this sort of laxity, to apply it as a reason to throw down the holy barriers, or make it seem a yoke too hard to bear! There is a wide margin, on the one hand, between treating an offender as a heathen man and a publican, and, on the other, receiving him at the Lord's table.

So also the balance is uneven and the weights unjust, which put the O.B. companies with Anglicanism and dissent. Both the Church of England and the Nonconformists emerged from darkness into better light; whereas the O.B. began by departing from what was of God in order to screen the partisans of an antichrist, and have never cleared themselves from this plague-spot: to do so would be to give up their *raison d'être*. Then, again, the O.B. *profess*, like ourselves, to be gathered to Christ's name, and deny that they are a sect, as they believe Anglicans and Dissenters to be. In both ways therefore it is untrue and unjust to deal with them alike, according to our conviction and *that of the O.B.* God judges according to profession; and so should we. The falling back of the O.B. on congregational ground also is to escape from corporate responsibility. But this aggravates their guilt, instead of leaving us more free to receive individually

from them, as from churches or chapels. What then is the worth of the palliation before us?

Indeed it may be doubted if any respectable teacher among the O.B. would go so far as the text and note of this paper to destroy the true force of Matt. 18:18-20. Think of lowering it down to Christian intercourse apart from any ecclesiastical position! Thus to blot out the solemnity of "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," and reduce it to ordinary prayer and Christian intercourse, looks like infatuation, as it certainly is a misinterpretation of the first magnitude . . . Certainly we who profit incalculably by this rich provision of the Savior's grace are not, if wise and true, the men to condone the guilt of so mischievous a perversion. May the Lord recover by and to His own truth, and save the weak and careless from shipwreck.¹³

An article in the *Bible Treasury* says:

The question is this: are we to receive from a sect where they have a practice or principle of communion such that they receive persons whom Scripture designates as leavened?

There are other points, and not without moment, in the Circular, needless to notice. Only let the writer beware of being influenced by the imaginary difficulties of ad infinitum contact with evil, which speculative minds urge to destroy conscientious action. No sober mind but rejects a theoretical association extending through endless ecclesiastical receptions and ramifications. If he believes we are right in refusing a sound man who cleaves to and justifies an unsound or wicked association, he surrenders the principle of "Open Brethren," and is bound to act accordingly. The more devoted the saints may be individually, the worse is their sanction of what is unholy. The writer endorses this himself, which is really the principle, and defines the position, of the so-called Exclusive Brethren.¹⁴

If a denomination has such a loose practice or principle of reception, how does this differ from the principle of reception of Open Brethren? Open Brethrenism has always been refused by us, and we require them to separate from it.

The Apostle teaches me that I cannot reprove and have fellowship with the same unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5). This principle puts Bethesda on different grounds from any with whom we have hitherto had communication. For I am sure I could at any moment have said for myself, that if any congregation of Independents, Baptists, or Methodists avowed that they admitted persons who had religious fellowship with avowed heretics, in the sense of the word intimated in the passage quoted from the letter of the ten, provided they were themselves sound in the faith of the Son of God, I should not have even entertained the question of receiving them or not. Under such avowal I could never have been happy in their presence among us.¹⁵

13. *The Bible Treasury* 16:208 (1887).

14. *The Bible Treasury* 12:148 (1878).

15. J. G. Bellett, *A Letter as to Bethesda*, Sept. 18, 1849.

It is clear from this that J. G. Bellett would not receive from a denomination that did as Open Brethren did. W. Kelly also gave testimony that at that time orthodox sects had no such Christ-dishonoring practice:

In one of their recent "Appeals" C. E. [an O. B.] argues that a true platform contemplates all the saints of God, as we have often said, and still say. But the O. B.'s abuse of this godly plea is to accredit, not only Christians guilty of sin, but yet more their society got up by the determination to shelter such from Scriptural judgment. This was not the case with any orthodox sect known to us; and therefore O. B. have no title to the same gracious consideration. Others began for good according to their light. O. B. began by palliating evil, or screening evildoers, in departure from the light they once had. To receive saints in Christ's name was never meant to let in such as dishonor His name; which is as mighty to detect those who treat Him lightly, whatever their pretensions, as to encourage the godly who may be ever so ignorant.¹⁶

How strongly J. G. Bellett regarded this is shown in the following letter:

No Fellowship with Dishonor to Christ

I refuse the language used by brethren from whom we have seceded, that we have "excommunicated them." This is not a just expression; and it produces indignation, and immediate determination in the mind to have nothing to do with people or with principles of such a bearing. It is NOT excommunication. It is standing at the door of the house of God, and, if certain persons come to the door seeking entrance, we act as the spirit of the apostle lets us know we ought to act, and we forbid them entrance.

We do not enquire if they are saints of God or not: this we may know elsewhere. The apostle does not tell us to make any such enquiry. But we refuse to receive them coming up to the door of the house of God from the temple of an idol (1 Cor. 10). They have declared or admitted the declaration, without judging it (and this makes them partakers with it), that they receive at their table one who comes from a place where Christ is dishonored, if he himself is sound in faith and morals, and has not imbibed the heterodoxy. And say no more but just ask, Is a place where Christ is dishonored other in our eyes than an idol's temple, where the cups of demons are drunk? We have no such custom, neither the churches of God. But we say, Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons (or of those who dishonor the Lord Jesus). Judge in yourselves, judge the principle in the light of the word. To me it seems, self-evidencing, light, and power, and virtue, and holiness are in it.

But now that I am on this subject with you, I will linger a little over it, though it be very painful, and has been so to me for many years; for I dearly love those personally from whom I am separated congregationally.

There are three distinct elements -- to use a phrase in much present use: formalism, socialism, and divine holiness.

Formalism obtains in all the aged systems of Romanism and the parish church. Socialism has made great inroads on it in this day of ours. To a great extent it is the favorite principle of the present generation; whether in or out of the church, we see it in activity. The men of the world are combining, and form their joint-stock companies, their confederacies, for the advance of present accommodation and international brotherhood. Such is the day. The saints are always tempted by the spirit of the age, and are now very much acting on this principle. They receive one another in an abstract way, not under the condition the word of God prescribes, as in 1 Cor. 10. And the social atmosphere is very grateful; they breathe it freely and encourage one another by no means to disturb it.

Divine holiness pauses in the light of everything, and challenges it, however precise, amiable, respectable, and widely accredited, by the light of the Lord, and forces it to give an account of itself to the word of God. It has its peculiarities, which it can never surrender either to socialism or to formalism. It is something more than the moral sense of man, or even than a "charity" that refuses to judge or distinguish things that differ. It is the mind of God dispensed in scripture in any given age, and walking in the light of His mind. This divine holiness is a separating principle, but not that of a Pharisee, all to the tradition of men, or assumed higher holiness in one's self, but that of obedience to God's peculiarities -- the principles of His house revealed in His word.

It is easy nowadays to take the journey from formalism to socialism. There is much in the temper of the age to put a very large generation on that road, so that great countenance is given to those who are traveling there. But to travel from socialism to divine holiness is another thing altogether. I add, and this only, that to us it is plain, that among the peculiarities, or attributes, of divine holiness is found that principle which I have already noticed -- that if one come from an idol's temple, where the cup of demons had been drunk (though he be a saint of God), he is not to be received in the house of God. He may say, It is my liberty, and I may go where I please. Divine holiness replies, I cannot combine with such liberty.

Yours affectionately in the Lord, J.G.B. To _____, Nov. 18th, 1863.

P. S. -- I should like with you to look at the Book of Nehemiah, as illustrating formalism, socialism, and divine holiness. We are now called "Exclusives." If this title belongs to us, it belongs to the apostle who tells us to act upon the principle which has given us the title.¹⁷

It has been our scriptural and godly practice to take account of evil associations.

Jude directs us to have compassion of some, making a difference; this has always been enforced and acted upon, so far as I know. But when we find saints ignorantly linked with those who leave the door so wide open to evil, we do, and I trust ever shall, try to make them see and understand their danger, and the dishonor that is done to the Lord Jesus. I have lately been informed that some of these brethren, unable longer to resist the effect of the truth as to the unity of the Spirit upon many of the simple-hearted, are now advocating it themselves, but in

such a way as to make it sanction and uphold what is really the utter denial of it. That is to say, just as, according to their reasoning, the name and profession of Christ ought to bind together individual saints in fellowship, without reference to their guilty association with evil; so the unity of the Spirit should be enforced as linking together the various denominations as such. Scripture speaks of many members, yet but one body; it does not say many bodies, yet but one body.¹⁸

Difficulty in receiving from sects became increasingly felt as the leavening process continued, because the denominations became leavened.

We must have sufficient evidence that those who desire to take part in it are true Christians, and that their walk is moral, Christian. Now, if they habitually meet with those who deny the truths of Christianity, they are defiled; and it is so also if they meet where immorality is allowed.¹⁹ ♦

I know of a case, where two persons got into the brethren's meeting at Vevey. I had not the slightest idea of the Vevey meeting being defiled because these persons had deceived the assembly, and the assembly had received them in good faith; but if a meeting, knowingly and willfully, accepts the wicked person it is not a new lump, if I am to believe 1 Corinthians 5. If the meeting judges the evil, or even if it has been admitted ignorantly -- in such a case it may be that there has not been sufficient vigilance -- but the assembly is not defiled, because the conscience has not been engaged in it. But if the evil is there, and brought to light, the assembly must show itself pure in the matter, otherwise it is not a new lump; it is impure, none of the members call upon the Lord out of a pure heart, unless there is real ignorance of the fact; and this is true ad infinitum, two, or two million, meetings do not alter the matter. In every case the question is: Has the assembly, knowingly and willfully, admitted what is impure? Has it willingly associated itself with that which is impure? If so, it is itself impure, and so are those forming it.²⁰ ♦

18. *The Bible Treasury* 7:240 (1869).

19. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:132 (1881).

20. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 33:26.

Chapter 4

Did the Practice of Reception Change During the 1800s?

I have never changed my views at all. The practice is more difficult because of the growing looseness in doctrines and practice of all around -- J. N. Darby.²¹

In 1833 J. N. Darby wrote:

I feel daily more the importance of the Christians at P. {Plymouth, England}, and I do trust that you will keep infinitely far from sectarianism. The great body of the Christians who are accustomed to religion, are scarce capable of understanding anything else, as the mind ever tends there. If they become so in their position before God, they would be utterly useless, and I am persuaded, immediately broken to pieces. You are nothing, nobody, but Christians, and the moment you cease to be an available mount for communion for any consistent Christian, you will go to pieces or help the evil.²²

Loose and neutral Christians have seized on this as if later a change was made. No, the practice did not change. The orthodoxy of the sects is what changed. More and more became leavened. Moreover, to be received, a Christian had to be a *consistent* Christian. Notice JND used “consistent Christian”²³ in this 1833 letter. A Christian who has fellowship with evil is not a *consistent* Christian. Fellowship with evil is not a Christian thing to do and it leavens a Christian. As the reader goes through this paper he should note numbers of references to receiving *consistent* Christians. In 1846 J. N. Darby wrote:

I believe we are not properly aware, few, at least, of the unfeigned importance of the position He has set us in, in testimony of separation from evil and waiting on Him.²⁴

That was written before the Bethesda division of 1848. Moreover, it is false that

21. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:460.

22. *Letters* 2:16 (1869).

23. We entertain no loose or perverse notion of what a consistent Christian is in order to enlarge the sphere of practical fellowship. He is one whose walk is godly, both in his personal practice and associations and in his ecclesiastical associations. The first three pamphlets deal with the bearing of 2 John, 2 Tim., and 1 Cor. 5 as well as Gal. 5:9 on what a consistent Christian does with respect to evil.

24. *Letters* 1:115 (Nov. 6, 1846).

he wrote his paper, *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity* ²⁵ at the time of, or in view of the 1848 Bethesda division. It was written in Oct. 1846 ²⁶ in view of the Evangelical Alliance. ²⁷ Earlier than that, in 1843, he wrote:

All true union is founded on faithfulness in separating oneself from the evil which is known. ²⁸

In 1867 he wrote:

But in these days the unity of the body, and separation from evil, are vital points of testimony for Christians. One is the original and abiding principle of the Church's existence; the other, faithfulness to its nature, and characterizing that faithfulness in a special manner in the last days. To me it is that (both) or nothing. One is the special purpose of God as to us connected with Christ, the other His nature. The notion that one can be wittingly associated with evil, and be undefiled, is an unholy notion -- a denial of the nature of holiness. And in the world the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The character of Christ with Philadelphia is, He that is holy, He that is true; the keeping His word and the word of His patience, what is commended in the saints; an open door and only a little strength, but special association with Christ the holy One, and the truth in the midst of a degenerate people. And things are going on so rapidly in these last days that Christians will be cast on their own ground, and we shall need the word to be our authority, and it is a divine one. ²⁹

Now, before quoting others concerning original practice, here is one more word from JND (1879):

But the principle of scripture is as plain as possible. There was one body *on earth*, of which all are members. They do not heal in heaven, nor preach, nor use any of the gifts spoken of in 1 Cor. 12. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it:" that is not in heaven. The body will be perfected in heaven (Eph. 1:23), but is practically always considered as on earth, and formed there: "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." And this was clearly down here. (Acts 2) The Lord's supper is the external sign of this unity: "one body for we are all partakers of that one loaf." It was this, more than fifty years ago, ³⁰ brought me out of the establishment: nor have I any other principle now. This obliged me to own every one baptized with the Holy Ghost as a member of the body. Only in the last days we are called on to distinguish those who "call on the name of the Lord *out of a pure heart*," which at the first was not called for: "*the Lord* added daily." This makes the brethren (so-called) not the church of God, but those who alone meet on the principle of its unity. The line between narrowness and fidelity is a very narrow one. But the Spirit of Christ can guide and keep us on it. The unity of the

25. See *Collected Writings* 1:353-365. See also p. 350.

26. R. Nelson, *Protest Against the Proceedings of Mr. John Darby*, Feb. 22, 1852.

27. W. Kelly, *God's Principle of Unity*, p. 21.

28. *Collected Writings* 1:276.

29. *Letters* 1:509 (1867).

30. {This letter is dated Nov. 1879. It is shown that four persons started breaking bread in the end of Nov. or early Dec. 1827 in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, vol. 1, available from the publisher. }

body cannot be touched, for the Holy Ghost unites to Christ: all those who have been baptized by the Holy Ghost (that is, received Him) are members of the body. It is "the unity of the Spirit" we have to keep; that is, to walk in that power of the Spirit which keeps us in unity on the earth, and that needs endeavoring.³¹

So it became increasingly difficult to carry out that practice of the original principle as time went on because of the leavening of various communions. Originally saints from orthodox sects were received. (Concerning reception from the Church of England, see Chapter 5.) In 1848, saints meeting at Bethesda, in Bristol, England, introduced a *new* principle of reception and fellowship in a document called *The Letter of the Ten*, read at a meeting on June 29 and July 3, 1848, signed by 10 leaders, among whom were George Muller and Henry Craik, and *voted* on by the congregation for acceptance (with dissidents). It stated the new doctrine:

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 {B. W. Newton} 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 . . .³²

From this we see that Bethesda adopted the idea that a person in fellowship where "fundamentally heretical" evil doctrines were taught and held, was not leavened and could be received if they did not imbibe the evil. This view, and even worse, is held by all Open Brethren. This marks **the formal beginning of Open Brethrenism**³³ and that letter is the charter of Open Brethrenism.

