

THE LOOSE GROUND OF GATHERING,

AND

NEUTRAL POSITION AS TO CHRIST

EXAMINED.

A REVIEW OF AN APOLOGY FOR THESE
PRINCIPLES.

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”—2 Tim. ii. 19.

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DEAR BROTHER IN THE LORD JESUS,

As you have requested a statement of my thoughts on the document you have kindly sent me, intended as an apology for refusing to take decided ground, when the truth and honour of Christ are in question, I will endeavour, with all possible brevity, to notice a few of the leading sentiments contained in it.

Were this simply an expression of private opinion, I should not have deemed it necessary to be so particular as I have been; but as it is put forth officially as a church document, and signed by nine individuals; and more especially as I take it to be a candid exposition of the kind of teaching to which the signers have been accustomed from certain leading individuals under whose influence they have acted, I deal with the paper as a statement of the principles of the party from whence it emanates.

It commences thus—

“Dec. 10, 1860.

“Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

“You are aware that for some time past, we, as two or three gathering in the name of Christ, have had our position and principles under review, as it was affirmed that there was that in our position and principles calling for separation from us; and earnestly desiring to be free from the sin of schism . . .”

As so much is said by some about this "sin of schism," it may be well, before we proceed further, to look for a moment at the subject. When, as in the Apostles' times, the visible church was one, and when even the conduct of some who were beginning to say, "I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos," had caused no rent in the body, what might be called the sin of schism was plain, namely, separation from the one undivided church on earth, as established by the Holy Ghost, through the agency of the Apostles of Christ. But now, where is the one outward undivided church on earth, to separate from which is schism? The Romanist may say it is the church of Rome; and others may say to separate from them is schism? Which is right?

My firm conviction is, that in the present divided and distracted state of the church, the only way to keep clear of this sin, is to "hold the Head," to keep close to Jesus, and to seek by divine grace to maintain His truth, honour, and authority, in separation from all that dishonours Him, or that touches His prerogatives; even though in so doing, we may be called the straitest of all sects. For Jesus Himself has said, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Luke xi. 23:

Is the sin of schism best avoided, and the unity of the body best promoted by holding with the members, whatever may be the evil among them; or by holding with the Head, in avowed separation from the evil? This is the pith and marrow of our present enquiry.

But where the loose ground is taken, what becomes of the unity of the body, because where is the sympathy with the Head? Those who have held and disseminated doctrines which are admitted to be fraught with blasphemy against the blessed Son of God are sympathized with. Those who, while meeting together simply as christians, have refused to judge these doctrines when brought before them, and

into their midst, and who by their thus countenancing the evil, have, as much as in them lies, prevented the sin from being repented of, condemned, and put away, are sympathized with. But where is the sympathy with the Head? Where is the indignation which resents the dishonour done to the Holy One? (See Rev. iii. 15, 16.)

I cannot but think that the desire of many to set up again an outward unity, which, by concealing beneath a smooth exterior a mass of rottenness within, may make a fair show in the flesh, proceeds from an unwillingness to take the low place, and to admit the humbling truth, which the history and experience of eighteen centuries teaches, that, as to the maintenance of an outward unity, the flesh profiteth nothing. That having been subjected to this fresh trial in the dispensational dealings of God, the flesh, even of believers, has been found utterly profitless. And that the only possible means of maintaining in any measure the unity which is according to God, and is in harmony with the prayer of the Redeemer, in John xvii. "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us," can only be by abiding in Jesus, drawing out from Him constant supplies of grace, in entire separation from all that is dishonouring to Him, and grieving to His Holy Spirit.

The writer goes on to say,

"We have deliberately, patiently, and prayerfully sought for instruction from the word of God, and tested our principles and conduct by that touchstone."

The most scrupulous attention to the word is of great importance; but what the Lord especially values is regard and love towards *Himself*. In Rev. iii. 8, He says to the church in Philadelphia, "Thou hast kept my word and hast not denied my name." There may be those who would not willingly deny the *name*, titles, or rights of the Lord

Jesus, and yet who in church matters may be little guided by the written *word*. Such appears to be the character of Sardis. Rev. iii. 1. There are those again who profess to take the *word* for their guidance in these matters, but who are lukewarm as to His *name*. Such is Laodicea. Whereas in Philadelphia, not only is the *word* of Christ kept, but also His *name* is not denied. No departure from the *word* of Christ is allowed, but at the same time there is fidelity to His *person*. This combination I believe to be of the first moment, and if practically acted on, there will be real unity and rich blessing.

