

Where Am I, And Why Am I There?

The Church of the Living God is called to walk in intelligent fellowship with Him, having the Word as her guide -- not in the deadness of the letter, or as a code of rules without application to present circumstances, but as that which she may use, whilst walking in the light, to test all that is around, whatever form it may assume.

Her present danger arises from the use which Satan is making of religion, veiling worldliness under a profession of devotedness of wealth and talent to God, or wrapping up false and heretical doctrines in the pleasing and fascinating draperies of largeness of heart and universality of Christian affection.

Satan knows how to present his temptations, and among those who profess to follow the Lord Jesus he creeps in with the imitation of what God is doing. Thus, under cover of some great principle to which He is calling His people's attention, Satan brings in that which mars the whole; and he so blinds the judgment of Christians as to persuade them that they are contending for God's truth, while they are really building up his own superstructure of falsehood. Not only is he the "god of this world," working in the children of disobedience, but he succeeds in deceiving and using the "children of God" to accomplish his purpose.

The manner in which he has effected this, and divided those whom God would have had to be one in worship and one in testimony, is too well known to need commenting upon. If the evil was one that was past, a thing gone by in activity, though still present in its effects, it might be left as having been fully exposed and judged. But the leaven is working -- it is a present thing. Young Christians are growing up amongst us, and others are being brought into the position which exposes them to this form of the enemy's attacks, without such knowledge of facts and principles as is needed in a warfare in which the foe is disguised, in a battle in which he has hoisted stolen colors and imitated the banners under which they serve.

The following brief sketch of the principles learned from the Word of God by those who profess to gather only round the Lord Jesus, and of the manner in which Satan has brought in sorrow, is written with a desire to meet this need, and to help those who are exercised on account of what they see and hear, to discern between truth and its counterfeit.

When the Lord first awakened His servants, in these last days, to the consideration of truth which the Church had gradually neglected, until it was lost sight of altogether, they did not see all truth at once. They were led to see

the evil amidst which they dwelt, and to leave it; they "ceased to do evil," and only gradually "learned to do well." They were taught to gather round the Lord Jesus, *unto His name*, without any regard to the variety of thoughts that each might have: simply regard to the variety of thoughts that each might have: simply as those alive to God, with one Holy Ghost dwelling in them. They had no regulations, no creeds, no fences, no provisions for the future. For *God* had gathered them unto Christ as a portion of His Church. They had not assembled by mutual consent as a human community, proposing to themselves certain ends and devising the best means for promoting them and securing harmony. *God had gathered them*, and they knew that notwithstanding the ruin that was all around, He was the same, and as ready to bless as ever. They knew that the Holy Ghost, who had been given to the Church to abide with it forever, had not given up *His* charge; and that the Lord Jesus was as truly present now, with any who in faith met in His name, though but two or three, as with those to whom He gave the promise. Present, not merely to rejoice their hearts -- He is thus present with each one alone, He is thus present in many a social meeting for reading His Word -- but *present especially to stamp with His own authority*, by the power of His Spirit, every Church act, for He has entrusted His people to act *FOR Him*. This promise of His presence has been and is so abused, so made to sanction and to sanctify anything, that it is most important to inquire what it really means. If it means no more (precious as that is) than the blessing of His presence as to communion, then is there no difference between a meeting *convened in His name* (1 Cor. 5:4) to exercise the most solemn power of discipline, and a social gathering of saints to read His Word and speak of His love; and then what warrant have we for any discipline in the Church?

We have read the Word carelessly, and thus many an interpretation has had the sanction of "general authority," which will not bear the test of a prayerful searching into God's Word, to know *what is the mind of the Spirit*. It will doubtless be manifest upon careful consideration to all who thus search the Word, that whenever the expression "name of Jesus" occurs, it always stands connected with the thought of *authority*, of *acting for* Jesus, as if He was Himself doing it -- in *His power*, instead of Him, as representing Him, etc.