W. H. Dorman was gathered together to the Lord's name before the Bethesda division of 1848, which introduced the new view on reception and fellowship, thus departing from the original practice. In 1849 he pointed out that Bethesda was acting in a new way:

I confess it *is* a new way of using the truth of the unity of all believers, when it is pressed as a reason why I should tolerate that which dishonors Christ; and why I should have fellowship with men, of whatever acknowledged piety, who are maintaining in their midst, a system of untruthfulness and evil, which can only defile the consciences of God's children, and grieve his blessed Spirit.

Brethren may urge as much as they please, the evils and corruptions that are maintained in the corporate associations -- as the church of England and the like -- from which saints are, nevertheless, received. My reply is, Let Bethesda and other places that sanction Mr. Newton's evil, be put in the same position (or, what my

31. *Letters* 3:49 (1879).

32. Quoted from, *Letter of the Ten*, Glasgow: Scott & Allan, p. 5, 1866.

33. {That letter was examined in great detail by G. V. Wigram. His examination is reproduced in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, Vol. 2, Defense of Truth, 1845-1850, a book which fully documents what transpired, and exposes misrepresentation by Open Brethren -- available from the publisher.}

soul desires, clear themselves before the church of God from these evils), and I have nothing more to say. But this is not so: and, therefore the ground that is taken is but a cover, to compel the sanction of known evil.³⁴

W. Trotter wrote an exposure of Bethesda's course in *The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda*, written July 15, 1849. Let us hear what he had to say about reception:

It is often said that in declining fellowship with those who come from Bethesda in its present state, we treat them worse than we do Christians in the denominations generally. It has been asked again and again, whether we would not receive a godly clergyman remaining in the Church of England, where all indiscriminately are received to communion. I answer, unhesitatingly, yes, we should, as always, receive a brother in the Lord who is in the Establishment or among the Dissenters, without requiring him beforehand to separate from the body of which he is a member. But what has this to say to the case in hand? Does a clergyman's reception of unconverted people at the table of the Establishment accredit them to us as Christians? Not in the least. But is this the case with Bethesda? The profession is, that none but Christians are received there; and any one coming thence heretofore, has come fully accredited as a Christian. If, then, Bethesda admits those who are unsound in the faith, the result is, that all confidence is destroyed, and we should never know, in admitting persons thence, whether we were not receiving under the guise of a "dear brother or sister" an enemy of the faith, and a subverter of souls. This is the position in which Bethesda has placed itself; a position altogether unlike that of the Establishment, or of any evangelical Dissenting Body. If I knew of a Dissenting congregation which, on principle, and to maintain a neutral place, received Socinians as well as Orthodox believers to communion, I should no more receive persons from that congregation than from Bethesda. I should have no confidence in their confessions of faith, however sound, till they had renounced their unholy association with the deniers of the Lord that bought them. And I regard Mr. Newton's doctrine as a more dangerous, because more insidious and artfully disguised heresy than Socinianism itself.

That shows us how William Trotter understood reception. He was gathered together to the Lord's name before the Bethesda division.

In Chapter 4 the reader will find more evidence concerning the fact that Bethesda departed from the original practice. There he will find the testimony of J. G. Bellett, one of the first four who were gathered together to the name of the Lord in Nov. or Dec. 1827. He will also find there further testimony of J. N. Darby, one of the first four. Besides that, G. V. Wigram was gathered together to the Lord's name just several years after JND and we have something from him.

Bethesda reception allows for Christians to have fellowship with leavened

34. *A Review of Certain Evils . . .*, 1849.

persons (in violation of 2 John 2; 2 Tim. 2; and 1 Cor. 5 with Gal. 5:9).³⁵ The leavening of sects has become worse and worse. Let us consider a number of statements bearing on the increasing difficulty of receiving Christians because of the spreading leaven. We will consider them in chronological order. First, here are remarks by J. N. Darby written in 1878:

Looseness is so prevalent now among the denominations that more care is needed; but I hold that every known Christian has the same title as myself; and membership of an assembly I totally reject . . .

I have never changed my views at all. The practice is more difficult because of the growing looseness in doctrines and practice of all around.³⁶

Here is an interesting statement from W. Kelly, written in 1902:

Q. If gathered to the Lord's name, on what principle in the present disorder and ruin of God's house should we receive a Christian from a denomination or sect though he were desirous of abiding there? R.M.

A. The principle is, "as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." If there be a known cause of sin and shame, we ought to refuse: not so did Christ receive us. Even when we had much to learn of the truth in detail, (50, 60 or more years ago), a firm stand was made by faithful men against such as trifled with fundamental truth. I remember in those days a fervent Wesleyan, who had learnt "the blessed hope" and was morally driven out of that society by their opposition to that truth; yet was he rejected in his wish for communion in the Lord's supper, because he denied the personality of the Holy Spirit, too common even then. But it is of comparatively late years that the fatal tidal wave of heterodoxy has been overflowing Christendom, as to Christ's person on both sides, everlasting punishment of the lost, and God's inspiration of scripture. This actual and growing condition compels all who fear God to reject such as either hold these grievous errors or, what is if possible worse, make light of these evils and insist on their title to go on where these destructive lies are taught. No matter what they plead, they disqualify themselves for true communion of saints, if they also claim indifference practically to such God-dishonoring errors. It is awful to think that some who were at least associated long with men faithful to Christ are now looser than the loose. For they faithlessly swamp the truth and holiness of God to receive Christians so called, no matter how defiled now. All of these may not be equally bold and careless; but there is no path so dangerous as, under heat for some and opposition to others, departing from known and cherished truth, and slighting those servants of God to whom they owe no small debt of love. Ere long, if grace do not deliver, they will hate their testimony more and more, and the light in them will become darkness; and then how great the darkness!

Where it is a known saint in an orthodox though sectarian position, yet in no way exercised about it, it appears to me still our privilege as of old to receive such an one in the Lord's name, who desires to remember Him with us in the

35. This has been explained in the first three pamphlets in this series.

36. *Letters* 3:459, 460 (1878).

breaking of bread. But he needs adequate testimony and comes under discipline³⁷ like others. Of course bargaining on either side would be intolerable. How many simple ones of spiritual feeling, though far from intelligent, having once enjoyed His presence thus, have enquired and learnt His will, and never returned to man's devices! The easygoing are such as retrograde, and so do the stiff and narrow; when they come to see that Christ is not therein, reaction may ensue.³⁸

Next, we have some statements from W. Kelly made in 1905:

According to his present view, and "the Keswick motto," whether maintaining sects, or abjuring them, all Christians in the existing disorder and confusion, are alike gathered to His name! If he said that, as members of Christ and walking consistently, they are entitled to be received in His name and are free to take their place, it is true. But what if they ignore it and prefer a gathering according to their own views, or an organization that sets aside God's? Can it be that standing to this looseness, go where he will among orthodox denominations, he and other believers honor that precious privilege as truly as in apostolic days? There was an early man among Brethren (A. N. Groves.) who seems to have entertained or slipped into a similar negation of all divine principle. To simple and intelligent souls this was ever abhorrent. For it stultifies all scripture which treats of the church, and in particular this Epistle { 1 Cor. } which T. N. perverts to his aid. Can he honestly believe that, when the apostle addresses the church of God that is in Corinth, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours," he sanctions separate sects, and accepts what he calls a heretic (Titus 3: 10, 11) as all the same gathered to the Lord's name? This is beyond doubt what the argument involves, as foolish a thought as it is faithless.

It is therefore mere evasion of "gathered to the name of Christ" if we pretend that when gathered as "Presbyterians and Episcopalians, Baptists and Methodists, and those who refuse all separating titles" (to take his own phrase in page 8), Christians, however earnest, are nevertheless gathered to His name. They are never so gathered whilst they abide in religious corporations framed on these extra-scriptural lines. Nor is the refusal of "separating titles" enough. There must be the positive gathering to His name as the divinely given, only, and adequate center for God's children, to the exclusion of all that is incompatible with it by the word and Spirit of God. Matt. 18:15-20 supposes but one communion, no matter in how many places even in the same city they may meet. The church or assembly here and everywhere else in scripture implies inter-communion, and never allows of a fellowship independent and differing one from another . . .

To assume that to be saints in the denominations makes them notwithstanding truly gathered together to the Lord's name opens the door to nullify the church, for which it substitutes a mere rope of sand. It is the device of latitudinarianism, and the abandonment of the Lord's promise to those who are gathered together unto His name. And what can be plainer, to those who have learnt from scripture the impending ruin evident already to inspired eyes and revealed in the Epistles and the Revelation, than that the Lord before the beginning here as elsewhere intimates that the falling away might be so great that only two or three here and

37. {See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:109, 110, 213.}

38. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 4:64.

there might be thus gathered in faith of God's will ecclesiastically for fidelity here below? Yet does He deign to provide the sanction here promised to those who obey His word in face of trial and ill report, instead of following the multitude in pride of antique error, or turning to indifference, novelty, and what not.

In earlier days believers were freely received as Christ's members who, having no right notion of the church, were hardly to be counted guilty of departure from what was of God. Yet those who personally departed could plead for no such favor. But there is now an ominous change foreboding "the apostasy." No saint in those days tolerated the sacerdotalism of Christendom with its lie of apostolic succession as the warrant, its saving ordinances, and its idolatry with the real presence of a demon. Still less had we to challenge those who countenanced the gross scepticism of the Higher critics, though we had to refuse such as fell into the denial of God's judgment of sins or the soul's natural immortality. We are now bound to apply the later tests of scripture.³⁹

Q. Acts 20:7. Is every Christian whose faith is sound and walk godly admissible when known as such to the Lord's Supper? J.O.S.

A. The principle is sound; but in the growing confusion care is due to the Lord that it be rightly applied so as not to cover ungodliness in either way by evil communications which corrupt good manners and defile even when personal appearance seems right. There are vast numbers, besides Papists, who now countenance idolatry in their so-called worship. There are very many, both Nationalists and Dissenters, who sanction or are indifferent to the scepticism of the Higher Critics. It would be wicked to make either of these free of the Lord's Table. They are enemies of the truth, and to allow their fellowship is a sin. Their belonging to some ecclesiastical system where such things notoriously flourish, to which they are attached, is a necessary ground to refuse them as long as they persevere in an evil association. Otherwise it is to blow hot and cold, and to adopt in what represents the church of God the laxity of the world which knows not God. In the case of relatives, friends, or the like, peculiar caution is due, lest in amiable feeling we should compromise Christ. In early days we had neither the idolatrous evil nor the skeptical one as we have now. The shadows of the coming apostasy are around us. Let us increasingly watch unto prayer and in jealousy for Christ's glory, and in true love to Christians.⁴⁰

Now, either JND and WK told the truth or they told an untruth. The loose and neutrals in fellowship matters may tell us which it is, with proof. Were these brethren deceiving others? Did they change their practice of reception and try to hide that change in practice with what are untruthful excuses? Or is it the loose and neutrals that are in the wrong -- who want fellowship with what was then rejected -- and so misrepresent the facts of the case?

It is well to state that what is right and proper in reception must be increasingly carefully considered in each individual case because of the widespread leaven of infidelity and corruption that has so commonly come in almost

39. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 5:296, 298 (1905).

40. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 5:334 (1905).

everywhere. Godly exercise and care must be carried out that the Lord's honor be maintained.

In his *John Nelson Darby As I Knew Him*, W. Kelly wrote:

The recent indifferentism that prevails also curtailed in practice the readiness with which outside Christians were received, though the principle abode as ever; but its application could not but be abridged, when some wished to break bread who were insensible to notorious and grievous error taught where they usually attended.

A. H. Rule wrote (ca 1905):

Our habit⁴¹ has been to receive a godly Baptist or Presbyterian and the like. But where the avowed creed of a sect involves wickedness -- bad fundamental doctrine, or immoral conduct -- a person still connected with such would not be received. He must sever his connection with a position in which he supports such a creed, before being received.

If, in the Briggs {of Princeton Theological Seminary}⁴² controversy, the body had, as such, adopted the wicked doctrines he held in connection with "Higher Criticism," we could no longer receive a Presbyterian at the table, however godly, because, by his position he is linked with the wickedness. The same principle has seemed to me to apply to "Open Brethren," because they adopted an evil principle at Bethesda which opened the door to wickedness, and whatever may be the state of "Open Brethren" now, it is well known, that acting on the principles they adopted, they received persons who held the Newton heresy. Trotter's paper shows this clearly.⁴³ But even if they had not received such persons, they received those still linked with the wickedness, though they believed them to be personally clear of the doctrine. This principle they have never withdrawn. It was reiterated only a few years ago. And I have heard it maintained over and over again in the last few years by those on that ground, that we should receive all who are personally clear of the doctrine. A person among them being ignorant does not alter the fact that they are identified with the evil. This is where my difficulty lies. Many a one among them one would most gladly receive if only they broke the link with the evil. For the principle, compare Hag 2:12, 13. The clean does not make the unclean clean; but the unclean makes the clean unclean.⁴⁴ ♦

A. G. (Alfred Gill?) is quoted by A. H. Rule:

It seems clear that membership of system, backed by known moral ways, cannot

41. {It is well, perhaps, to state here that what was right and proper in this matter many years ago, must be carefully considered in each individual case because of the wide-spread leaven of infidelity and corruption that has so commonly come in almost everywhere. Godly exercise and care must be carried out that the Lord's honor and glory be maintained.}

42. {Some 30 years latter, the situation had so changed that J. J. Machen (quite the opposite of a Briggs) was defrocked. When push came to shove, as it is said, "moderates" sided with the liberals and modernists against the conservatives. The result was that a split came and the Westminster Theological Seminary was formed.}

43. {*The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda.*}

44. *Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule* 2:92, 93.

be accepted as ground of admittance. In Mr. Darby's day it might; but there has since been a fearful downward progress. Infidelity is widely and openly taught from the pulpit; the Bible is shorn of its divine inspiration and authority, and regarded as being merely a book of legendary lore and moral precepts; and creeds of once orthodox bodies are swept aside to make way for the admission into the sect of Unitarians and the like. Coming from such a quarter the visitor may well be interrogated as to his faith and baptism; and received rather *in spite of* than in any wise *because* of his membership in system. There are furthermore the facts that many ministers are deep in the oath-covered fellowship of secret societies; and that moral delinquency of a serious character is in some cases largely tolerated in order to retain the financial support of the guilty ones. If a visiting brother be a freemason why should he be received; when, if coming from the world he would be refused? My sympathies are with those saints who, with tender conscience, have scruples regarding laxity in receiving from system, though I quite recognize the danger of narrowness with a hard pharisaic spirit. Apart from grace we shall surely fall on the one side or on the other.⁴⁵

And finally:

If a Christian, sound in doctrine, and blameless in morals and in his associations, wish to break bread with us (upon adequate testimony of those who know him to be such), none could refuse or make bargains.⁴⁶ ♦

45. "Memorandum of A. G.," *Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule* 2:98, 99; written in approximately 1903, *ibid.*, 2:96n.

46. *The Bible Treasury* 7:239 (1869).