Passing over the professions which follow—for this simple reason, that if the principles afterwards laid down are abided by, those professions cannot possibly be carried out—we pass on to notice the following paragraph.

“Putting away appears to have been a matter of the greatest importance, only resorted to after all discipline had failed. It was the last act. When this took place the excommunicated were to be regarded ‘as the heathen man and publican’—without the pale of the church altogether: there was to be no more fellowship with them of any kind, no companionship, ‘no not to eat.’ It was a delivering over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved. *This appears to us as the only alternative to receiving into fellowship; we can find no middle place or state.*”

There are two distinct precepts of scripture which are often confounded together; the one is that given by the Apostle on the authority of Christ, 1 Cor. v. 13, “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” This is a delivering over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh; and such an one is undoubtedly to be regarded for the time being as an “heathen man and a publican.” And this extreme discipline is to be exercised on two grounds. For immorality, as in 1 Cor. v.; and for false doctrine, as in 1 Tim. i. 20. This has been styled “excommunication,” though there is no such word in scripture. The other pre-

cept is that found in 2 Thess. iii. 6, 7, and there pressed home on the conscience on the authority of Christ. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye *withdraw yourselves* from every *brother* that walketh disorderly, and not according to the tradition which he received of us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you." This precept enjoins the *withdrawal* of the disciple from such *brethren* as are not walking according to the *teaching* and *example* of the Apostles of Christ.

And this provides for the good conscience and clear path of the faithful disciple, even when the church fails either temporally or finally in putting away the evil. Thus Paul acted towards the church in Corinth, while waiting to see the effect of his admonition. He purposely kept away from them for a time, until he was satisfied that he could again happily identify himself with them, although his love towards them was most intense. "Moreover," he says, "I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." 2 Cor. i. 23. He saw through the device of Satan to bring in disunion between the Corinthians and himself: for had he come, and they not have cleared themselves, he must have proceeded to extremities.

This *withdrawal* does not, I judge, amount to a delivery over to Satan; neither is the brother so withdrawn from to be regarded "as an heathen man and a publican." This is clear from ver. 15, "Yet count him *not as an enemy*, but admonish him as a *brother*."

The measure and character of withdrawal of course is to be regulated by the measure and character of evil to be avoided. I speak of the principle here. In the case of those at Thessalonica, the evil might have been "working not at all;" and the object of withdrawal would be to express disapproval of such a course. Again, in ver. 14 of 2 Thess. iii. we read,

“If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.” This expression, “have no company,” does not mean, have no intercourse, for the Apostle immediately adds, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” Literally it is, do not “mix yourselves up with” his principles or conduct. Or as the Apostle in his epistle to Timothy expresses it, “neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.”

So in 1 Cor. v., there are two distinct subjects treated of—first, the duty of the assembly in putting away the wicked person, v. 1—8; secondly, their duty whether as individuals or collectively not to keep company, or not to mix themselves up (it is the same word here) with one called a brother, who is walking in evil. And the duty of putting away, when the case requires it, is founded on the principle already laid down, the necessity of separation from evil, v. 13. To put a case. Evil, either practical or doctrinal, comes in, and the whole assembly is defiled: yet the assembly declines to act. A person feeling it a duty to keep himself clear from the evil, withdraws from the assembly. Immediately a cry is made, “You are excommunicating brethren more holy than yourself.” No such thing. He is neither excommunicating them, nor himself either. He is simply *withdrawing from evil*. He has no power to excommunicate. The *duty* of excommunicating, when evil demands it, rests with the whole assembly unitedly: but the *power* is alone possessed by the Head, which is Christ Himself. And can only be exercised by the assembly when acting in fellowship with Christ. 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver,*” &c. So that if any assembly, or all assemblies combined, were to put away a person, and Christ not to go along with the

act, the individual would not be excommunicated. Instead of being delivered unto Satan, it might be that he would rather be cast on the especial care and sympathy of his Saviour: like the restored blind man in John ix. 34, 35: or Luther in the days of the Reformation. Parliament may pass an act; but no act is binding that has not received the royal assent. Only the Lord has promised His sanction when that which is done is done under the leading of His Spirit, and in accordance with His will.