In connection with the gathering round the Lord Jesus as the only centre of unity, saints were taught that when the Lord ascended the Holy Ghost had come down, not only to inhabit believers, which He had not done previously, but also to baptize those believers into *one* body, to become the power of their union with the Lord Christ, and with each other; to build them *together* for a habitation of God, and to dwell in them, or among them (thus builded), to order all that belongs to God's house, to minister the fullness and

to administer the power of the Lord Christ. Saints thus learned that the Body was *really* one (not figuratively), and since *one* Spirit ruled in “the body” (however scattered saints might be as regards situation) His action in each gathering must be in harmony.

Impossible that it can be otherwise if *He rules*, consequently whatever He did at Corinth or elsewhere was *owned* by the whole Church. If He received a newly-born soul in one place, no gathering of saints elsewhere questioned the reality of life -- that one was, so to speak, free of the whole Church all over the world. Again, if He judged evil in one part of the Church, as at Corinth, that judgment was not questioned by any other part; and the evil there purged out could not present itself elsewhere, but as the thing that had been judged. One Spirit *ruled* in the body, and the gathering of saints who had met for carrying out discipline in the name of the Lord Jesus, acting by the Holy Ghost, had its sentence confirmed by the Lord Himself, according to His promise, etc.

When saints had learned what was meant by the oneness of the body -- the unity of the Spirit -- *the rule* of the Spirit -- and looked around, they found how truly the Church was in ruins, for nothing of this was visible. What was to be done? They then understood how gracious a provision was made for their need in the promise of the “two or three,” they saw that what was true to the whole Church originally remained *now* true to faith, and would be realized by those who were on what *God* could recognize as Church ground.

What is this ground? It must be that in which the unity of the Spirit can be maintained. Not mere union, not mere brotherhood, not merely the loving association of those who can pray together, but the unity which is the result of the Spirit’s dwelling in the body. Therefore, *Church* ground is that in which the Holy Ghost can act -- unhindered. Again, the Church was “built together for a habitation of God” -- nothing can be allowed there contrary to God. All evil must, as soon as known, be purged out; *the place in which God dwells must be holy*. Church ground, then, is that on which discipline can be maintained. If the position taken is one in which from any consideration this is hindered, it is not the ground which God recognizes. Again, to the Church God has committed the care of His Truth; He has constituted her “the pillar and the stay of the truth,” of all truth, but especially of that which may be called foundation truth. If this is not preserved, however brotherly love may appear to be manifested, evidently the very being of the Church (as regards man) is destroyed; for it is the pillar of the *truth*, not of brotherly love -- a pillar set up *for God*, not for saints! Much of this may appear needless to those who have not entered into the details of the controversy which has so painfully divided saints, or into the plausible arguments by which Satan has tried to make darkness appear light; but it is necessary to make all clear, and

to distinguish the seeming from the true, if we would judge the question in God’s light, in the Spirit and not in the flesh. With these principles before them, but still, as to all they involved, indistinctly seen, brethren went on happily and simply, acting in present power and present light, making no provision against evil because the Holy Ghost was ever there to guide in action and to lead in God’s way, as the exigence of the moment might be. They received all who knew and loved the Lord Jesus, asking only for evidence of life and the Spirit. As in the early days of the Church the only thing required was faith in Christ’s name, so here, asking no questions on minor points, all were welcomed, the title of every believer to the Lord’s Table was acknowledged. They took their stand where the whole Church might meet, and there was no hindrance (in them) to the practical exhibition of the oneness of the Church. Satan was not long before he tested them.