Chapter 5

Reception From Orthodox Sects

May the Lord guide you. Remember, you are acting as representing the whole church of God, and if you depart from a right path as to the principle of meeting, separating yourselves from it is to be a local sect on your own principles. In all that concerns faithfulness, God is my witness, I seek no looseness; but Satan is busy to lead us one side or the other, to destroy the largeness of the unity of the body, or to make it mere looseness in practice and doctrine; we must not fall into one in avoiding the other. Reception of all true saints is what gives its force to the exclusion of those walking loosely. If I exclude all who walk godlily as well, who do not follow with us, it loses its force, for those who are godly are shut out too.⁴⁷

I make a difference between a person not rightly dividing the word of truth, and positively teaching on the part of the enemy what dishonors the Person of Christ, or saps any fundamental truth.⁴⁸

There are Christians who fall into looseness and neutrality who then want to point to the practice, during the 1800s, of receiving from sects, *while omitting or avoiding the various guards* which those brethren noted in many places in writing on this subject. The reader should pay close attention to those occasions where such guards were noted.⁴⁹ They received from *orthodox* sects, and then not necessarily every one, as there were certain states of soul, or other matters, that needed to be taken into account.

J. N. Darby, who was there at the commencement of the work in Plymouth, England, informs us of the practice of reception from the beginning:

The brethren who, at Plymouth, had from the commencement devoted themselves to the work, as well as others who had helped in the oversight of the flock, met each week to take counsel together on all that concerned the welfare of the assembly, the reception of members, etc., and the work in general, communicating in detail to the flock all that which, in general, would interest them, and specially all the cases of public discipline, which demanded any public act on their part. The supper was open to every Christian; gifted brethren, whencesoever they might have come, partook of the supper as members of the body of Christ, and exercised freely as such their gifts. There was much blessing. There were also difficulties,

47. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:12 (1869).

48. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:378 (1864).

49. Numbers of quotations stating these guards will be found in the next chapter, on receiving, or rather not receiving from Open Brethren, and from those who hold similar principles of reception and fellowship.

for which God in His grace provided.⁵⁰

This was written in 1849, after the formation of the Open Brethren in 1848 at Bethesda (Bristol, England). It is an unguarded statement, not taking into account how others afterward would make use of such a statement for their loose practices in a wide-spread condition of leavened sects compared to the time of the early years at Plymouth. We will now look at a statement from W. Kelly:

We receive every Christian walking as such, without reference to their connexion with Nationalism {national churches} or Dissent; we rejoice to have communion with them, whether privately or publicly. They may join us in worship and the supper of the Lord; they are as free as any of us to help in thanksgiving, or a word of edification, if so led of God; and this, without stipulation either to leave their old associations or to meet only with us . . . If you mean that I, for one, would refuse, (not to have communion with God's children anywhere in a holy scriptural way, but) to join in the services of the Establishment {Church of England}, that is a very different question . . .⁵¹

A key phrase here, very liable to be over-looked by neutrals in divine matters is "walking as such." A Christian in a leavened sect is not walking consistently⁵² as a Christian and is to be refused.

A helpful extract from correspondence was printed in *The Bible Treasury* 7:239, 240 (1869):

Extract From Correspondence

Revised by the Writer

There may be, and no doubt is, practical failure in this as in other matters; but I do not think that, as a principle, or as a rule practically, the so-called "exclusive" Brethren refuse the table to any Christian who may be walking consistently, merely because he may be connected with one or other of the various systems around. Such a course would be to abandon the true breadth of the church of God, and to make ourselves in very deed a sect. It is of the utmost importance that the absolute freedom of every believer, as a member of the body of Christ, to the Lord's table, and to all the privileges and responsibilities connected therewith, should be jealously maintained and acted upon. What they do (and so long as this fundamental principle is secured from violation, what I trust they ever will do) is to guard against any such supposing that the ground we are upon is the same as that which others occupy; and that accordingly we ought to go in and out amongst the denominations, or at least, by expressly stipulating to let those do so who wish to break bread with us, admit that they are as right as we. Now it is just here that the shoe pinches them (to use a common but forcible figure) and, believe me, it is just here that it ought to pinch

50. *Collected Writings* 4:173 (1849).

51. *God's Principle of Unity*, London: Morrish, p. 23. This is "A New Edition . . ." and appears to be a slightly revised second edition of a paper, *God's principle of Unity, in Reply to the Rev. O. Bobrée*. It seems that these papers appeared about 1862. The paper is in two parts. Part 2 is missing in the CD-ROM, *The Kelly Collection*. Part 2 is "The 'Brethren.'"

52. C. H. Mackintosh spoke of the requirement of "a walk consistent with that faith" in "Thoughts on the Lord's Supper," *Miscellaneous Writings* 3:18, New York: Loizeaux.

because it is the truth of God that is involved.

It is not that we are better than they, or more faithful to the light we have received; no, but it is a question of perceiving the mind of God, as to the unity of the body of Christ on the one hand, and what is contrary to it -- what in reality sectarianism is -- on the other hand, and of simply holding to His will at all cost.

You will often find (and from what little you say of your friend it may be so with him) that other Christians of the more spiritual sort would like to be identified with "the Brethren" (so-called), provided we could receive them on the ground of their being at liberty, as with our sanction and approval and as if it were scriptural, to continue in fellowship with their respective systems. It is a device of the adversary, plied with great energy, and made to press heavily upon us on all hands of late, to swamp the true character and testimony of the church of God.

We do not attempt to re-establish the church in its outward unity as at the beginning, much less do we profess to be it -- that would be arrogant indeed; but we do not and cannot admit that the ground we are upon (*viz.*, the unity of the Spirit), finds its expression in the saints' deliberately, and of choice, identifying themselves one Lord's day with one system which denies that unity in one way, and with another the next Sunday which denies it in another, and then on the third identifying us with their loose position and ways.

If a Christian, sound in doctrine, and blameless in morals and in his associations, wish to break bread with us (upon adequate testimony of those who know him to be such), none could refuse or make bargains one way or the other with him; nor could any put him away for continuing to identify himself with the orthodox systems; but that is no reason why we should not remonstrate with him, and try to teach him better. But, alas! this is just what our alleged and obnoxious exclusiveness consists in, and what those who like "liberty" in these things, better than they understand the interests of Christ that are involved, will not tolerate. Looked closely into, I am persuaded that, without being conscious of it, a large number of Christians are too much occupied with the interests and rights of the saints with respect to this matter of fellowship. I mean too much in comparison with the interests and the rights, &c., of Christ. Both are true, but each must have its due place, Christ and His claims *first*; and if these be entertained, the others will inevitably follow. What now characterizes the bulk of the more spiritual and active Christians is that a preponderance of their interests is on behalf of sinners on the one hand, and on behalf of the saints on the other hand: that is to say, both evangelically and also ecclesiastically their labors begin from the human side and not from the divine. The interests of God and of His Christ are a good deal, to say the least, overlooked.

You say that your friend admits it would be inconsistent to receive "constantly" at the table one who continued to go to and fro; but are there in scripture two kinds of receiving, one less important, and less definite, and less responsible than the other? Either a person is on the ground of the church of God or he is not. If he is not, he ought to be seriously instructed, and if possible made to understand before he practically takes that ground with us, that he makes himself a transgressor in having done so if he abandon it. But whether he understand it or no, you have no right to refuse him his place, if he be not otherwise disqualified. If however he be eligible to break bread once, it could only rightly be upon ground that would make him always so; and if his not having renounced denominationalism was no obstacle at first, it could not be such at any time. He not only has title to the Lord's table as

being a member of Christ, but has actually taken his place there, and, unless he should disqualify himself otherwise, is free of all its privileges and responsibilities.

It is said, Oh, but after all, the unity of the Spirit has long since been *broken*, and we must in all love hold one thing in the way of church fellowship to be pretty much, if not altogether, as good and as right as another: therefore who is to arrogate to themselves such exclusiveness as prevails in certain quarters? To this my reply is very simple. I deny altogether that the unity of the Spirit is broken or can be. It is an absolute and unalterable fact that the saints of this dispensation are baptized by one Spirit into one body. In Eph. 4 the saints are exhorted to keep this unity, not from disrapture, but "in the bond of peace." They were to exhibit not outward only, but in condition of soul that unity, but it existed to be so kept, and it exists still, though we have grievously failed to hold it and to exhibit it in the bond of peace.

Now if these loose brethren, where and whoever they may be, deny that there exists this unity for the saints to keep, we do not wonder that to them one thing is pretty much as good as another. As to unity, they have themselves nothing that is divine to contend for, and do not see the use of contending, and would have us to give up the truth we have learned, and for peace' sake to resolve ourselves into a mere sect, like the denominations, and go on comfortably as they do. But no! it was the true mother of the child who exclaimed with horror at the decree of Solomon to divide it. The other had nothing to lose by it and could afford to consent; but it only betrayed the true state of the case -- she had nothing to lose. The true one had a living mother's interest in a living child, whose life was most precious to her: she could not and would not consent to such a compromise. So is it with the so-called exclusives. They have -- I would rather say *the Lord* has -- something to lose by a compromise, and they cannot consent to it. Let us hold fast. We shall never really help our brethren by lowering our ground, or relaxing our hold on the truth of God as to the character and testimony of the church. Let us receive as many as will come, telling them faithfully that in coming they take ground which, whether they apprehend it or not, utterly condemns all denominationalism; but if they come, let them come. "Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them" (Jer. 15:19). If this seem to be taking very high ground, be it so: we dare not contend for lower. The best way to prevent their going back to what they have left is to give them what is better. The ministration of Christ to each other in the power of the Holy Ghost cannot fail to bind together those that are His.

In these remarks I have passed over the question of evil doctrine, which God suffered to trouble us some years ago. It was needful in order to arouse us to the question of fellowship; and it tested the ground we were upon, and it was found that with some, to meet "as Christians" simply had lost its true and scriptural import, and had come to signify that, if a person was a Christian, we had no responsibility to ask any other question. He might hold all sorts of evil doctrine, or be suspected of it, and yet because he was a Christian, he had his right to a place at the table of the Lord. Others seeing the evil of that principle did *not* see that deliberate identification in the breaking of bread with a gathering in which evil doctrine about the person of the Lord was known to be held and taught, made the individual guilty, although he did not himself imbibe it. They overlooked 2 John 10, or denied its application. They hold and have taught that the fornicator was to be put out of the church at Corinth,

not because his presence defiled the assembly, but lest he should corrupt others!! Alas, what an overlooking of the character of the assembly as the place of the presence of Christ. Read Num. 19.

Jude directs us to have compassion of some, making a difference; this has always been enforced and acted upon, so far as I know. But when we find saints ignorantly linked with those who leave the door so wide open to evil, we do, and I trust ever shall, try to make them see and understand their danger, and the dishonor that is done to the Lord Jesus. I have lately been informed that some of these brethren, unable longer to resist the effect of the truth as to the unity of the Spirit upon many of the simple-hearted, are now advocating it themselves, but in such a way as to make it sanction and uphold what is really the utter denial of it. That is to say, just as, according to their reasoning, the name and profession of Christ ought to bind together individual saints in fellowship, without reference to their guilty association with evil; so the unity of the Spirit should be enforced as linking together the various denominations as such. Scripture speaks of many members, yet but *one body*; it does not say many bodies, yet but one body. 0.

In 1873 J. N. Darby wrote:

The question you put as to receiving is to me always a delicate one. The point is to conciliate sound discipline, and being wholly outside the camp, which is of increasing importance, and avoiding being a sect, which I should as anxiously do. Receiving all members of Christ's body is not a sect clearly, and that is the principle on which I unite, but they must walk orderly and be under discipline,⁵⁴ and not pretend to impose conditions on the church of God. If therefore they came claiming as a condition liberty to go elsewhere, I could not allow it because I know it is wrong, and the church of God cannot allow what is wrong.⁵⁵ If it was ignorance, and they came *bona fide* in the spirit of unity, to that which is the symbol of unity, I should not reject them, because they had not in fact broken [with it], but I could not, accept what made us part of the camp, nor any sort of claim to go to both, to be inside and outside. This is equally pretentious and dishonest. . . . But I receive a person who comes in simplicity, with a good conscience, for the sake of spiritual communion, though they may not yet see clearly ecclesiastically; but the assembly is bound to exercise discipline as to them, and know their walk and purity of heart in coming whenever they do. They cannot come in and out just as they please, because the conscience of the assembly is engaged in the matter, and its duty to God, and to Him at whose Table they are. Looseness in this is more fatal than ever now. If a person practically says I will come to take a place in the body of Christ when I like, and go into sects and evil when I like for convenience or pleasure, that is not a pure heart. It is making their own will the rule of God's assembly, and subjecting the assembly to it, and that cannot be is clearly wrong.⁵⁶

54. {See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:109, 110.}

55. {See also *Letters* 2:11; 3:460; *Notes and Jottings* 39.}

Concerning Christians who merely want to go back and forth and impose their will on the assembly, see *Letters* 2:12, 212, 213.

Concerning bringing friends, see *Letters* 2:409.

Cases must be considered individually: *Things New and Old* 19:274.}

56. *Letters* 2:213 (1873).

Two questions answered in *The Bible Treasury* 9:224 (1872) are quoted here:

Q. 2. Is it requisite that the assembly as such should agree to the proposal of names for communion? or is it enough that they be proposed by two or three having the confidence of the rest? A.B.

A. There is no small danger for some of attaching too much importance to the mere proposal for communion. This really involves no more than the judgment of the individuals who propose: if they propose rashly it is enough that the assembly refuse to receive those they propose -- a wholesome but painful lesson for all concerned. The great point of importance is, not the proposal by a few individuals (which really and properly has nothing to do with the assembly; for in principle any brother is at liberty to propose whom he thinks fit), but the action of the assembly, who are all responsible, when a name is proposed, to satisfy themselves directly or through such visitors as they confide in, that the Lord has received those they accept after proposal. It is egregious to suppose that the assembly should propose as well as receive people; and to lay overmuch stress on the individuals who propose (however desirable that they be godly, and respected by all for spiritual competency) shows latent ministerialism. Exclusion and restoration answer, not to proposal, but to reception, and are all, save proposal, the act of the assembly, which in each case is bound to carry out what it believes to be the Lord's will in his word.

The grand thing is the assembly's acceptance or rejection of those proposed. To make too much of the proposers is to make too little of the assembly. If individuals propose carelessly, they should feel it as their fault. If the assembly receive carelessly, it is the assembly's fault (and it is vain to shift it thence on individuals); for to receive is their responsibility, not that of the proposers.

Q. What are the grounds of admission? what of exclusion? and what is meant by the unity of the body? H.D.

A. I know no ground of admission but the membership of Christ's body. Of course it is implied that the applicant affords no just occasion for exception either doctrinally or morally. Were there known evil in doctrine or practice, the clearest profession of the truth would only produce the deeper distrust. But a Christian, apart from such reasons, inconsistent {sic} with the godly confession of the Lord's name, is thoroughly admissible as such, hardly needs to be known. To demand ecclesiastical intelligence⁵⁷ in the persons applying is not only without and against scripture, but a proof of lack of intelligence in those who seek for it in such circumstances. We ought not to look for spiritual understanding as to the church in those outside. Press for the confession of Christ, or the knowledge of redemption. All we could hope to find beyond the gospel is mere notions, till a soul is in the place which grace assigns it, till walking in communion. Those who are on church ground ought themselves to be intelligent as well as gracious; and if they are, they will assuredly help to smooth away difficulties for the ignorant, not increase them in the present snares and difficulties of Christendom, in a way the apostles did not when all was at the beginning clear and plain. If it be pleaded that such souls may still go backwards and forwards through ignorance of the evils of the world-church, denominationalism, etc.; the answer is that it is our duty, as far as we can, to instruct them within, not to create artificial and unwarranted barriers, or to keep them

57. {See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:11.}

dangling without on one excuse or another which there is not honesty to avow, because it would be the avowal of sectarianism. But this largeness of heart, this yearning according to Christ over all that are His, this refusal to allow human rules expressed or understood to stand in the way of receiving in the Lord's name those He has called by grace, is as far as possible from the indifferentism which makes light of fundamental heterodoxy or defies the holy obligatory discipline of God's assembly.