We withdraw from evil, that our fellowship with the Head may be unhindered and complete. By holding with the assembly when evil is allowed, we endanger our communion with Christ, and grieve His Holy Spirit. And schism between the members and the Head is a far more serious matter than separation from christians who may be walking with allowed evil.

Many of us have felt it to be a solemn and imperative duty to withdraw ourselves from various sections of the professing church, but in so doing we had no thought of excommunicating those with whom we were formerly connected: or any other desire than that of continuing in the feeling and manifestation of brotherly love towards them: while at the same time, we could not continue to mix ourselves up with principles and actions which we believe are not in accordance with the church order taught by the precepts and example of the Apostles of Christ.

The ground professedly taken by any company of believers, and the principles admitted, will necessarily affect most seriously the question of the measure of withdrawal, where the ground ostensibly assumed is that of meeting in the alone name of Jesus; yet where there is practical neutrality when the truth and honour of Christ is concerned, and doctrines vitally subversive of the truth of Christ, and of the very foundation of the soul's salvation are not dis-

tinently judged and repudiated; and when, as the document under consideration will prove, there are principles admitted, which if only carried out, are subversive of all holiness and truth in the assembly of saints—since the ground assumed is so intimately connected with the honour of the blessed Lord, and the position actually taken so dishonourable to Him, and so unsafe for His saints—what course is left for any one who has a heart and conscience for Christ, and real regard for the welfare of His saints, but that of entire separation; a separation, not so much from *persons*, whose individual walk may be exemplary, as from their *church position*, for Christ's sake, and for their own sakes, as the truest expression of love.

We now proceed to notice a rather long paragraph, which will require a little time to unravel and reply to.

“It is said we are open to receive defilement, and have received it, if not directly, indirectly, and we are referred to such scriptures as 2 Cor. vi. 14, also to the Levitical law, as shewing how defilement comes in. With regard to the passage in Corinthians, we find it is direct and actual fellowship with unrighteousness that is condemned. It is the yoking of believers with unbelievers, &c.: the temple of God with idols. No contact could be more direct.”

Before we pass on, I would ask a question. Is not sitting down together at the Lord's table an expression of fellowship the most direct and actual? (See 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.)

“And with regard,” continues the document, “to the Levitical ceremonials, as these types and shadows doubtless are, as setting forth the requirement of God's holiness, we are not precisely informed in what manner they are to be applied to the gatherings of the Lord's people around His table, or whether they have any application at all to it. The Scriptures are silent on the subject.”

Are the scriptures silent on the subject? Do they not tell us that “whatsoever things were written

aforetime were written for our learning?" Rom. xv. 4. And that "all things happened unto Israel for ensamples: and were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come?" 1 Cor. x. 11, 12. And does not the Spirit of God so use them repeatedly?

To continue.

"Under the ceremonial law God required not only sanctification on the part of His people, but perfect holiness—absolute purity. None could stand before Him, or could even have a place in the congregation, but those who were free from all impurities of the flesh, either in themselves, or by contact with it. If these types taught us that the *practical walk* of God's people must now be as perfectly free from all that defileth, without which they can have no place in His presence, who then can stand? BUT THAT THIS IS NOT SO, WE LEARN FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT!"

This is plain speaking. But is this a doctrine according to godliness? Does the New Testament indeed teach that the *practical walk* of believers now *need not* be free from all that defileth? Have we not proof positive here that these loose principles have a tendency to lower the church beneath the level of Judaism? and to subvert the principles of holiness in the assembly of the saints?

To return to the quotation.

"In the Hebrews we are taught how the worshippers are able now to enter into the presence of a God so inflexible in His demands for perfect holiness. We are there told of the precious blood in which 'the worshippers once purged have no more conscience of sin.' All this perfect holiness we have. Not in ourselves, but in Christ we have it; and thus being complete in Him, we stand clean every whit. We may sometimes, nay, we continually fail in duty, fall into sin, come in contact with that which defileth. *What then?* It is our unspeakable happiness to know that *being in Him* His blood is ever efficacious in cleansing all away."