Mr. F. W. Newman began to slip from the truth {about 1830}; wrong thoughts about the person of the Lord Jesus were manifest in his teachings; defilement was entering the habitation of God! Godly jealousy was aroused, but what was to be done? Mr. Newman was then a “brother beloved” by many. How separate from him? But the honor of the Lord was in question, the purity of His House and the Church as “the pillar and stay of the truth.” Therefore Mr. Newman was separated from. The body is one; the communion of the body, if existing at all, must be by the unbroken action of the Spirit. The Lord’s table is one, and in the breaking of bread saint is linked to saint in fellowship. Hence, if Mr. Newman had broken bread at any table, every table was involved; for in principle there is but one Lord’s Table (though for convenience and of necessity we meet in different places); where the Spirit *rules* it is “one bread,” one cup, and all partake of that same bread, that same cup, as linked by the Spirit, since the Spirit is the power of fellowship.

Brethren had acknowledged all this; but truth not practically exercised is often not really known, and God will have all tested in the souls of those who are brought near to Him. The Holy Ghost used Mr. Darby in this crisis (as He had before brought out much previously forgotten through him), and he said that not only could he have no fellowship with F. W. N., but he could not with any brother who received him! Saints were then walking in the simplicity and power and freshness of the truth, *therefore* they had spiritual perception to discern, and obedience to own, what was of God. With the exception of a Baptist congregation {Bethesda, Bristol, England}, which had not then professed to own the presence of the Spirit, Mr. Newman was withdrawn from by all those with whom he had previously been in communion; whether in England or Ireland, all sorrowing over him, but none *so* pitying him as to break the unity of the Spirit and sacrificing the honour of the Lord Jesus to persist in maintaining fellowship with him because he was

a “dear brother.” Thus, Satan was baffled, and peace was unbroken. In time, Mr. Newman’s open infidelity justified the conduct of God’s servant and of His saints, and made it manifest that it was *God the Holy Ghost* who had judged the evil by them.

It will be readily acknowledged that principles remain the same, whether they affect in the working out one person or one thousand persons. The case that has just been detailed is the Bethesda question in miniature. Let the mind be kept free in the consideration of it from the biasing influence of numbers and persons, and the judgment arrived at cannot fail to be the same. At the present time [1857] Mr. Newman is represented by Mr. Newton and the Plymouth party, viz., by those who hold heresy personally or in communion; heresy, which if it takes not openly away the Godhead of the Lord Jesus, does by denying the purity of His person, deny His *true relation* to God as Man, and thus equally over-throws His person and His work {B.W.N’s doctrine of Christ’s “unspeakable circumstantial distance from God”}.

Christians who know anything of this heresy will at once acknowledge that the defilement of those who hold it or treat it lightly is manifest, and that no alternative is left to others but that of separating from them. “They must be put away from amongst us,” one would expect to be the unanimous judgment of those who were not themselves involved in it. It should have been so, but those who now profess to gather unto the name of the Lord Jesus are great in number, but feeble in truth. Many have come in from various reasons whose consciences have been but little exercised; they have taken a position, the responsibilities of which they but little understand. As we see in larger bodies, many have taken up opinions without holding the truth in power; therefore, when the enemy again came, they were not prepared to act for God nor with God, they were not prepared to judge as heavenly men, but looked at the question with earthly affections.

They allowed personal attachment to Mr. Newton, and the recollection of what he had been, to weigh against his errors, and *then* they thought them light. They allowed him to occupy the foreground until they lost power of seeing the relative proportion of the earthly and the divine. “Mr. Newton teaches sweetly on some points; he is a gifted brother, a dear brother. We need not hold his errors, but we will not separate in fellowship from himself or his party.”

Now, what was to be done? Were these tamperers with evil to go hither and thither as they pleased, carrying defilement, and by their occasional presence, if allowed, linking other gatherings with Compton Street, Plymouth {where B. W. Newton ministered}?