There can hardly be too much care, both for the Lord's sake and His assembly, not to say for the souls themselves, in ascertaining on the most trustworthy evidence that those who come forward are members of Christ, not merely quickened but possessed of the Spirit, so as to join in Christian worship and every other godly function. Acts 11:17.

To require more, not to accredit and act on that, is in my judgment a slight of the name of the Lord, and neither right nor wise. Honest ignorance we are bound to bear with, while seeking to teach the truth more perfectly; but we are yet more solemnly bound to purge out and keep from all that denies and dishonors Christ whether openly or by neutrality.

This suffices as to grounds of exclusion, the principle and details of which faith can find in the word of God. Originally all the church owned itself and acted as one. Those who so own and act now are seeking to walk in the unity of the body. For they take their stand for united action on the great truth that "there is one body and one Spirit," seeing also that the Lord has provided a resource even for the present state of His saints scattered by inadequate or false, by loose or narrow, grounds of union. They accept the unity produced by the Spirit who baptizes all Christians into one body; and if they cannot convince all others that this is the divine ground of church unity, they can at least act on it by grace themselves. Hence they seek diligently in the measure of their faith to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, while they would also maintain scriptural discipline among those who gather thus to the Lord's name. This is set aside by the Protestant theory of co-ordinate systems, though by none so distinctly as the Congregationalists; for they go so far as to make each congregation independent of every other on principle, whatever they may concede to courtesy -- a fatal abuse of churches to deny the whole principle and practice of the church on earth.

In 1874 G. V. Wigram wrote:

If, on the other side, we are too free in our accessibility, we may either really dishonor the Lord by letting the world in, or cheat saints exercised in the Spirit about themselves. I would receive all thereto who have faith in the Lord, and are walking up to their light, and yet bring before them the responsibility of it in them, and the judgment which will light on them from the Lord, if they come to him unjudged where He is, and unpurged . . .

Of course I would desire to watch that no ecclesiastical difference which I can be glad to see the holder, if he have life, jump over, be a cover for moral evil. The moral evil rises above the ecclesiastical question.⁵⁸

Christopher Wolston wrote in 1883:

58. *Memorials of the Ministry of G. V. Wigram, Letters*, p. 294.

Q. What is the scriptural title to the Lord's table? and what amount of intelligence should be looked for in those seeking to come to the table before they are received to it?

A. That which, according to scripture, entitles to the Lord's table is, we believe, the possession of life in the Son of God and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. This will be evidenced by faith in Christ and His finished work, so that there is the knowledge of salvation, peace with God, and the ability to say, "Abba Father." Desirable as may be intelligence about the church, and with this the perception of the unscripturalness and evil of human system, these latter should never be made necessary before souls are received to the table of the Lord; but with a true faith, such as we have spoken of, however little the intelligence, there must be the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," which allows neither moral nor doctrinal evil. In other words, a true faith and godly walk are what entitle to the Lord's table.⁵⁹

59. *Words of Truth*, 1883, p. 84.

Chapter 6

What About Reception from Open Brethren?

Open Brethren do fall into some groupings, which some loose persons try to exploit to broaden the path of reception and fellowship. It is not intended to explore those groupings here, nor is this at all necessary. Why so? It is because there is a terrible teaching which is common to *all* Open Brethren of whatever shade or grade. Yes, it is the new doctrine of reception and fellowship first enunciated at Bethesda in 1848 in *The Letter of the Ten* when they departed from the original practice. In the letter below, by J. G. Bellett, this wicked principle is quoted. Whatever the way in which Open Brethren state that teaching, what it means is that fellowship with leaven does not leaven a person. *All* Open Brethren hold this, except perhaps some ignorant persons among them,⁶⁰ whom if you have anything to do with, you may enlighten them concerning what they are connected with -- and *see if they withdraw from the evil*.⁶¹ Concerning leaven leavening the lump, the third pamphlet in this series, on 1 Cor. 5, deals with that subject, showing that *those who do not separate from leaven are leavened*. The first pamphlet, on 2 John, showed that persons who have fellowship with evil doctrine are *partakers of the wicked works*. Gal. 5:9 was noticed as well as Rev. 2 and 3. The second pamphlet, on 2 Tim. 2:16-26, shows that those who do not separate from vessels to dishonor *are not themselves vessels to honor*. Such persons are not to be received. In these papers, Open Brethren are quoted, so we know what their view is on these matters. We will now see some summary statements of how this evil began.

When the meeting at Bethesda, (Bristol), admitted {in 1848} several partisans of Mr. N., {B. W. Newton} and thus occasioned a separation far and wide among "Brethren," it had been for years fully owned as enjoying intercommunion. Hence, there is no honesty in comparing that meeting with individuals coming from the national body or dissenters. How far Bethesda really coalesced, it may be hard to

60. And perhaps a few who seem not able to break away because of relatives.

61. Beware of those who foster the notion of receiving from Open Brethren based on grades of understanding and responsibility. If a person professes ignorance, enlighten him with the truth! Do not accept the ignorance-argument. This will bring out the true state. I have had occasion to do that, and in each case the person then maintained the Bethesda principle. Thus they declare their looseness and neutrality concerning what is due our Lord.

say: still, it was an accomplished fact, and no question was raised, till the crisis of 1848 came, when reasons were sought to palliate the fatal deed of receiving the known followers of a convicted heretic. Now we have always excepted cases of real ignorance. But what could justify receiving persons of intelligence who came straight from his party, eulogizing and circulating the very tracts which contained the anti-christian doctrine already described? Bethesda received them in the most determined manner, driving out not a few souls, some of them among the most spiritual, enlightened, and devoted there, who refused to sanction indifference to a blasphemy at Bristol, from which they were at all cost apart at Plymouth and elsewhere. Not satisfied with letting these people in, ten of the leaders at Bethesda put forth a too famous document, in which they labored to defend their refusal of investigation before receiving the incriminated. The first thing insisted on was that the Bethesda meeting should clear those who signed it: else they would labor no more in their midst! Was it surprising that the mass fell into the snare, and consented to vote the leaders right, before the tracts were read, or comments allowed in presence of the meeting? After the breach was consummated, they held meetings in which Mr. N.'s doctrine was condemned, especially by Mr. M. {George Muller} as strongly almost as by any outside Bethesda. Partly by this, and partly by other means, Mr. N.'s partisans retired from Bethesda, expressly not waiving their claim to be there, but desiring to release the leaders of some of their difficulties. Could this yield a moment's satisfaction to a sober Christian? Bethesda was bound to clear itself openly of a sin of the gravest kind openly done: mere words would not avail, nor getting rid of souls in an underhand way. Subsequently a party was formed, a public building was taken, Mr. N. was had there, and two of "the ten" (Messrs. A. and W.) were found in their midst. The movement failed; and these two leading men, to speak of no others, after Bethesda's loud denunciation of the Newtonian blasphemy, after their own public association with Mr. N., were permitted to return to Bethesda, without the smallest confession of their notorious and flagrant sin. All they owned was the wrong of leaving Bethesda; but they were not asked, nor did they give, an expression of sorrow for the wickedness of fraternizing with one who still retained the main part of his heresy as to Christ. And because we renounce all fellowship with such ways and persons, we are covered with the bitterest reproaches which combined folly and malice can heap up! We are taxed with "new tests," and I know not what. Whereas, on the face of the matter, it was the beloved Apostle, not we, who wrote 2 John. And if he introduced no new test when he insisted on uncompromising rigor wherever a false Christ was in question, how charge us with it who are very simply carrying out the Word of God given through him? Those who plead for laxity in such a case, would be more consistent if they denied the authority of this Scripture altogether. ⁶² ♦

But your letter apprizes me that you have already taken the ground of neutrality; but neutrality between Christ and evil is worse than anything. "He that is not for me is against me," says Christ. The evil at B. {Bethesda} is the most unprincipled admission of blasphemers against Christ, the coldest contempt of Him I ever came

62. W. Kelly, *The Brethren and Their Traducers*. The facts here summarized by W. Kelly are fully documented in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended by J. N. Darby*, vol. 2, available from the publisher.

across. All their efforts to excuse and hide it only make the matter worse. All who do not abhor the whole system and all connection with it are entangled and defiled. It is, I am satisfied, a mere net of Satan (though many Christians may be entangled in it). Every question of churches and of unity disappears before the question of B. It is a question of Christ. Faith governed my path as to it, but I have seen its fruits in America, the West Indies, France, Switzerland, and, in a measure, in India. I have seen it the spring and support everywhere of unprincipledness and evil, and all who were under its influence turned from uprightness and truth. I have found persons unknown to each other, and strangers to our conflicts in England, unite in testimony that they could get nothing honest from those who were connected with it, or who did not openly reject it all. Wherever the difficulty has been, persons going on badly, and in the flesh, were induced to fall in with it or follow in the line on which you have entered.⁶³ ♦

Here is an occasion to bring to light once again *A Letter As to "Bethesda,"* Sept. 18, 1849, by J. G. Bellett,

I have a desire to write to you, remembering some happy communion with you and having, to some extent before now, conversed with you on the present question of Bethesda, and my present subject makes it right for me to communicate with one who is still in communion with her. I shall, however, use *this* as the occasion of considering certain principles of truth. For it is expected of us that we be nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine, and that we grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the times of the apostles occasions arose which were used of the Spirit to unfold new portions of the divine mind and will to the saints. A large quantity of the instructions we get in the epistles, comes to us through the ignorance and error of the Churches, and all this happened for our learning. And so it is still. Occasions arise to call our thoughts to new and important principles of conduct, indifference to which then become *guilt*: such I believe to be the present moment with us. May we have grace to use it wisely, graciously, patiently, and yet obediently. It was a thought with the brethren from the beginning that we received one another as believers or saints just because God had already received us in Christ Jesus. This thought remains unquestioned, only we must be careful lest the generality of this principle mislead us. We do, it is true, receive one another because we have been received already of God, and do this not to doubtful disputations, in other words, that we receive one another in the Lord, though, in many things, we be differently minded; not, however, agreeing to differ as though any part of God's truth were indifferent, but purposing to love one another, and to walk together in spite of differences. Hoping to attain more, we *come* together on that simple ground, but we *walk* together afterwards for ends and purposes divinely appointed us. So we are not gathered as a congregation who find their pleasure or even their edification in certain ways or doings agreed upon; but we are gathered as part and parcel of the Church, to be, and to act according to the mind of God. Among its services it has to teach angels (Eph. 3:10), to edify itself through joints and bands in the Holy Ghost, and to lead those outside to own God, in the midst of His saints (1 Cor. 14:23-25), to exercise discipline, to worship as a holy priesthood, to show forth the Lord's death. It is, moreover, the pillar of the truth, and as such it must keep itself erect and firm; the writing on it is to be large and legible. Nothing is to be allowed to shake or

63. J. N. Darby, *Letters* 2:216 (1864).

blot it; some may claim a right to try their hand with it, and plead many pretences; they may talk of brotherly forbearance, the gentleness of Christ, the duty of not judging another man's servant, but the pillar must hold itself firm and inviolate; still, no such pretensions or pretences, nor any other can be listened to; and occasions will arise when the integrity of the pillar is to be guarded with increased vigilance because of the enemy. It was, dear brother, another early thought among us, that we had to distinguish between communions and individuals; that is, that we could receive individuals on the ground of their own faith, when we could not do so on the credit of the communion to which they belonged, or as though we sanctioned the communion while we received them, but this was understood to refer only to a certain character of communion it had respect to, such as the Establishment {Church of England}, the Independents, the Baptists, the Methodists, among whom the truth was maintained; it did not contemplate such communions as the Universalists and Unitarians. For according to my knowledge of brethren from the beginning, an individual who desired fellowship with us, if there was no other objection than that he went to such places, *that alone* would have been enough for us to keep him outside. The smallest measure of affection to Christ would dictate this. I may say that I would instinctively shudder at any other thought, for we have a duty to Christ, a service to the truth lying upon us, and our receiving others must be after such a method as will leave us free to perform such duties and services, and not put us under such terms and compliances as compel us, in simple consistency to abandon them. We must accordingly distinguish between communions and individuals, and it is here our present sorrow and difficulty touching Bethesda arises.

In Compton Street, Plymouth, an energy of evil was exposed in the progress of its working {in 1847; B. W. Newton}. It was guilty of putting dishonor on the Son of God. It held, therefore, a peculiar place in the apprehension of the soul, let me say I know the service of those who keep watch in the camp; the trumpet is, among other purposes, for sounding an alarm on the approach of the enemy, all we can desire is that it may be used with priestly skill when it has called the camp into action, that the action itself be conducted according to the mind and word of God; for the battle is to be in His name, and for his kingdom. Now by all this which I am suggesting, dear brother, do not think we are building again the thing which we once destroyed. I hold, as at the beginning, the broken, ruined condition of the Church, I know and still would testify as ever that the "great house," with its different vessels, is around us. I will say, as before, that no gathering of saints can assume to be *the Candlestick* in the place, and treat as darkness all that is not of itself. Such order and such authority are gone -- this we have ever said, and still say. But with all this, we avow it, that we are not together as a convention believers, but as part and parcel of the Church of God, and we have to take heed that the principles and the testimony of the house of God be preserved among us according to our measure in the Spirit. I am glad thus to speak a little on principles before I come to the more immediate object . . .

But I must go on a little further, for I have found my mind lately going over this whole case, and now I have to *confess* that I have been *guilty of haste and carelessness* in a particular which deserves attention and seriousness, I mean as to

“the letter of the ten”⁶⁴ with respect to the *Church Principles* contained in it. I felt indignant, I remember, at the integrity of such men as G. Muller, H. Craik, Hall and Meredith being questioned (as I thought it was) because of that letter, and I was quick to dispose of such a question, I was zealous and happy to assert the good consciences of such, having been long dear to them in the Lord. But now I have read this letter, and see it in the light of avowing certain principles which I judge to be at variance with those which alone are worthy of the Church of God.

Take this passage from it,

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 understood and imbibed views, essentially subversive of foundation truth, especially as those meeting at Ehrington Street, Plymouth, last January, put forth a statement disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts.

I need only refer you to previous parts of my letter, where I have spoken of different communions, and of our proper relation to such, in order to show you how entirely I judge this thought to be wrong. 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. I would ask you, also, how could any gathering of saints be consistently faithful to Christ and still avow such principles? Fidelity to the Lord demands of us to *reprove* or *make manifest* the heretical teaching here intimated. But that cannot be done while we have fellowship with the place which countenances them.

The Apostle teaches me that I cannot reprove and have fellowship with the same unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5). This principle puts Bethesda on different grounds from any with whom we have hitherto had communication. For I am sure I could at any moment have said for myself, that if any congregation of Independents, Baptists,⁶⁵ or Methodists avowed that they admitted persons who had religious fellowship with avowed heretics, in the sense of the word intimated in the passage quoted from the letter of the ten, provided they were themselves sound in the faith of the Son of God, I should not have even entertained the question of receiving them or not. Under such avowal I could never have been happy in their presence among us. I can again say, indeed, dear brother, how truly do I desire that all Bethesda could seriously consider this -- we are all learning, we are all in the school of God, we have much to correct, as well as in many things to advance. It is but little to confess ignorance and mistakes; I am confessing more at this moment, I am confessing *carelessness and haste*, and again I say to you, seek to bring their souls to the calm consideration of this, and do it as you may, on the sanction of some serious and solemn motives . . .