Let it be distinctly remembered that we are not now considering the standing of the believer in Christ before God; to which the passage quoted from the

tenth of Hebrews refers: but whether practical holiness is or is not required in the church. Scripture does not say, "the worshippers once purged have no more conscience of *sin*," but of *sins*; a very different thing. For "if we say we have no *sin*, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John i. 8. Scripture does not say, that "*being in Him* His blood is ever efficacious in cleansing all away." But that "if we confess our *sins*, God is faithful and just to forgive us our *sins*, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," &c. And, "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Prov. xxviii. 13. And again, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Cor. vii. 1. A very different use of these precious truths than that here made of them, which is this, "What then? are we to conclude that the practical walk of God's people now must be perfectly free from all that defileth? That this is not so we learn from the New Testament." Is not this Antinomianism of the worst kind? Not only making our standing and perfectness in Christ an excuse for personal sin, but also an excuse for the allowance of evil in the church? Compare Rev. iii. 17, 18.

It is most important to understand the completeness of the believer in Christ, and his sanctification in Him: but his walk down here ought to be the expression of all this. And there is all grace provided in Christ for the practical exhibition of what we are in Him. So also it is most important and blessed to realize the holiness and perfectness of the whole church in Christ: but surely the church on earth ought to be the expression of this. But this can only be by the exercise of the strictest discipline, and the most godly and prayerful watchfulness and care.

I now notice the following statement.

“Outward contact merely cannot defile the soul. HOWEVER CENSURABLE THE CONDUCT MAY BE in those with whom we have outward association, the soul receives pollution only by our knowledge of that conduct, and by its precepts and doctrines being received. This we believe may be the instruction conveyed by the types of old, and this way ALONE does the LEAVEN OF EVIL DOCTRINE SPREAD, viz., by being taught, listened to, and imbibed.”

This is speaking out. How fearfully must the leaven of the system have penetrated and pervaded the whole moral man, before a person could sit down and deliberately pen such a sentence; and eight more individuals as deliberately sign it!

Let it be distinctly understood and remembered that this is not a question of association in the world, but of *association in church fellowship*, as the next paragraph will shew: and is intended as an apology for the loose and neutral position which the writer and signers have taken and defended.

If this is to be received as a faithful expression of the system, when its unholy and unscriptural character is considered, who that values holiness or truth can for a moment vindicate it, or have any participation with it? Here is the door thrown wide open for all evil in conduct, and all heresy in doctrine to come in. The presence of an evil doer, say they, is no defilement, “however censurable his conduct;” and the presence of the holder of false doctrine, is no defilement, however evil his doctrine may be. Consequently, the presence of Achan was no defilement in the camp of Israel; and the presence of the incestuous person was no defilement in the church at Corinth. And the church in Pergamos was not to blame because it had in its midst those who held the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes, which is a flat contradiction to what God Himself has written in the scriptures of His truth.

The writer proceeds.

“It is said that false doctrine even *held* though not taught by any one, through the mere outward presence of the person, defiles an assembly, and renders the table of the Lord impure. Yet we find in that disorderly church of Corinth, as it appears before us in Paul's First Epistle, WHERE FOUNDATION TRUTH WAS DENIED, AND FORNICATION FOUND, the Apostle could write to them, ‘Purge out the old leaven, &c., *even as ye are unleavened.*’ 1 Cor. v. 7. Again in the 6th chapter, 11th ver., ‘Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, justified.’ If any church could be condemned as polluted, surely the Corinthian church would have been so regarded.”

So then, according to this, “*foundation truth* may be denied, and *fornication found*” within, and yet the assembly continue undefiled and unpolluted! And the Apostle is made to contradict himself in telling the church at Corinth to “purge out the old leaven,” for what could be the need of that, since with all the evil within, they were still “unleavened,” and as a church, “washed, sanctified, justified?” (For it is church condition we are now considering.) And the writer implies that as a church they are not to be condemned as polluted, notwithstanding all. And instead of using the fact of their standing in Christ as unleavened, and washed, sanctified, and justified in Him as a reason for putting away all evil from their midst, as the Apostle uses it; these precious truths are used as a palliation of sin, and as an excuse for not exercising discipline!