Manifestly this was impossible. If they would not separate from evil they must be separated from; the command was plain (2 John 10, 11). They

might be personally sound, but they were one lump with Mr. Newton! How preserve the holiness of God’s house? How maintain our trust and be “the pillar and stay of the truth,” if identification with such evil was allowed, and a door opened for heretical teachings? How was even the soundness of these persons to be known? They were listening to and enjoying the teachings of one who upset the person of the Lord Jesus and dishonored His relation to God! True, these might be “dear Christians”; true, “the table is open to all believers”; true, “faith in Christ is all that is to be asked”; true, that “division must be avoided.” But are saints more precious to us than is the Lord? fellowship with them of more consequence than regard for the glory of His person and the integrity of His Godhead? Surely no believer with his eye single, with his heart undivided, could need to reason about it! Life prompts the feeling, the spiritual instinct starts from the horrible danger, and the soul that is in communion with “the Father” is at once ready to exclaim, “Let the whole Church be separated from rather than my Lord be dishonored!”

Satan having now succeeded, not only in introducing hidden leaven, but in getting saints to sanction it when manifested, the question with any gathering, when a stranger came from Plymouth, could not merely be, “Is he a believer?” They could no longer act upon that alone, but they must also ask, “Is he in communion with Compton Street?” For that was the party known to be aiding and abetting and abiding in fellowship with Mr. Newton. It was not merely life that had to be certified, but health; infection was abroad. So, in the early Church, in its freshness, it was faith in the Lord Jesus; afterwards, when heresies arose, soundness in the faith was insisted on among those received (see 1 John 4:1, 2), and no communion with heretics (2 John). Even at this point, had the evil been resisted, it would have been comparatively well, painful as it was to see any turn from their allegiance to the Lord Christ through love to man. But brethren had fallen, and now God would test all, and He permitted Satan to sift. Now they proved the evil of not waiting upon the Lord in every step -- of acting upon human judgment. Any step taken in the flesh must result in sorrow. Bethesda Church (to give it the name by which it had long been known), having more spirituality and more truth than other Baptist churches, claimed or desired to be owned as a gathering meeting in the name of the Lord, and *as a whole* they were acknowledged; saints were not only received from them, but commended to them.

Yet Bethesda retained much that proved that even her teachers had not received the truth which they professed to acknowledge, viz. the one Spirit present and acting in the Church; for see how they acted when the test came. Some of those in immediate connection with Compton Street {Plymouth}, who advocated Mr. Newton’s doctrines, even those concerning Christ’s sufferings, circulated his tracts, and were really his partisans, went to

Bethesda and *were received*. Brethren then kindly, but with increasing urgency, warned Bethesda of what she was doing, and who those were who had been received; but she disregarded all remonstrance, and publicly and formally said that “Bristol saints could not be troubled with what was wrong at Plymouth”; thus, in principle and practice denying the oneness of the body. To this act of the leading “Ten” {brethren at Bethesda,} expressed in a too well-known “Letter,” the body put their seal voting them right! After much remonstrance from all around she professed to judge *the doctrines*, having publicly kept in those who had been received, and privately requested some of them to leave for the sake of *peace*. She held meetings to judge and to condemn Mr. Newton’s tracts, but never judged or condemned herself for the refuge which she had afforded to those who had sanctioned the dishonor done to the Lord! And to this day she defends her conduct, and refuses to judge any believer for fellowship with evil, only excluding those who are personally unsound. Thus, does she deny our corporate responsibility and our fellowship as one body, treating each believer solely as an individual responsible only for his own sin, and not for that with which he stands connected even where the Holy Ghost’s presence is professed. With regard to the want of moral rectitude displayed in this matter, it will be sufficient to say that it was a repetition, on a smaller scale, of the monstrous system of wrong that was developed at Plymouth (before the evil doctrine came out), when Mr. Darby and other saints were compelled to separate from Ebrington Street {Plymouth}, because of their departure from principles, and return to real sectarianism; particularly in the practical disavowal of *the rule* of the Holy Ghost. But to return. Since Bethesda persisted in remaining connected with this evil of heresy, persisted in refusing rightful discipline, in abandoning the purity of the house of God, brethren were forced to separate from her, notwithstanding the love that was felt towards the saints there individually. Sins committed by the body, the body must be judged for. Among those who acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the power of communion, *each one* must be responsible for the evil with which he stands connected, and this evil is one which actually destroys the Lord’s table; for if we permit the *person* of the Lord to be trifled with, around whom do we gather? Not God’s Christ. And for what do we meet? The Holy Ghost cannot testify to Christ’s dishonor. He cannot *rule* where such evil is sanctioned in His name, for a *Church* act (by those who own His *rule*) commits Him to that act. To suppose that He does not judge such evil, that He sanctions such identification, is an absurdity; and those who take part with Bethesda are either criminally indifferent to the Lord’s glory, or really on the ground of Christians in the national establishment {the Church of England} viewing each believer separately as coming to the Lord’s Table merely for individual blessing, not in any way having or desiring fellowship with those who