64. {This *Letter of the Ten* is a statement signed by 10 leaders at Bethesda in which the principle is stated that association with evil does not defile. It was examined in great detail by G. V. Wigram. His examination is reproduced in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, Defense of Truth, 1845-1850*, a book which fully documents what transpired -- available from the publisher.}

65. {There are Baptists now who will, they say, reject a modernist, but not sound persons who associate with those modernists. Well, that is essentially the Bethesda position. And great evangelistic campaigns are held these days in conjunction with churches generally, and in association with modernists/liberals.}

Believe me, ever Your affectionate brother,
J. G. BELLETT

JGB was one of the first four who first meet together in late Nov. or early Dec. 1827 to break bread. Here we have his testimony about *original practice*. We have J. N. Darby's too, who was also one of the first four.

JGB did not immediately see into the character of Bethesda's action as quickly, or as deeply, as some others. Subsequently, he addressed the issue again and another letter of his, perhaps to the same person, was printed in *The Bible Treasury* 15:25. It is well worth reading (it has one paragraph from which I demur⁶⁶). There is another letter of his on the subject of Bethesda, dated Nov. 18, 1863, found in *The Bible Treasury* 16:304, which has been quoted above in Ch. 1.

Now let us hear J. N. Darby's rejection of the new Bethesda principle of reception and fellowship, enunciated in 1848:

I now turn to the difficulty you mention, as to Bethesda being on the ground of the Dissenters or the Establishment. This has been pressed much by persons who sought, while owning there was evil, to involve us again in looseness of fellowship with the principles of B. This is not your object at all, but your difficulty turns on the same point. But to me far graver considerations make a total and complete difference. There had been fellowship rightly or wrongly with B., and the first question was, was it to be continued. That is, people had been received if they came thence, and brethren went there received in like manner. Subsequently to this, persons holding the most horrible doctrine as to Christ were received, inquiry refused, and the doctrine laid down and accepted by the body that no such inquiry should be. That is, they took as a body this position of unfaithfulness on foundation matters to Christ. The Establishment has not done this; indifference to persons holding a false Christ has never been proclaimed as its principle. Nor has any dissenting body that I know ever done so. This is the difference then to me, a grave positive sin against Christ, the body having accepted this as a principle. Where a dissenting body has done this, I would not receive its members, unless the individual were cleared of the sin. Nor can I consent to set ecclesiastical faults of judgment (however grave as regulating my conduct in connection with the unity of the body) on the same ground as positive indifference to what concerns the personal glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. An Independent goes ecclesiastically wrong; when he comes to me, though inconsistent perhaps through want of conviction, he goes ecclesiastically right; but as to Christ's personal glory, and the foundation of union, he is perhaps as jealous as I am, and, it may be, more faithful.

66. "One from whom for more than twenty-five years {JND, likely} I have learnt much of the mind of God, long since said to me, "Take care you do not correct the flesh by the flesh" {good!}. Had this been remembered by us all in the progress of this sad controversy, we should now have to rejoice in results instead of mourning over them."

The mourning is quite in order in any event, but his conclusion is unsound. Assuming resistance to Bethesda had been accomplished perfectly, there is no guarantee that they would have repented.

Supposing now B. unfaithful, for I am only showing the difference of principle -- supposing they are as regards the Person of the Lord Jesus, I am, in receiving one who forms part of it, acquiescing in this sin, which is in no sort cleared by his coming amongst us, but rather acquiesced in by us. Fidelity to the truth as to Christ's Person is in question in one case, and not in the other. Now, this is a difference *all-important*, which is *before all unity*, and at the foundation of all unity too. To hold unity independently of it is to put the church -- that is, unity of men -- in place of Christ, not to build it on Him. To me this is as clear as the sun at noonday, and I believe it to be a question of the *value we have for Christ*. If persons say we are now separated for good, and have nothing whatever to say to B. as being outside the pale of Christian unity, I should have no objection to examine each case, provided the sin in which they have been implicated be inquired into and pressed, and continuance in it taken account of -- in a word, that indifference to Christ be in no way accepted or acquiesced in. That is the whole matter with me; though I think there are other grave points in the B. case, all fade to my mind before this.⁶⁷

W. Kelly who broke bread before the Bethesda division, wrote:

In one of their recent "Appeals" C. E. argues that a true platform contemplates all the saints of God, as we have often said and still say. But the O.B.'s abuse of this godly plea is to accredit, not only christians guilty of sin, but yet more their society got up by the determination to shelter such from scriptural judgment. This was not the case with any orthodox sect known to us; and therefore O.B. have no title to the same gracious consideration. Others began for good according to their light. Open Brethren began by palliating evil or screening evildoers, in departure from the light they once had. To receive saints in Christ's name was never meant to let in such as dishonor His name; which is as mighty to detect those who treat Him lightly, whatever their pretensions, as to encourage the godly who may be ever so ignorant. An honorable man among O.B. ought not to wish fellowship with us, if he believe in his own policy, and ought to resent the plea of ignorance, which, when ever true, would not be used in vain. And as to "thirty years," what difference does this make, if the same old principle abides? . . .

With Open Brethren it is a wholly different case from welcoming a godly person, in spite of his sect. For *they* were once with us on common ground of scripture; they owned the "one body and one Spirit," as gathered to Christ's name. Their origin, the reason of their existence, was to defend and maintain the reception of men tainted with the worst sin -- indifference to the truth of Christ. That they may have liked independency before, that they walk in it and enforce it since, is true enough; but he that puts forward independency of principle, as the plague-spot of the O.B., is blind to their characteristic and most serious evil. And if he goes so far as to reject individuals for independency, he must, to be consistent, abandon all the largeness of heart which marked Brethren from the first, and the principle which their best and wisest leaders cherished to the last, -- our title of grace to welcome godly saints out of an orthodox denomination, though independency is stamped in various forms on all. No denomination, as

67. *Letters* 1:223, 224 (1852).

such, great or small, does or can stand on the "one body and one Spirit" of scripture for principle and practice alike. It demands living faith ecclesiastically, and an entire superiority to the world and flesh, which must have independency open or latent but real.⁶⁸

G. V. Wigram, who broke bread first about 1830-31, wrote:

A congregation ("Independent of the Independents," as its form is called in England) in Bristol acted, and persisted in acting, as if neither it nor its (so-called) members were responsible as believers to avoid indifferentism to the glory of Christ. Faith says, "Touch not the unclean thing, accredit not its letters commendatory, receive none such; they are not clean." Often there is leaven working and making itself manifest in the conduct, and that might exclude; and, alas! often does.⁶⁹

Simulating OB arguments, A. C. Ord (who also broke bread before the Bethesda division) wrote:

A. But is that sufficient reason for cutting off or excommunicating whole bodies of Christians for evils with which they have no tangible connection, whilst admitting members of the Church of England and other sects?

B. That is a misrepresentation, as you ought to know. When were you excommunicated? For my own part I have *left* (not excommunicated) those you are now united to, because I could not recognize it as the Lord's table,⁷⁰ that which did not maintain His glory, or regard the rights of His Person as paramount to all other considerations; but I am not aware that by doing so I excommunicated anybody. To this path of separation we have been driven, in order to keep our consciences clear, and the principle is the same whether applied to one or many. We withdraw when evil is admitted, as the Scripture directs, where it has carried the day: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" {2 Tim. 2:19}. Refusing to receive those whom we have been obliged to leave is not excommunication, just as it is not the same thing to decline a person's visit as to turn him out of your house. I do not regard the Establishment as an assembly of Christians at all, but as the world, and therefore not on the same ground as yourselves and others, who are professedly associated as Christians. But I know of a recent instance in which persons who desired to break bread with us were refused, because they came from an Independent Chapel where false doctrine was sheltered; so that the measure we mete is not so uneven as you imagine.

A. You admit, then, that you would not allow me to break bread with you next Lord's day, which, as far as I am concerned, I could freely do.

B. You astonish me! Do you wish to convince me of your own inconsistency and to show what has been too evident in others -- that you are not acting before God, from any real principle, or from conscience either? You charge us with behavior which, if it were true, would render us nothing but a set of violent

68. *The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism*.

69. *Memorials of the Ministry of G. V. Wigram* 2:83.

70. {There are sectarian tables. These are certainly not the table of demons. See *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:409. There are sectarian tables of the orthodox and there are evil sectarian tables of tolerators of leaven.}

schismatics, acting in direct contravention of the word of God, and then profess, in the same breath, your readiness to unite with us in such wicked conduct! Alas! what laxity the least abandonment of right principle leads to.⁷¹

In response to “The Invercargill Circular of 1878,” someone (W. Kelly?) wrote:

The recent New Zealand Circular has appeared in this country, and indicates such an advance in the writer’s soul that, if strengthened in faith to walk consistently with its avowed principles, he cannot abide in the ranks of neutrality {i.e., among OB}, but must seek his place with those branded as Exclusives. He owns that he wrote erroneously in his former tract (entitled “Discipline and Position,” &c.) on the question of *wicked association*, which is the hinge on which the controversy turns. He dwells on the incompatibility of fellowship with evil and Christ, as in 1 Cor. 8-10, and the still deeper sin of countenancing those who bring not the doctrine of Christ, as in 2 John . . .

But surely the writer will see on reflection, that 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 intelligently upholds or winks at that “wicked association.” Satan would be pleased indeed at high-sounding abstract condemnation in word, coupled with allowance of the evil, by thoroughly responsible souls who help it on. He does not appreciate the difference between the mere religious systems which never took the stand of owning the Spirit’s presence to carry out the Lord’s will in their midst, and those who owe their rise to the determination of combining holy claims with unholy associations. We have always made allowance for the ill-taught Christians in systems {ecclesiastical systems} as unintelligently but honestly framed as themselves; and for dealing in grace with ignorance; was express provision made in the abused Bethesda Circular {a paper by J. N. Darby refusing Bethesda}. But it was soon discovered that many pleaded ignorance who knew far too much for their integrity or the Lord’s honor; and this did lead to caution in wise men, as it engendered suspiciousness in weak men. But it would be folly to place the companies of those who gather to the Lord’s name (however loose, neutral, open, or whatever they may be called) on the same ground as the ordinary denominations. It would be their deep dishonor if it could be done righteously, and they really wished it themselves, for it is to avoid the consequences of unfaithfulness in favor of their friends -- the essence of party work and worse.

One can only pray that the writer may see this for his own clearance, therefore, and not let “holding the principle of believers’ fellowship” as he calls it, swamp the maintenance of practical holiness in the assembly, the Lord’s name being bound up with it. The open meetings cannot enjoy the allowance made for ignorance which one accords to a sect, *together with* the privileges and responsibility of an assembly met in the Lord’s name, and recognizing the one body and one Spirit. If they were denominations, like a Wesleyan Society, the English Establishment, or the like, one might receive godly individuals as such, without question; but not so since they have assumed the place of owning the Lord’s presence and the free action of the Holy Ghost, which makes every intelligent person among them solemnly responsible after another sort. For honest ignorance we should still make allowance wherever it exists. Now it is for

71. From “Is There Not a Cause,” *The Collected Writings of A. C. Ord*, available from the publisher.

intelligent but wilful partisans that the plea is usually set up: is this really defensible? Is it loyalty to Christ? What is more deplorable than this thick-and-thin support of friends in the things of God? It is of esteem among men, but an abomination in His sight.

The writer acknowledges also that the evil is immensely aggravated by full testimony and patient admonition. Any evil might enter any assembly; but it is the want of genuine zeal in judging it scripturally for Christ's sake, which is so fatal that no assembly ought to be owned if it distinctly abandon this paramount duty. The deliberate acceptance of evil, the persistent failure to clear itself, ought to unchurch; and those who, with conscience before God, leave such a defiled meeting, are the very inverse of schismatics, if they also hold fast to the one body. Nor is it a sort of clergy, (that is, men here or there, who set up to an exclusive right to judge these questions,) who have to decide this, nor other meetings in the neighborhood, but saints in the circumstances who have to act for God in their own duty, with the interests of Christ and the church in their hearts.

There are other points, and not without moment, in the Circular needless to notice. Only let the writer beware of being influenced by the imaginary difficulties of *ad infinitum* contact with evil, which speculative minds urge to destroy conscientious action. No sober mind but rejects a theoretical association extending through endless ecclesiastical receptions and ramifications. If he believes we are right in refusing a sound man who cleaves to and justifies an unsound or wicked association, he surrenders the principle of "Open Brethren," and is bound to act accordingly. The more devoted the saints may be individually, the worse is their sanction of what is unholy. The writer endorses this himself, which is really the principle, and defines the position, of the so-called Exclusive Brethren.⁷²

J. N. Darby wrote:

The question is as to reception of saints to partake of the table of our Lord with us: whether any can be admitted who are not formally and regularly amongst us. It is not whether we exclude persons unsound in faith, or ungodly in practice, nor whether we, deliberately walking with those who are unsound and ungodly, are not in the same guilt -- not clear in the matter. The first is unquestioned; the last, Brethren have insisted on -- and I among them -- at very painful cost to ourselves. There may be subtle pleas to get evil allowed; but we have always been firm, and God, I believe, has fully owned it . . .

There cannot be too much care as to holiness and truth: the Spirit is the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of truth; but ignorance of ecclesiastical truth is not a ground of excommunication when the conscience and walk are undefiled.⁷³

Here are J. S. Oliphant's remarks:

"Meetings of believers" {Open Brethren} as they are called, are now formed on the same principles of independence, and in the denial of the character and responsibilities of God's assembly. The consequence is that doctrine is wholly ignored, and persons are received, not only unsound in doctrine, but who have been dealt with in discipline, or have left in self-will assemblies where the unity of the whole assembly and its responsibility is acknowledged. Philadelphos {Mr.

72. *The Bible Treasury* 12:143 (1878).

73. *Collected Writings* 31:381, 382.