Again I say, are not such principles subversive of all holiness and truth in the assembly of saints? And have they not a tendency to make the grace of God a licence for all manner of sin, pollution, and heresy? Is this the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes? or what is it? “O my soul come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united.” Gen. xlix. 6.

“However censurable the conduct,” even though it be “fornication” itself; and however false the

doctrine, even to the "denial of foundation truth," smother it over, cover it up, and let it stay for the sake of unity. Such is the principle!

When it is proposed to make a common receptacle for the offscouring of the universal church, some such principle may be admitted. But if the church is to be a sanctuary, for the habitation of God through the Spirit; where the presence of an Holy God may be realized, Jesus magnified, and the Holy Spirit of God ungrieved may discharge His sacred offices, no place for such principles must be given for a moment.

The Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold (see Joshua vii.) were securely *hidden* in the earth under the tent of one person, and all Israel *knew not of it*. Consequently, according to this doctrine, there was no defilement to the camp. But what saith God? "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." (ver. 13.) "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you." (ver. 12.) Such is God's principle; and what a contrast!

The object of believers in meeting together in church fellowship should surely be, that God may have a sanctuary in which He may dwell with men on the earth; that Christ may have an house in which He may exercise His Lordship; and the Holy Spirit a sphere in which He may act freely. That believers may be able to walk together in love; having the same care one for another; provoking one another to love and to good works; building up each other on their most holy faith; and watching over one another with godly care. That the church may be the pillar and ground of the truth before the world, preserving and maintaining the faith once delivered to the saints; and a focus whence a pure and holy gospel may go forth for the healing of the nations.

In a word, for the glory of God and for the maintenance of love, holiness, and truth. Whereas, according to the principles here advocated, Achan's tent is to be God's tabernacle: Christ must put up with that in His own house which dishonours Him; and the Holy Spirit of God is expected to give the sanction of His presence to concealed and unjudged evil: all for the sake of an outward appearance of unity. While false doctrine and sin, instead of being judged, reprobated, and discarded by the church, is to be allowed to stand out before the world with the broad seal and sanction of the church upon it: authorizing the infidel and blasphemer to charge the evil he may discover to the account of christianity itself. Again I say, "O my soul come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united."

"In like manner," proceeds the paper, "does our Lord speak of the imperfect churches in Revelation. He does not reject the whole because of the unworthiness of a part, &c. **THE MERE PRESENCE OF UNWORTHY MEMBERS RENDERED NOT THE WHOLE COMPANY UNCLEAN.**"

This last sentence is a direct contradiction to 1 Cor. v. 6, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" And where is the spiritual discernment in referring to Rev. ii. and iii. in favour of the toleration of evil in the assemblies of saints? When in this most important portion of scripture, the judgment of the Lord Jesus against evil both of doctrine and practice is so clearly shewn and so strongly expressed.

In chap. ii. 2, the Lord commends the jealousy of the church of Ephesus because they could not bear them that were evil, and had judged those that falsely professed to be apostles. In ver. 14, He says to the angel of the church in Pergamos, "I have a few things against thee, *because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.*" This is a complete

refutation of the statements we are considering; nothing can be more to the point. Again in ver. 15, 16, He says, "So hast thou them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." "Repent," &c. He says not a word about the teaching of these doctrines, or the reception of them, without which, according to the writer, there is no defilement. The allowed presence of those holding the doctrines is what the Lord condemns. And with regard to the church in Laodicea, He represents Himself as outside, knocking at the door, and inviting to individual communion with Himself: while He concludes His expostulations with these solemn words, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Language which expresses, not the casting off of a single soul which has fled to Him for refuge, but the utter rejection of their church principles and position with loathing and abhorrence.

I proceed to make another quotation which follows.

"If we seek in the Old Testament for guidance in the matter of communion, where shall we look but in the type itself of the pascal feast? On that dread night we find but two situations, either within the blood-besprinkled house, or outside exposed to destruction. All Israel had a place within, separation or exclusiveness was unknown to them."