(outwardly) partake with them. Only as believing them in this position can any excuse be made for them; but then as it regards themselves it is a solemn thing, for they have taken a *church* place which they do not understand, but for which nevertheless God holds them responsible. Bethesda having failed in faithfulness, the difficulty increased; it was no longer individuals only that had to be dealt with, but gatherings -- no longer a saint here and a saint there to be separated from, but hundreds of saints; for as Bethesda had refused to separate from Compton Street, and had involved herself in the guilt of sheltering heresy, so other gatherings have refused to judge Bethesda, and have persisted in maintaining intercommunion with her, and therefore are involved in her guilt.

It is impossible for any gathering faithful to the Lord to receive any saint, however otherwise personally unexceptionable, who has fellowship at the Lord’s Table with evil, however far off in time or place the original evil may be. Hers is not a question of numbers nor of persons, but of principles; and of principles as affecting the *One Body*, and that in its oneness. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

There remains another point to be considered by those who have spiritual discernment, viz. obedience to the Lord acting by the word and Spirit. He has raised His voice against this heresy. He has “lifted up a standard.” Are we rallying round it? Are we with Him standing for the Lord Jesus and the perfection of His person, endeavoring to keep that ground on which the “unity of the Spirit” can be maintained, or are we in *any* degree sacrificing Christ for the brethren? making union the first thing, caring for the members at the expense of the Head, who therefore sinks into the second place (for this is what fusionists are practically doing). The Holy Ghost cannot *rule* in two opposed gatherings. He cannot protest against evil in one place and protect it in another; cannot exclude saints in the one gathering and receive them in another; cannot disown and sanction at the same time -- this is impossible. This is a solemn matter, and Satan labors to surround and entangle with it all kinds of difficulties that he may get saints off the simple inquiry, “What is due to the Lord?” It is a day of great talking about “brotherly love,” but that which compromises Christ for saints is not *true love*, it is not the *love which is of God* (2 John v. 2). There has indeed been a scattering, but it is Satan who has scattered by introducing iniquity. Standing for God may lead to separation. It ever has done so but it is separation in order to real unity. Whatever the consequence the believer must follow Christ; must avoid that which is contrary to Him and must separate from it, though it should lead to isolation.

In the ruined condition of the Church the path of faith is often a solitary one. Separation *is* a sorrow, but sorrow is better than sin. * There is danger of human association on spiritual grounds when it is desired on earthly ones.

Human nature is ever ready to band together; sorrow naturally calls for sympathy, and sympathy apart from God always blinds the judgment.

Spiritual evil is very insidious, and the tone of the soul gets lowered and its perception of that which is contrary to the Spirit deadened very gradually. This question is not one to be decided by knowledge and mental power, it is one of life, of right feeling towards Christ and about Him in subjection to the Word of God. May God give each of us in His presence to ask, "Where am I, and why am I there?" It is not enough to be in a right position if the conscience is unexercised and the evil around unjudged.

Anon. – 1857

* "Evil we shall meet with and it is sorrowful, power to meet it or its wasting the whole system is in question." -- J.N.D.

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