Bewley } objects to brethren receiving from sects, while they refuse to receive from, or to acknowledge, Bethesda, and similar assemblies. The commendations of sects {of their members} are not however received, though individuals from the sects are allowed to break bread on competent testimony being given to their godliness by any "in communion." The fact is believers in the sects are less likely to be tainted with doctrines subversive of holiness in God's house, than those who have professedly left sects to witness to the character of God's assembly, and have subsequently entirely denied its true character and its responsibility, and have acted unfaithfully with regard to evil doctrine touching Christ. Nevertheless, the door is open wide for individuals to leave assemblies which deny the character of *the* assembly; and through the mercy of God many have been and are constantly being delivered from such assemblies. The more faithful the brethren are, who stand separate, in witnessing for Christ, and against the evil of the false principles acted on at Bethesda and other places in reference to what I may call "assembly fellowship," the more likely by the blessing of God, are the consciences of His children to be aroused to inquire what they are connected with contrary to Christ and God's word, seeing that hundreds of assemblies of believers are witnessing against the position and doctrines of those with whom they are associated. It is absurd to talk of excluding hundreds of God's children. It is a question of confidence in assemblies of Christians gathered on principles which deny the nature and unity of the assembly of God, and do not admit assembly defilement, assembly state, nor assembly responsibility, and consequently where there is an open door for evil. If individuals prefer to go on with such assemblies, it is their own choice. Did brethren exclude hundreds of God's children when they left the sects? Such an outcry is too absurd. They left hundreds of God's children in the sects, believing sects were contrary to scripture; but the children of God in the sects found always a warm welcome to the table of the Lord when they came there with adequate testimony to their godliness. Believers were never commended to the sects. How could brethren commend to that which they had left as evil? And, not having confidence in the sects, their commendations were never received. Individual godliness was another matter. "Of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." So with Bethesda. Brethren left it as they left the sects, though on far more serious grounds, namely, open identification with the doctrines and party of a false teacher about Christ, and unsound doctrine as to the nature, character, and responsibilities of God's assembly. They cannot commend to that which they have judged and left, and cannot receive the commendation of an assembly in which they have no confidence, for the reasons already named. But that is no more excluding hundreds of God's children than leaving the sects. The door is as wide open as ever to godly individuals, and their welcome into communion is none the less warm. The Bethesda assembly forfeited its place in the confidence of brethren, and another assembly is now in communion at Bristol;⁷⁴ but many came out from Bethesda and kept themselves clear from its course. Were they excluded? Ah, no! It will not do. Brethren are gathered together in the confession of the truth that the whole assembly is Christ's body, and God's habitation on the earth, the ground of

74. {This other assembly in Bristol was at first composed of those who withdrew from Bethesda because they would not accept the new principles of fellowship and reception. They continued to act on original principles.}

communion being Christ and His cross; and this ground is broad enough to embrace all the children of God everywhere, and none are excluded except by their own choice or by their wilful connection with evil dishonoring to Christ and condemned in His cross. I am not saying there are not godly persons at Bethesda. ⁷⁵ It is not the question. Brethren did not say or believe when they left the sects that there were no godly persons in them, but they believed they were bound in faithfulness to Christ to depart from iniquity and what was contrary to scripture. Many godly persons may be, doubtless, mixed up with the assembly at Bristol who are ignorant of the past; and a good many more have perhaps never been much exercised as to the character of God's assembly. The range of their faith extends to their own meeting, as it is called, and to an interest in gospel preaching, and the blessing of poor sinners. To such, and many others ignorantly connected with evil, there is no exclusion; while there is not, and cannot be intercommunion ⁷⁶ with the assemblies with which they are associated. ⁷⁷

In closing this chapter, this from A. H. Rule should be considered:

The various sects of Protestantism show a struggle to get away from the awful corruption of the middle ages -- the object not fully gained -- but still a struggle toward the light.

Those who have learned the truth of the Church and have abandoned human system to be gathered simply to the name of the Lord Jesus on the ground of the one body, have come out into fuller light. And generally one from the sects desiring to break bread with us is feeling his way toward the fuller light and where this is the case he needs to be encouraged and helped on. But the position of "Open Brethren" or any who have abandoned the true ground, is the result of a retrograde movement -- a distinct work of the enemy leading back to darkness. Many godly ones among them may in a measure recover themselves and even the body as such throw off much of the evil involved in the first assault of the enemy. But still the body remains as a witness to the departure from the truth. Do you not think this bears on the question of receiving?

Take the Raven movement: after the first attack of the enemy, there was a denial and refusal of much that was taught at first. There was an effort on the part of the body as such to throw off a measure of the evil. It was partially successful. But in this case as time has gone on the disease has shown fresh virulence, and the leader is leading on rapidly toward the apostasy. This is more striking in this case than in the other movements, though in the Bethesda movement there was a terrible and blinding power of Satan, from which many through grace were recovered, and many were in a measure freed, though they never abandoned the wrong ground. The general character of these things would make us very careful about receiving those continuing in such a fellowship. I confess I feel it to be different from receiving from a sect whose creed involves

75. {See the first two pamphlets in this series (on 2 John and on 2 Tim. 2:16-26 for the status of saints at Bethesda.)}

76. {See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:194.}

77. *A Letter on Bethesda fellowship; with an Appendix on the True Basis of Communion*, sec. ed, revised, London: Morrish,, pp. 76-79.

no fundamental error. I do not look upon the sects as a work of the enemy, although the enemy has sought to corrupt them. The National bodies resulted from the first effort to get away from Rome. God wrought but the wisdom of man got mixed up with His work, so that it stopped short. The movement of the last century was again a work of God. But now through human failure the enemy got in and all these retrograde movements are the result of *his* work, though God may have set a limit to the enemy's power and for the sake of His people in these false positions, preserved much of His truth for their benefit. But the general tendency of the day is toward apostasy. I see a tremendous power of Satan leading along many lines toward that goal -- the Raven movement one of the worst, and leading surely to that end -- Higher Criticism one of the worst among the sects. And there are many others . . . they adopted a false principle in 1848, which they have never recalled.⁷⁸

Yes, never recalled; and not only that, but that evil principle is insisted on to this day and is characteristic of the various groupings of OB, however they may differ otherwise.

Many persons huffing and puffing in papers, letters, and on the Internet, about departure in the practice concerning receiving, are really using in a partial and dishonest way what was previously taught on this subject in order to foster a course of looseness and neutrality. Observe how clearly this is shown by the fact that such foster reception from, and intercommunion with, Open Brethren. Such have selected some point about reception from past teachers to serve their purpose of breakdown, while ignoring the rest of what was said, and the true history of these matters; and then, utilizing their perversion of the truth and facts, claim that there has been departure from "original practice" -- and they will set the matter right! Well, there is a thick, spiritual fog that has suffused itself through their minds. It is *the fog of unholiness in reception and fellowship*; and they seek to impose this on history in a perverted and obdurate representation to induce unwary souls into their agenda. Let the reader examine the first three papers in this series and cleave to the truths shown in them. He will necessarily reject these loose, neutral, and self-serving notions and perversions.

By their teachings on reception and fellowship, advocating reception of, and/or intercommunion with, Open Brethren, such have placed themselves among those who are the subjects of the above denunciations.

78. *Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule* 2:93-95

Chapter 7

What About Reception from the Church of England?

We have already seen, above, some remarks on why members of sects were received, and some notice of the Church of England (C of E), but refusal of reception of Open Brethren. Pleaders for what in effect is unholiness in reception and fellowship attempt to find an inconsistency in the reception from the C of E, and through that alleged inconsistency promote their looseness and neutrality in divine matters.

Here we will quote some explanations of the reception from the C of E. The first is from C. E. Stuart, whom I quote strictly for the historical accuracy of what he wrote in this letter, and not as condoning in any way his final course.

Reading, Nov. 15, 1902

A Letter on Occasional Fellowship with Open Brethren

In this matter now stirred of occasional communion of Open Brethren I ask myself, What has brought it up now?

Certainly twenty or thirty years ago we heard nothing of that. Her latest declaration, that made to our American brethren, negatives any such supposition. Have O.B. at large asked us to relax our discipline? I believe not. Why then is the question of occasional communion with such raised? It is not raised by those without us. It is raised by some within. Then such must be opposed to the dealing with Bethesda in the past.. Have these then kept silence all these years? Have they really considered what they now strive for? If the division was called for when it took place, and I believe you would admit that, has anything come about to lead us to denounce it and condemn our brethren who took then, what I have always believed was God's side in the matter?

You tell us that some desire to act with O.B. as we have always acted with Christians in the Church of England, and you point to the unsoundness of some clergy in the Establishment, and ask if we receive Christians in the Church of England, why not any from O.B.?

First, let me remind you *that ever since you and I* have known anything about such things, there have been clergymen in the Establishment unsound in doctrine. Witness the Oxford Movement. Yet for years, whilst that was fully known, neither you nor others advanced it as a reason to change our position towards O.B.

Then the parallel you would assume does not exist. In the Establishment

there is no thought of association. All there is, is individual. The prescribed forms for the sacrament show that. To each person separately are the elements given. The words of the minister proclaim it: "The body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was given for *thee*," &c., and so of the cup. All really is individual. Corporate association, corporate responsibility is not acknowledged. We view the individuals, therefore, who may come as separate units. If they go back to the Establishment they do not identify themselves with indifference really to the Lord Jesus Christ.

With O.B. it is different. These take professedly Church ground, owning thereby that Christians are One Body, and members one of another. We view them, therefore, on that ground, and have to look at their associations, as well as to their personal soundness in the faith, and consistency of walk. If they go back, and receiving them to *occasional* fellowship implies that, they go back to that from which we had to separate as not duly caring for the holy Person of the Lord.

We must remember that the difference with Bethesda was not about unsoundness of doctrine taught *within* her, but about the principle avowed in the "Letter of the Ten." That letter remains to-day uncanceled. How then any can think of admitting O.B. to occasional fellowship I do not understand, and the move is really *endorsing Bethesda principles*; receiving O.B., sound in the faith, without reference to their continued association with that from which we had to withdraw {because of harboring fundamentally evil doctrine}. Let this be seen, and the desired move cannot take place without condemning all with us in the past for their withdrawal from Bethesda. If you are prepared for this I am not. And you cannot wonder at that which I wrote you, that such a move carried out would raise in some of us a very serious question -- as to continuing in fellowship with those who carried it out.

You have sent me a pamphlet entitled, "Our attitude towards *fellow members of the Body of Christ*." Am I to understand that you agree with it? It speaks very unfavorably of the Pittsburgh meeting and conclusion; but does not, as far as I have seen, quote the ground for change from the Plainfield conclusion, viz., a letter from Mr. Wright⁷⁹ as to the "Letter of the Ten." Should

79. {Concerning James Wright, son-in-law to, and successor of, George Muller, Charles Stanley wrote:

Is it true then, that Bethesda really does now receive from those in fellowship where those minister who teach errors? Certainly not, many will say. C. L., a Christian young man in London, being much perplexed as to this question, wrote to Bristol to inquire at the fountain head. He received the following:

*New Orphan Houses, Ashley Down,
Bristol: 19th Dec. 1883.*

Dear Sir,

In reply to your enquiry, the ground on 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 whom we had reason to believe was personally sound in the faith and

(continued...)

not that have been set forth? Then there is a paper in it assuring all of the soundness in the faith of the signers of it, and of their practice, who guard themselves from speaking for the companies with which they were associated. Rather, let me call it, a shady document. And 'all that really is beside the mark, as you and I know that the separating trouble with Bethesda was not so much the soundness of those within her, but of the principle of association in "*the Letter of the Ten*" . . .

Reception from the Church of England involved the understanding that it really was not a church, as J. N. Darby noted:

We treated the seven churches (Rev. 2, 3) at Annonay with much interest, and, I believe, help from above. The Church of England has nothing to do with the matter, for it never had any pretension to be a church at all in any scriptural sense of the word; it is a great unformed mass arranged by men, with many children of God doubtless in it. It is important, specially in these days, to see things as they are.⁸⁰

Here are some comments by J. N. Darby in *Collected Writings* 14:

. . . "the Church and State are but different aspects of the same body," to use the expression of one of her distinguished defenders (p. 192).

Her aim and boast is to have the whole population within. I repeat, there is no pretense of being a church at all (p. 193).

You can now pretty well understand why I speak not of the world being the Church of England, but of its being the world and not the church at all (p. 194).

I say, then, that the constitution is worldly, because she contemplates by her constitution -- it is her boast -- the population, not of the saints (p. 195).⁸¹

Another quotation from J. N. Darby is apropos here:

I now turn to the difficulty you mention, as to Bethesda being on the ground of the Dissenters or the Establishment. This has been pressed much by persons who sought, while owning there was evil, to involve us again in looseness of fellowship with the principles of B. This is not your object at all, but your difficulty turns on the same point. But to me far graver considerations make a total and complete difference. There had been fellowship rightly or wrongly

79. (...continued)

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; just on the same principle that we should not refuse a person *equally sound* in faith and consistent in life simply because he, or she, came from a body of Christians amongst whom the late Mr. J. N. Darby had ministered, though on account of much more *recent* unsound teachings of the *latter*, we might well feel a *priori* greater hesitation.

I am, faithfully yours,

Signed, James Wright

From, *An Allegory: Things Supposed to Illustrate Things that Are*, p. 4, available from the publisher. 80. *Letters* 2:103 (1870). See also *Collected Writings* 15:257.

81. See also pages 144, 145, 149, 170, and 188. See also *The Bible Treasury* 14:169, 170.

with B., and the first question was, was it to be continued {after 1848}. That is, people had been received if they came thence, and brethren went there received in like manner {before 1848}. Subsequently to this {in 1848}, persons holding the most horrible doctrine as to Christ were received,⁸² inquiry refused, and the doctrine laid down and accepted by the body that no such inquiry should be. That is, they took as a body this position of unfaithfulness on foundation matters to Christ. The Establishment {Church of England} has not done this; indifference to persons holding a false Christ has never been proclaimed as its principle. Nor has any dissenting body that I know ever done so. This is the difference then to me, a grave positive sin against Christ, the body having accepted this as a principle. Where a dissenting body has done this, I would not receive its members, unless the individual were cleared of the sin. Nor can I consent to set ecclesiastical faults of judgment (however grave as regulating my conduct in connection with the unity of the body) on the same ground as positive indifference to what concerns the personal glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. An Independent goes ecclesiastically wrong; when he comes to me, though inconsistent perhaps through want of conviction, he goes ecclesiastically right; but as to Christ's personal glory, and the foundation of union, he is perhaps as jealous as I am, and, it may be, more faithful.⁸³

82. {Reception of persons holding B. W. Newton's doctrine is denied by Open Brethren, but the fact is documented in *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, Vol. 2, Defense of Truth, 1845-1850, available from the publisher.}

83. *Letters* 1:223, 224 (1852). Another statement, but not as perceptive is found in Andrew Miller, *The Brethren*, London: Morrish, pp. 61, 62. See also J. G. Deck, *A Letter on Receiving . . .*, pp. 36, 37, 1852. Also, other comments on this matter are found in the previous chapters.

Chapter 8

Letters on Some Practical Points Connected With the Assembly

From *Helps by the Way*, New Series 2:213-223 (1880)

Dearest Brother, It is upon my heart to write to you, freely and familiarly, about some things affecting the practical state of the gatherings, which the Lord (we may trust) is bringing into being in so many places now, often in great weakness and isolation, separated by long distances from one another, as on this immense Continent of North America especially. The weakness, if only realized, would be indeed matter for thanksgiving and an occasion of real strength; and the isolation from other help should cast them more immediately upon the church's living Head. I cannot speak then of *felt* weakness as being really that, or lament that circumstances should be favorable to that walk with God alone, which is what at all times the Lord has called His people to. Still these circumstances have their peculiar difficulties, and call for some special consideration, as I think, some special attempt to minister to the need by those who have in some measure felt it, and who by their very mistakes and failure, have been taught what they would desire others to learn in a better way. Still that so much of what we have to speak of has been knowledge acquired in this painful manner, may serve to free the writer from even the appearance of self-conceit in communicating it.

Without further preface, then, let me commence with some thoughts as to the gathering itself, which is indeed naturally the first consideration, and a matter of all importance. For this very reason the beginning of things in any place is so critical a thing. A bad constitution at the beginning, just as in the physical condition of an individual, may lead to an unhealthy state which may never be recovered from. Let me say then, that the first of all requisites for a true gathering to the Lord's name, is that it be of the *Lord's making*. You will understand that I do not mean by that merely that those gathered together should be themselves the Lord's. That is a matter of course, which I need not dwell on, for I am not now seeking to establish what the church of God is, or what the gathering to Christ's name: I assume that as known and acknowledged by those I speak of. But I mean that their actual drawing together should be by the Spirit, working by the truth upon the heart, and by *nothing else*.

I believe the very thought of the unity of the church of God may be unintelligently used to hinder this. That every Christian (the maintenance of a Scriptural discipline being understood of course) has a right to the Lord's Table, may

become an argument for methods of gathering, which are quite unsuited to the days in which we live, and tend only to produce confusion instead of what will glorify God.