In Exodus xii. we find a distinction made between the actual passover night, and the *memorial* of it, which was to be observed year by year, which is entirely overlooked by the writer. On the night of the passover all Israel were sheltered by the blood, and all were redeemed out of Egypt. So *all* believers are alike sheltered and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. But as to the yearly memorial, God says, "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul

shall be cut off from Israel." Exodus xii. 15. And again ver. 19 to the same effect. See also Num. ix. So we find that separation and exclusiveness was known to Israel, and enjoined by God Himself. And what says the Apostle? 1 Cor. v. 6—8, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," &c. He does not say, because ye are unleavened in Christ therefore you may keep the leaven under cover for the sake of unity, which is the doctrine of the document. But because ye are unleavened in Christ, purge out the old leaven from your assembly. What we *are* in Christ, is the reason and the rule: and what we *have* in Christ is the power by which we are to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

And notice again, the person dealt with at Corinth was dealt with because he was *within*, 1 Cor. v. 12, and put out that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. So we find that separation and exclusiveness was known also at Corinth, and commanded by the Apostle, even though the individual was one redeemed and sheltered, and after a time received in again, when the object of discipline had been accomplished.

The church on earth should not only exhibit what the church is in Christ as to its oneness; but also in its holiness, truth, and subjection to His Lordship. "See that thou make *all things* according to the pattern shewn to thee in the mount." Heb. viii. 5. To make the church on earth the mere expression of the oneness of the redeemed, at the sacrifice of holiness, truth, and obedience, is anything but the will of God, and is subversive of the very ends for which the church on earth is established.

The writer continues.

“In making these remarks we do not of course lose sight of the fact that *open* immorality, living in known sin and heresies, are to be dealt with by the church, many of them are enumerated by the apostle, *and to indulge in them is to forfeit the claim to the christian character, and is to be treated accordingly.* But errors in judgment, weakness of faith, failure in duty, and unknown sins, may call for admonition, but not for separation.”

After the doctrine stated, this comes too late. Principles are laid down which render discipline on a christian impossible: and then to save appearances, some sort of discipline is admitted to be necessary. But to keep up some consistency with the principles advocated, it is added, and I call especial attention to the words, “*To indulge in them (the evils mentioned,) is to forfeit the claim to the christian character, and is to be treated accordingly.*” This is in harmony with the ground stated, that “*there are but two positions, within and without!*” According to this, hypocrites may be discovered and put out; but discipline on a christian is impossible, beyond simple admonition.

Accordingly the writer proceeds.

“We conceive the Lord’s table to be the gathering point for *all* who are in Christ; under the cover of His blood. IF THE CHURCH CAN ACCEPT THE CONFESSION OF FAITH OF ANY, THEY CAN DO NO OTHERWISE THAN RECEIVE THEM; this being the mind of the Spirit, ‘Receive ye one another.’ If any one shall sin wilfully and openly after being received, the instructions are plain, ‘reprove, rebuke, exhort.’ If he refuse to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

In consistency with what has been before stated, the person refusing to hear the church is of course supposed to be an unbeliever: for “if the church can accept his confession of faith, they can do no otherwise than receive him.” “This being the mind of the Spirit.” Is it so? When the Holy Spirit by Paul says “Receive ye one another,” he adds, “to the glory of God!” The Spirit of God has a higher object in gathering believers around the table of the

Lord, than the mere expression of outward unity: even God's glory, and the honour of His Son. But in order to this, purity and truth must be maintained, even though in maintaining it, some, whose confession is received, may be excluded for a season.

"This discipline," it is added, "it appears is to be exercised by each local gathering. Whilst we gladly own the truth that the church is one body, we cannot overlook the truth, that there are many churches, or now perhaps gatherings, of the one church, and that matters of discipline are left with these separate churches, as occasions arise. Hence every church is placed under its own responsibility of keeping out pollution and sin, and is bound to examine that which comes, whether it be in life or doctrine, and nowhere do we find it to be made the duty of local churches to enter into the details of discipline of other churches at remote distances, which would be almost or quite impossible for them to do. Still, the principles laid down in God's word for the guidance of 'the church,' are to be the principles for the guidance of every branch of that church."

This is Independency. As to details of individual conduct, no doubt the place where the person resides or meets is the proper place for the matter to be judged. But even then, the individual under discipline could not rightly be received elsewhere until his character had been cleared before those with whom he had been associated. This however does not apply to the case in hand. It is no mere case of private walk, but a question in which the public honour of Christ Himself is involved. And if "every church is placed under its own responsibility of keeping out pollution and sin," why has it been attempted to be proved that the presence of evil does not defile; and that a believer may be admonished, but not put away? Can pollution and sin be kept *out* by keeping it *in* for the sake of unity? What contradictions we always find when false principles are contended for!

And if "every church is bound to examine that which comes before it," was not the Assembly at Bethesda bound to examine the Newtonian heresy

when it was brought into their midst and to their table? which is the very thing they refused to do: and for which they are upheld by the writer and others!

“With regard,” say they, “to the particular church of Bethesda, we feel therefore we are not called upon for explanation or apology on its behalf, though by the way, we would just observe, as our private opinion, that her apparent laxity has received the severest chastisement at the hands of her friends. She is treated as though now openly receiving those bringing antichristian doctrines with them, and as against the unanimous remonstrance of the church steadfastly adhering to her purpose. But facts shew it is not so, that she is not now knowingly receiving any who bring not the doctrine of Christ. When she declined pronouncing judgment on certain writings, saying it would not be to the glory of God to do so, it appears she did not fully know the character of the doctrines in question, there being so much that was difficult to understand in the writings, and such variableness in the writer’s opinions, that not till afterwards was the discovery made, and their *heretical character* fully understood. Since that time we are assured she has really judged them by emphatic repudiation, and by refusing fellowship with any holding them.”

As to those who signed “the Letter of the Ten” being ignorant “of the character of the doctrines in question,” this is disproved by the letter itself, for in the opening clauses they go over the leading particulars of the doctrine, and shew themselves fully acquainted with it, although they refuse to judge it.

And whether the writer is correctly informed as to Bethesda’s subsequent course, I leave others to determine. Statements have been made, and published again and again on the best authority, the very reverse of those here made. But this I leave, simply remarking that I think it will be found that those at Bethesda have acted more consistently with the principles put forth in this document than the writer gives them credit for. But my present object is to deal, not with persons or circumstances, but with the broad principles of the case.

In conclusion, the question is, Ought the church on earth to be built on the model of a *palace*, for the residence and honour of the sovereign, where all is to speak of His glory, according to Exodus xxv. "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them;" and Ephesians ii. "Builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit?" Or on the model of an *union house*, where all who have a claim on the parish are to be admitted, whatever their characters and conduct may be, if they are not bad enough for the county gaol, simply because they belong to the parish? Ought the church to be "*the pillar and ground of the truth*," according to 1 Tim. iii. 15? Or a *tower of Babel*, built on the principle of unity for unity's sake, according to Gen. xi. 4, "Let us build us a city and a tower . . . lest we be scattered abroad," even after the confusion of tongues has come in, as a judgment from God? Ought the church to be a *monument to the glory of Christ*, composed of living stones, the purchase of His blood; shining in the beauties of His holiness, and radiant with the light of His truth? Or a *whited sepulchre*, with the bleached bones of a deadly heresy, and the corruption of false doctrine decently buried beneath?

One word in closing. I would again repeat what I said when I was with you, in the presence of some at least of the signers of this document. God is putting our souls to the test, and the touchstone is Christ—not mere unity, not human opinions, but Christ, His own Christ, the Christ of God.

I never expect to see the church on earth brought back to a general unity, or even uniformity. The last four churches of the Apocalypse in Rev. ii. and iii. give us a divine foreshadowing of the state of things on to the close.

There is Roman Catholicism with its Jezebel system and its depths of Satan, ripening for the

vintage, when the vine of the earth will be cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

There is Protestantism, with its name to live covering over its spiritual death; its former works of reformation unperfected, its refusal to watch, and its few names of transcendent purity in the midst of all.

There is Philadelphia, with its little strength, a feeble few, faithful to the word and name of Jesus, struggling to hold fast that which it has to the end, encouraged by the promise of Jesus, "Behold, I come quickly."

And there is Laodicea, priding itself on its riches, but failing to draw out the supplies of grace treasured up in the Head. Lukewarm as to Christ: and for this very cause, as to principles and position, about to be rejected of Christ at His coming.

Meanwhile He stands at the door and knocks. O may each one of us, whatever the place we occupy, or the condition of our souls, have an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: whether the word He speaks in the name of Jesus be, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, and I will receive you," or, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." And may that word be obeyed, so that at His coming we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Yours sincerely,

T. NEWBERRY.