For real gathering the Holy Ghost must gather, and Christ therefore it is who must be the attractive object, for thus alone the Holy Ghost works. It is only weakness for instance, where a wife follows a husband into fellowship, or a husband his wife, or children their parents, without personal exercise and conviction. Or where pleasant companionship is the object, even in divine things. Or where people come in, just because converted under one in fellowship: or where one's own personal blessing is the object sought. All these are motives short of Christ Himself, and all acting upon them should be as far as possible discouraged. We cannot indeed refuse Christians their place upon this ground only, but we can and ought to put them solemnly upon their responsibility to act as to and under the Lord alone.

Intelligence as to more than fundamental truth we must not require.⁸⁴ When the Church first began, and disciples came together to break bread, the truth of the one body was not yet known; and babes have their place at the Father's board as well as full-grown sons. On the other hand, profession is absolutely worthless except justified by the life; and we have to remember that our rule for a day of failure is to purge ourselves from the vessels to dishonor, and

follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart {2 Tim. 2:22}.

We do not pretend to judge who is who, as Christians; we do not pretend, in refusing fellowship, to say the person is not a Christian: "the Lord knoweth them that are His," not we. But we cannot associate with vessels to dishonor, and be ourselves "vessels to honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use" {2 Tim. 2:21}; and we know the pure-hearted by the righteousness, as well as faith and love, that we follow with them. In days of common and easy profession, the test which is not imposed by the circumstances amid which we move, must be only the more rigidly imposed by those with whom "truth in the inward parts" is recognized as the Lord's requirement.

84. {Certainly a person must not be unsound on the fundamental truths. In addition, note also the following:

There is a place at the table of the Lord for every member of the body of Christ, provided always that there be nothing in doctrine or walk to disqualify. If any more be required for admission to the table than the ability to cry, "Abba Father," that is, the Spirit of adoption {sonship}, it is not the Lord's table at all, but the table of a sect (*Things New and Old* 19:27).

A person who has the Spirit of sonship is sealed with the Spirit. See *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:351.

See also *The Bible Treasury* 16:316; 14:155, 171; 9:224; *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:10; 171; *Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule* 2:122, 123.

Of course, it is assumed that the person is baptized:

As to order, he should be baptized first (*Notes and Jottings*, p. 40).

Would an assembly be justified in refusing those who confessed Christ, though not baptized?

It would not be in order to receive such . . . J. N. Darby, *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. 4, p. 97, Oak Park: Bible Truth publishers, n.d.}

And here let me insist a little -- for there is need -- that a most Scriptural test, and an important one, is that of one's *associations*.⁸⁵ Even the world has its proverbs bearing upon this. "Tell me who are your companions, and I will tell you who you are," says one of them; and as an estimate of moral character we recognize the truth of this. A man's moral level cannot be much above that of his voluntary associations. Above all, where Christ is denied or dishonored, one who winks at this dishonor is plainly unfit for communion with Himself. Let me illustrate this by an example. A Freemason, if a Christian, is not only yoked unequally with unbelievers, but still more with those who purposely omit the Lord's name out of their corporate prayers, to accommodate Jews and unbelievers generally: he is openly linked thus with the Lord's dishonor. The same may be said of those who sit under the teaching of fundamental heresy, or who sit down in communion with it. The teaching of Scripture is that, "he that biddeth him God speed," or gives him salutation, "is partaker of his evil deeds," and that "if any one purge himself from these [vessels to dishonor], *he* shall be a vessel unto honor" (2 John 9-11; 2 Tim. 2:19-21). Have we then any right to count those vessels unto honor, who do *not* so purge themselves?

It is a question thus of practical walk, this association; and as truly a matter of discipline, or of exclusion, as any other. In these days in which 'confederacy' is so leading a principle, it is one of very solemn importance.

Now a word or two as to reception. It is the act of the whole gathering in a place, just as much as is exclusion; whether there be 'two or three' gathered, or two or three hundred. This leads to the practical necessity of submitting the name of any one to be received, to the whole gathering a sufficient time before reception, to allow of all to know and realize what they are doing. Practically it may be that there are a few who have the confidence of the assembly, upon whom the work of visiting and enquiry will usually devolve; but these ought never upon such ground to assume to act for the assembly, nor can the assembly rightly rest their responsibility upon these.⁸⁶ Communion is a thing which concerns every individual; as to "receive one another" must of necessity be individual.

It has been objected that there is no Scripture for making people wait a week or more, and it is quite true that *in that shape* there is none. But every text which enforces our responsibility as to our associations with others, enforces also the necessity of giving opportunity to all to be of one mind in such a matter as this. And a really godly person who understands the reason of his being asked to wait, to proceed from care for the Lord's glory, and to have fellowship a real thing, will be content to wait, if it were a month, rather than hinder this, nay, will be only too glad to see this care practically exercised.

This touches another point -- the matter of *introduction* to fellowship on the part of a brother or more, for one occasion, as of a person accidentally present, and known by him to be a Christian.⁸⁷ Ought such individual judgment to be imposed on an assembly, without giving them time or opportunity to express their own mind

85. {The first three pamphlets in this series discuss associations in detail.}

86. {See also *Things New and Old* 16:25; *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:349, 350; 3:459.}

87. {See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:10, 11, 349, 350; 3:349; *Ministry of G. V. Wigram* 2:83.}

intelligently about it? It is my own clear and deliberate conviction, that this ought never to be done, and I think full and Scriptural reason can be given for it.

The right of a Christian to communion is not in question: the question is who is to recognize the right? Is it the assembly or is it the individual? The two or three gathered to the name of the Lord have His promise to be with them; but they cannot transfer this to one or more among them acting for the rest. If it be allowed to all to introduce, how many are there whose judgment could not at all be trusted in a matter of the kind? If on the other hand it be only the privilege of a few to do so, an official class is set up, very hard to define, impossible to be allowed to define *themselves*, and wholly unknown to Scripture.

If it be said, this only applies to occasional ⁸⁸ not regular communion, I answer, if a person be recognized as entitled to 'break bread' for a single time, he cannot be rightly refused at any other; except of course in a case where discipline has to be maintained, to which all are equally subject who are at the table of the Lord. The place is the same for all exactly, and reception is exactly the same also. If we admitted the idea of 'occasional' communion, we should make provision for what is contrary to the Lord's mind; for *He* certainly gives no permission to wander from His table. And while we cannot prevent this, nor require intelligence as a pre-requisite where the heart is really right with God, we cannot and may not on the other hand *ourselves* admit the title to wander.

I have said all this, dear brother, in so brief a way, that I feel there is need to ask you not to mistake brevity for dogmatism. I have indeed myself the strongest belief that what I have said will stand the fullest test of the Word of God; and I trust and believe you will not receive anything on my part, that that blessed Word does not authenticate. Here, for the present then, I close, though with much more upon my mind, to which at a future time I may ask you to listen . ♦

* * * * *

Chapter 9

88. {JND wrote:

When persons break bread, they are in the only fellowship I know -- owned members of the body of Christ. The moment you make another full fellowship, you make people members of your assembly, and the whole principle of meeting is falsified (*Letters* 2:349.)

Our Practice as to "Receiving." A Review of Certain Objections

by J. R. Gill

A pamphlet entitled *Fellowship*, written by Mr. J. Reader, has lately been put into circulation. In it our brother, who is well known and loved by many in America, gives utterance to certain views relating to the sorrow that in measure presses on us all, viz.: the divided condition of those professedly gathered to the Lord's name.

It is with great reluctance that we undertake to reply to this publication, but inasmuch as it appears to advocate unscriptural principles, and has been a source of stumbling to some, we feel that personal affection for the writer must not stand in the way of the vindication of the truth.

Our brother begins by referring to exercise which he has noticed, here and there, concerning the divisions which have come in among us. We find the question then asked if this exercise is "a work of the Spirit of God, to revive the true ground of gathering and receiving at the Lord's table?" And this question is followed by the presentation of what appears to us an imaginary difficulty as to what is commonly called "receiving" at that table, whereby the impression is conveyed to the reader that something is radically wrong with the methods usually practiced among us.

The writer then complains of the current usage of the word "fellowship" among those gathered out of the systems of men. He does not like us to say that one coming among us is "received into fellowship," or that another whom we may meet for the first time is "a brother in fellowship," or that one who ceases to break bread with us is "not in fellowship." Mr. Reader then assails what he calls "a paper fellowship" among us, limited to certain companies, or individuals, whose names are printed in a "List," which latter he also objects to.

Summing up these difficulties he says . . . "Let Brethren be candid, and own that we have become a sect.

We have every desire to be humble. Indeed we write with a deep sense of the broken state of things among us; yet we feel it necessary to point out the fallacy of much that our brother here advances. The real cause of the divisions among Lord's people has been, we believe, in almost every instance of which we have knowledge, the masterful and self-willed course of leaders among them. Those gathered {together} to the Lord's name have suffered much from the ambitions of gifted brethren who in some cases have not hesitated to split saints in two, rather than be thwarted in a path of self-will, or suffer the humiliation of being checked in the propagation of questionable doctrine. We do not say that the bulk of the saints are exempt from blame. Certainly this is not so, but the scripture,

My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation (James 3:1)

was not written in vain.

But notwithstanding the measure of failure we must own to, in our apprehension and practice of the truth, divine principles remain the same, and ever claim the obedience of the renewed heart. To turn now, and attack the ground on which we stand, as though it were to blame for our own failure, is to embark upon a seriously wrong course.

As to the subject of "receiving," we desire to say a little. The question is here asked, "In considering the ecclesiastical position of those known as 'Brethren' . . . when a believer is received by them, what is it he is received into? Do they receive into the body of Christ or into the house of God? or into the church (ecclesia) of God? or into the unity of the Spirit? or into fellowship with God? or into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord?" It is said that if a believer is not already in all these he ought not to be received at all, and that if he is received into something additional, it must be "some kind of a sect or party."

This does not seem to us very good reasoning. Let us tell the enquirer -- whoever he is (for Bro. Reader seems to be quoting from someone else) -- that there are two kinds of Christians on earth. (We speak of outward position here.) There are those who go on, through ignorance, very largely, with the systems about us, in ways and associations displeasing to the Lord, and contrary to His Word. There are also those (through grace!) who have been gathered out of all this, and who meet around Himself, *according to His word*. When the last mentioned company "receive" another, they simply open the door to him, and admit him to their fellowship in the path of obedience, which includes, of course, participation in the Lord's supper.

It is not a question of being received into membership of the "The Brethren." We are not "*The Brethren*." To accept such a name would be to deny the existence of other brethren. It would also be a mark of sectarianism, and contrary to God's Word (1 Cor.1:12). We repudiate it; but we avow ourselves to be *brethren*, in the Lord's mercy, and we recognize as brethren all true believers, whether with us on scriptural ground, or not.

Those whose privilege it is, in a day of apostasy, to be gathered there around the true center, may and do at times have the joy of receiving others to that center. One who is brought there acquires no new status. Formerly (as to his position) he was a disobedient Christian. Now he is an obedient one. That is all.

While we do not see that there is any legitimate difficulty in all this, yet we are inclined to think that the truth would be more clearly expressed if, instead of speaking of "receiving" such souls, we were to say that we recognize them as having been received by Christ, and thus open the door to them. We believe Mr. W. Kelly, in his weighty *Lectures on the Doctrine of the Holy Ghost*, points out this difference. But in ordinary conversation it is not always practicable to use

such precise language.

As to the current use of the term “fellowship” we shall content ourselves by acknowledging that it is a little indefinite, and perhaps not strictly according to scripture; where, as A. B. P. points out in his well-known treatise, *Remarks Upon Fellowship*, that word is always given in some particular connection, as “fellowship in the Gospel” (Phil. 1:5); “fellowship of the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1); “fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10); “fellowship of the apostles” (new translation, Acts 2:42); “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” (2 Cor. 6:14); etc. It will be observed that scripture does not limit the use of this word to “the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord,” as the phraseology of Mr. Reader’s pamphlet suggests; though certainly that is a most blessed “fellowship.”

“Fellowship” simply means *partnership* the holding of something in common with another. In God’s mercy, and through His sovereign favor, amid all the ruin of Christendom -- the ruin, too, of those separated from it ⁸⁹ -- there yet remain some who have in common a desire to maintain the truth, and who occupy a common position in respect of this. They have “fellowship” one with another, then, as to these things. This is all that is meant by “receiving into fellowship,” and inasmuch as this is generally understood we do not see that our brother has much basis for his criticism. What expression would he recommend as a substitute, in ordinary conversation?

Our brother further objects to what he calls “a paper fellowship” among those professedly gathered to the Lord’s name. Here he refers to the printed lists of gatherings, and says, “Such lists, and other like things which would confine saints in a small ecclesiastical circle have largely contributed to our present ruin.” We confess we are puzzled by this statement. In what way are the saints limited through learning where there are others gathered on divine ground? -- others like-minded? And are we not ready to receive all true-believers, of godly walk and associations, whether or not their names appear on a list? A printed list is simply a convenience, and a very necessary one, too, in a day of scattering like the present. The appearance of a name on it is not a condition of fellowship.

But what seems to underlie these more or less imaginary difficulties is the writer’s desire to ignore the dividing of the saints. Apparently he would have all barriers thrown down, the past forgotten, unjudged sin condoned, and a so-called reconciliation thus effected. We do not wish to speak with undue severity of a brother whom we love, but we would like to ask him upon how substantial a basis such an amalgamation would rest? And we would like to ask him, too, if this

89. {If the words “separated from it” were instead, “separated in it,” the matter would be stated more accurately. Those gathered together to the Lord’s name are part of the ruin but separated from the vessels to dishonor and from those vessels not separated from vessels to dishonor. See the second paper in this series, on 2 Tim. 2:16-26). We are ruined also, as part of the ruin of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony.}

compromising with schism and heresy would be pleasing to the Lord? Earnestly as we long for the removal of the barriers, we cannot conceive of any adjustment being satisfactory which fails to give God His place.

We take the opportunity here to refer to what is undoubtedly in our brother's mind -- the "T.W." controversy. Of all the difficulties that have arisen among us, this one we believe (from a certain standpoint) to have been the most foolish and unnecessary. We believe, too, that a godly way to adjust it could be found -- *and should be found!* But that end would not be reached by simply forgetting about the matter. Something similar may be said about the "Grant" division, to which our brother subsequently refers. In this instance, in view of the professed regret of those who began a schismatic course, and of our willingness to receive the wanderers back, what is it but pride and self-will that hinders their restoration?

How simply all this could be settled, if the saints were in a right state -- settled in a godly and scriptural way, too, and in a way which would give the Lord His place! Simply to forget about sin, and not to confess it may be a very convenient way for us, but we doubt very much if it would please the Lord. Prov. 28:13.

Before passing on to the further consideration of our brother's pamphlet, we note his discontent as to letters of commendation. As to this we remark that if such letters were deemed in godly order in the days of the apostles (2 Cor. 3:1), how much more are they needed now! And, although our brother objects to it, it is necessary, in certain cases, to specify in the letter with what company the one vouched for is connected. It is a sorrowful necessity, certainly, but it *is* a necessity, that the holiness of the Lord's table may be maintained, and confusion avoided. This is not conducive to sectarianism, as is intimated, but is conducive to godliness and order.

Nor can we, with every desire to be humble, accept the writer's invitation to declare ourselves a sect. We speak not for others, but for ourselves. We believe we stand, through God's grace and mercy, where we always stood -- on the ground of the one body; though we have much occasion to own our unworthiness and infirmity in that place.

As we progress in the reading of the publication before us, we find the sentiments advanced by its author bear some resemblance to the well-known doctrines of Bethesda, long and righteously condemned among us. Those known as "Open Brethren" (the supporters of this teaching) are committed to the principle that the Lord's table is not defiled by the admission of one who retains his connection with a hotbed of heresy, provided this person affirms that he, personally, has not imbibed the heresy. We are reluctant to think that our brother would deliberately endorse such principles, but his views certainly bear no little resemblance to them.

Thus we now read,

It has been said by some that there are godly saints whose Christian character

could not be questioned; yet because of their ecclesiastical connection we could not walk with them. Does that imply we could not let them break bread with us? If so, what is it but sectarianism? Is the Lord's table to be spread for those only who are with *us*, and not for *all* the members of Christ?

An instance is then cited of one actively connected with a schismatic table appearing at the home of the writer, and desiring to break bread; whereupon our brother informed him that as it was the Lord's table, he could not be disallowed the privilege of partaking, but that those who met there regarded the associations of the visitor as schismatic! The result of this, we read, was that

the brother, being thus left to his own responsibility before the Lord, did not participate, but sat on one side.

What a perversion of divine principles we have here! "Because this is the Lord's table," our brother says, in effect,

we exercise no restraint on those who would draw near. If the table is defiled, the guilt is theirs -- not ours!

Is there, then, no such thing as *responsibility* for maintaining the holiness of the Lord's table? And how long would it remain holy under such a free and easy system as the writer here seems to advocate?

There is nothing in Scripture more distinct than the holiness of that table. The Old Testament points to it, and the New affirms it. Listen to the voice of the Lord (Ex. 30:25-30):

And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment . . . It shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint . . . the table amid all his vessels, . . . And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: *whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.*

In the New Testament we learn that the assembly, which is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3 :15) is responsible to clear itself, not only of gross outward sin (1 Cor. 5), but also of doctrinal evil (Rev. 2:14-15). These truths seem so clear, and are so generally understood, that we are surprised to find it necessary to point them out.

No, what we should say as to the table of the Lord is this:

Because it is the Lord's table, therefore we must exercise care and vigilance to maintain its holiness.

And at no time in the church's history has the need of godly vigilance been as great as it is today. We admit, in principle, the right of every child of God to be at the Lord's table, but in actual practice we debar those whose walk and associations are not consistent with godliness, and in so doing we are supported by the written Word.

Let us quote from one whose views will perhaps find more favor with Mr. Reader than ours (Mr. W. J. Lowe, in his French tract, *The Responsibility and the Walk of the Assembly*):

To receive the stranger the exhortation is addressed to the whole assembly. There

was, in the next place, the same title and the same law for the one who properly belonged to the assembly, and for the stranger who sojourned among them. (See Num. 15:14-36; Lev. 19:33-34.)

The assembly is responsible with regard to the admission of those who present themselves to it; it is unable to relieve itself of this responsibility by throwing it upon the person who asks to be admitted. There are not two rules; it is the same one for him who is only passing through the place, or the sojourner there, as for him who is born in the land. All those who formed part of the assembly had part in the responsibility of maintaining the holiness to the name of the Lord in their midst (Deut. 29.:10-18).

A confusing feature of Mr. Reader's pamphlet is that in several instances, after laying down loose and unscriptural principles, he practically nullifies them by adding statements at variance with them; so that one is left in doubt as to what he really means. An instance of this kind now comes before us.

Immediately after the recital of our brother's attitude towards the visitor, which we have been considering, he says,

We need the largeness of heart that God gave to Solomon to enable him to take in all His people, *but not to include evil. If evil be there it should be put away, or God will surely, sooner or later, deal with the assembly that allows it.* (The italics are ours.)

How are we to reconcile this with what has just preceded it? With one breath our brother tells us he is willing to have an active worker in a schismatic party sit down at the Lord's table, without repentance or confession, while with the other he tells us evil must not be allowed in the assembly! This is so obviously inconsistent we are at a loss to understand the principles which actuate our brother. Can it be that he does not consider schism {heresy} an evil thing? As for ourselves, we own we know nothing worse than this wounding afresh of Christ in the house of His friends. *The dividing of the Lord's people is an evil thing.* We affirm it with all the emphasis in our power. See Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 10:10-16; Titus 3:10.

It is conceded, of course, that there is a difference between simple believers in system, who have never known the truth, and those who have turned away from it, for our privileges and our responsibilities correspond. We believe that ordinarily there is no difficulty felt among those gathered to the Lord's name as to receiving sincere but ignorant souls in system. We believe it is according to the mind of the Lord to receive such persons simply, and without any legal stipulations; but this is not the line of things before our brother here.

What is specially before him, we gather, is the case of persons who have departed from the true ground of gathering, who are chargeable with schism {heresy}, or who are identified with those thus chargeable, and who are not ignorantly in that position. To receive such, without repentance, at the Lord's table, is not only to betray a lack of faithfulness to the Lord, but it is also to lack true love (which ever seeks the good of its object) to the person involved; for how is the one astray to learn the seriousness of his position if we smile blandly on

him, and say not a word to arouse him? It may be said, however, that there are some in these schismatic parties of “Brethren” who are ignorant of what they are involved in. Very well, let them be informed of it, and given an opportunity to extricate themselves from a position so signally displeasing to the Lord! Surely this is what every godly soul would desire.

We are now confronted by another instance of the contradictory character of the principles advanced in the pamphlet before us, for the author refers presently to the holiness of God’s house, and the need of maintaining order in it. We again affirm that the bulk of his teaching cannot be reconciled with this.

On page 8 he returns to loose principles, and says,

If we meet at the Lord’s table as members of Christ, and not as members of an assembly, we should receive all who are in His fellowship.

We read also,

If we impose or accept conditions on or from any who desire to break bread with us, it savors of sectarianism.

In any ordinary connection these statements could be accepted, perhaps, without comment, but here we are obliged to point out that what is being contended for is the receiving of persons of evil associations without repentance or confession.

He says again,

If there is life in Christ that is the link that connects us as His, and we should own the relationship practically.

Certainly we should, where saints are walking in an orderly way, as in Pentecostal days; but C. H. M. long ago reminded us that we are not now in the beginning of Acts, where all was lovely and serene, but 2nd Timothy, where a very different state of things is found.

On page 9 we find some recognition of the practical difficulties of our day. Our brother would not have souls free to go in and out of system (at least not for communion), nor would he break bread with “any living in sin,” nor would he go “where evil doctrine is allowed unjudged.”

These belated admissions, good as far as they go, we are thankful for, but we know not how to reconcile them with the views and the practice elsewhere advocated.

Towards the close we find the authority of the assembly under attack. We have already seen that its *responsibility* is denied: now its *authority* is denied. We are told that there is no authority “*vested in the assembly as such.*” To this we reply that the assembly cannot be considered apart from Christ in the midst, and with Him in the midst it has all the authority that His presence confers, as Matt. 18:17-20 clearly shows. But the fact that it has authority (and responsibility resulting from it) does not make it infallible.

The assembly may err, just as an individual may err, but we would like to point out to those who are so much occupied with this line of things that the

assembly is far more likely to be right, concerning its own affairs, than any number of outside individuals, hundreds or thousands of miles away, who undertake to revise them. The fullest knowledge of the circumstances of any case of assembly discipline can only be found on the spot where these circumstances have developed, and that is where the Lord, in His wisdom, has decreed that they shall be settled (1 Cor. 5:12-13). We believe that in the first instance every assembly judgment, whether understood or not, should be respected. If sufficient reason exists for it, enquiries can later be instituted concerning the measure taken; but only the clearest and most flagrant case of disobedience to scripture, and violation of its fundamental principles, could warrant the rejection of an assembly's decision.

A favorite difficulty with those who, in practice, have departed from the ground of the one body is whether an unrighteous decision is "bound in heaven," and whether it is to be considered binding on earth? When first propounded this sounds very formidable. It is, of course, a proper question, when asked in a proper connection, but this we do not conceive it to be when its purpose is to throw dust in the eyes of time saints, and to conceal a serious departure from church principles, as laid down in Scripture.

We are free to say that we do not believe an unrighteous decision is bound in heaven, but we turn the tables on our inquisitors by enquiring of them how they can be certain that a decision with which they had nothing to do is unrighteous? *If they are looking for difficulties, here is a real one.* An assembly of God, competent, and authorized to carry out discipline, according to His Word, with the Lord Himself in the midst, acts in a certain case with full knowledge of all its ramifications and intricacies. It savors of rare conceit for individuals elsewhere, on the strength of fragmentary reports, and information which at best must be incomplete, to undertake the work of revising this, unless they are very certain the Lord has called them to it.

We do not say there never could be an instance of this kind, but we do say that if the solemnity and responsibility of such an undertaking -- its *difficulties*, too -- were more before the saints, there would be much less readiness to assume an attitude which has led to sorrow and division, and sometimes over the most trivial and unworthy causes.

In conclusion we share the desire of our brother that we may "so walk with God, that the love wherewith He has loved His Son may be in us, dwelling in our hearts by faith, and so displacing the world there"; also that we may "be occupied with Him, longing to see Him as He is"! And thus, presently, we know that we shall see Him. May it be, then, our earnest endeavor so to conduct ourselves during the little time that remains, that we may hear Him say, "Well done, good and *faithful* servant!" It is happy to know that we may be faithful in a small place.

We trust there has been nothing written here inconsistent with love for an aged servant of the Lord, long known and loved for his work's sake.

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See also *Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule 2:195*.

Conclusion

Responsibility as to godly carefulness in receiving to the Lord's table reflects faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ in obedience to 2 John, 2 Tim. 2, 1 Cor. 5, Gal. 5:9, etc. To refuse separation from those who do not bring the doctrine of Christ makes one a partaker of "wicked works." To refuse to purge oneself from vessels to dishonor makes one unfit to continue with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. To break bread with a "wicked person," refusing to "put away" such, or the receiving such, leavens the assembly. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Fellowship with leaven leavens a believer.

* * * * *

There is no more precious practical expression of fellowship among believers than the breaking of bread.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not [the] communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not [the] communion of the body of Christ? Because we, [being] many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf. See Israel according to the flesh: are not they who eat of the sacrifices in communion with the altar? (1 Cor. 10:16-18).

Appendix 1:

Receiving Children

A practical point not noted elsewhere in this paper concerns the reception of children. This can be a very touchy subject due to parental pride in offspring. As to sitting in the meetings, J. N. Darby gave some counsel⁹⁰ which may be borne in mind, also keeping in mind that there are different cultural practices in different places.

Concerning children breaking bread, he remarked:

The other question is for me a more delicate one, because it is a question of the state of the soul, as of the church, when darkness covers it. Many, many souls cry Abba, Father (that is, have the Spirit of adoption) which are clear in nothing, save that their confidence is in Christ and His work only: and as doubting is taught in the church, and a plain full gospel unknown, and even rejected by teachers, this state is the natural consequence; and it often requires spirituality to discern the real state of a soul, if really under law undelivered or legalized by teaching. Hard cold knowledge of doctrine is not what I seek. Then there is the danger of throwing back a soul just when it wants to be encouraged. Doubts brought in by conflict, when a soul can really say Abba, are not a ground of rejection, though it shows a soul not well established. But a soul exercised, but not yet resting in Christ's work, is not in a right state for communion. So with young converts: it is far better for them to wait until they have peace, only carefully showing it is not to reject them, but for their own good. I should not look for understanding deliverance, but being personally able to say Abba, Father. The intelligence of deliverance is the consequence of sealing. But if a man be not sealed, he is not in the christian position: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."⁹¹ Peace through forgiveness is, as to Christ's work, the evidence of faith in Christ's work, and that work received by faith is the ground of sealing: then one is delivered. But the intelligence of this is another thing.⁹²

Here is another comment from the 1800s:

You ask, "If you found a young person who gave you the fullest assurance he was saved, enjoyed peace with God, enjoyed fellowship about the things of Christ, and whose conduct at home showed the power of it -- if such an one expressed a desire to come to the Lord's table, would you receive him? or would you keep him outside for a length of time, if he were only 13 or 14 years old?" Most assuredly, we should gladly receive such an one, and not keep him outside for a single hour. What has the question of years to do with the divine life? How old was Samuel, when he first

90. *Letters* 2:409 (1877); 3:459 (1878).

91. {A soul may be quickened without being sealed and so is "not of him," rather than "not his."}

92. *Letters* 2:351 (1875).

knew the Lord? or Josiah? or Timothy? ⁹³

I was present at a meeting for the care of the assembly where bro. John Begg was, and this matter came before us in the case of a girl of good report, and perhaps 11 or 12 years old. Bro. Begg called our attention to several problems that might be faced. Speaking generally, he asked what children do when they step out of the meeting room. Why, he said, they act as children. And why do they do *that*? he asked rhetorically -- because they *are* children. Moreover, he said, God's priests and worshipers come here to offer up spiritual sacrifices. Do you want young children leading in prayer, &c.? In addition to that, should they not have a sense of 1 Cor. 11:28, 29? Furthermore, consider that when a young one is received, and someone else's young one is refused, there may be problems develop from that. Why, he said, he knew of an assembly that split because of just this kind of thing.

What was done in this case was that several brothers visited with the girl and sought to encourage her in the things of the Lord and express their appreciation, and the appreciation of the saints, for her desire. They counseled her to wait on the Lord for His timing. A few years later she was happily received and there were no repercussions. Bro. Begg was quite aware of the above quotation. His counsel seemed to me better than the last two sentences in the above quotation. Children vary in their maturity and mere physical age is not the only consideration.

One more point I desire to make on this topic is the notion that the assembly is a shelter, or haven, or a safe place, for young ones, so we ought to hurry them "in." I strongly doubt that that is the function of the assembly. It seems to me a misuse. The family is the place for such things.

With regard to converted children, my conviction entirely agrees with that of some trusted brethren I have consulted. First, one should be quite clear as to the conversion of the child, because children are without hypocrisy; so sensitive are they, and subject to the influence of impressions, that they sincerely believe they feel all, and do indeed *feel* what is at work around them. But if they have been actually and apparently converted, we should by no means persuade them to break bread. Let that arise naturally in *their* hearts, and if they desire to do so, ascertain if they are capable -- of course, as a child -- of discerning and acknowledging in it the body of the Lord; not to drive them away, but that they may do it with spiritual insight and true faith and understanding. It is not to be expected of them that they should explain everything like theologians, but that they should understand it is with you a matter of faith from the heart, and realization of the broken body. If they are actually in the care of believing parents, there is not so much danger. If they have much intercourse with the world, it is well to be assured of their firmness. One must remember that they have not yet been tempted and tested by the allurements of the world; and there lies the danger, supposing that they are really in Christ. It often happens that what they have longed for while subject to influence exercised over them without feeling the check, becomes subsequently a hateful check and nothing else, and they abandon what later on perhaps they would have longed for. Hence the importance of that of which I have already spoken--that they should be in the company of christian parents, by whom they may, as time goes on, be

93. *Things New and Old* 18:167.

guarded and brought up before the Lord, that they may be cared for in a christian way. Invariably so soon as they are in active life, the world and lusts come in, besides the hope of a future in the world, to tempt them. But if the work is deep, conscience secures their apprehension of the Lord's supper, especially if the parents are faithful and the children are accustomed to care of every kind. Or if there is proved faithfulness in the child, then nothing hinders their breaking bread. It is by no means a question of right, but of that which is altogether best for those that according to the will of God are under the government of others.⁹⁴

94. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:255 (1874).

