

A SECOND LETTER

ON

RECEIVING AND REJECTING BRETHREN,

AND ON THE

Principles of the Church of God.

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1852.

A SECOND LETTER.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

If we have been led through the Lord's holy and gracious discipline to discern errors in our ways and judgments; and those errors have been *public* ones, and have grieved the hearts of some, and injuriously influenced the minds of others; it seems to me that the least thing we can do, is publicly and freely to acknowledge them. This is due to that gracious Lord and Master who, instead of giving us over to our blindness and folly, deals with us in correcting grace and love; due also to those brethren who have either been grieved or misled by our course. This is what I desire with all humility to do in this paper, in obedience to that word which tells us to "Confess our faults one to another;" and reckoning also upon that grace which has added, "Pray one for another that ye may be healed."

Nearly two years ago, grieved at what I heard of the contentions and divisions among brethren whom I loved, I published a Letter "On receiving and rejecting brethren from the table of the Lord." I received communications from several brethren, who were grieved by its contents; but it is only lately that I have been led to see both my *inconsistency* in publishing it, and my *ignorance* and mistaken judgment of the real questions at issue.

My *inconsistency* was shewn me by a tract entitled, "Unity, a Dialogue." In my letter I condemned others for *publishing* openly the faults of their brethren before the world; while in the *publication* of that letter I myself was doing the same thing. This inconsistency was aggravated by my not having first dealt personally with those brethren whose ways I ventured to blame; or even ascertained that I was accurately informed of all the circumstances, facts, and principles that governed their conduct. In this I acted both unwisely and unjustly; and while I ask the forgiveness of the brethren I have wronged, I desire to accept the rebuke which that tract has justly inflicted on me.

These things would of themselves be sufficient to cause me to repent of the publication of that letter, and to request that it might be destroyed. But this is not all. I have also to confess, that I wrote with very defective apprehensions of the mind of God on the solemn subject of which it treats; and that one most important principle maintained in it is erroneous. I have also the bitter sorrow of knowing that some have either been misled by it in their judgments, or strengthened to persevere in a wrong course. I am learning in some measure the truth of what a brother wrote to me soon after its publication—"That letter will be made a use of by the adversary you little think, I am persuaded; a use which none would deprecate more than yourself. . . . It shews a most entire unacquaintance on your part with the questions at issue." This is what I have been proving. I have not stood in *God's* counsel; and therefore, though I was unconscious to myself of evil motives in writing that letter, and really thought that I was opposing a course that was grievous in the Lord's sight, He is teaching me that even good motives and desires, and upright intentions, are poor guides in a scene where God is dealing in righteous discipline with His people, and Satan is active with his deceits and wiles.

I would humbly and earnestly beseech those brethren who may have approved of that letter, to weigh before the Lord, what I shall now point out as defective, or contrary to the truth in its statements and principles. And may the good Lord graciously open the eyes of any of His chosen, whom my mistakes may have misled, to discern where I erred.

To prevent misunderstanding, it may be well at once to state those points in my former letter on which my judgment is unchanged. I still regret that there has not been more sought the fellowship of the prayers, and counsel, and help of other brethren and fellow-labourers in order to fellowship of action. I still hold that the simple term of communion on earth is, "Receive ye one another, as Christ has received us to the glory of God" (Rom. xv.)¹ "We do not make a creed, but Christ, the ground and term of our union" (Letter, p. 7). I still maintain that

¹ If the *grace* of God may be "turned into lasciviousness," may not the precious truth of "union in Christ" be abused to sanction latitudinarianism. As a brother has well said, "Truth is not to be

“evil is not to be tolerated in the Church of God.” “We are responsible to purge out the leaven of false doctrine, as well as the leaven of malice and wickedness, from the house of God” (p. 8). Neither do I question what I insisted upon in pp. 9, 10, that “Degeneracy in a Church of God claims service and not departure.” “Corruptions are no ground for leaving a Church of God.” I believe this is a true principle; its abuse is another thing. And, lastly, I still believe that *indiscriminate* judgment and rejection of saints is contrary to the mind of Him who says, “Of some have compassion making a difference, and others save with fear” (Jude 22, 23). Each case, whether of individuals or of bodies, ought to be dealt with on its own merits before God.

But while still holding these principles, I see that I have passed by others of deep practical importance; the very principles, indeed, which are now so solemnly pressed upon our hearts and consciences by the Lord’s dealing with us in rebuke and chastening. The following questions, for instance, ought to have been well weighed by me before the Lord before venturing to publish that letter:—

1st. May not an assembly or Church² once owned of God as *His* Church or assembly, so depart from Him in spirit, in principles, or in practice, that *on its refusal to judge itself and repent*, He may disown it—remove its candlestick—and even spue it out of His mouth?

2ndly. If this be so, what would be the will of God concerning any of His saints in such an assembly, who sought

sacrificed in order to maintain *unity*: nor will *true* unity be interfered with by the strict maintenance of truth. The whole question is settled by a single verse of Scripture, ‘Receive ye one another as Christ has received us;’ here we have the unity of the Church: but it must be ‘to the glory of God;’ and here we have the purity of the truth.”—*Thoughts on the Lord’s Table, by the Author of Hezekiah, etc.*

² I may be permitted to say here, that I prefer using the term “Assembly,” rather than “Church” or “Gathering,” in speaking of a congregation. The term “gathering” is purely human, and unscriptural; and the word “Church” is so misunderstood through its connexion with traditional and conventional usage and associations, that Tyndale, in his translation of the New Testament, advisedly rejected it, and rendered “ἐκκλησία” by “Congregation.” Ἐκκλησία is used by the LXX. more than seventy times as the rendering of the Hebrew *Kāh-hahl*, translated “congregation,” or “assembly,” in our English version of the Old Testament. It is applied, Acts viii. 38, to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness (comp. Heb. ii. 12), and in Acts xix. 32, 39, three times to a heathen assembly.

to be separate from the evil, obedient to the truth, and faithful to Christ? Ought they, after service and testimony had failed, to continue in fellowship with the assembly; or to come out and be separate from it?

3rdly. What ought to be the course of the Church of God generally, or of any local assembly or assemblies gathered in the name of Christ, and in the recognition of the unity of the body of Christ, towards such an assembly, —ought they to continue to hold intercommunion³ with it, or to be separate from it.

These are solemn questions: the more solemn, because of the spirit of the age in which we live and are called to be faithful witnesses for God. The spirit of the age is to miscall latitudinarianism and indifference by the fair names of charity and liberality. It hardly becomes me, perhaps, to remind brethren of this; and that one of our special dangers in seeking to preserve and promote outward unity, is that of compromising truth and holiness. O how deeply necessary it is to remember, that the “unity” we are exhorted to keep is no carnal or merely outward unity, but “*the unity of the Spirit:*” a unity of which, He, who is the *Holy Spirit* and the *Spirit of Truth*, is both the

³ By intercommunion, I mean that holy unhindered fellowship of saints, and assemblies of saints, founded on the unity of the body of Christ, which we see existed in the Churches of old; and a measure of which, in former days, we were privileged to enjoy. To be in fellowship with Christians at Ephesus, was to be in fellowship with Christians everywhere, wherever they were gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus. Epistles of commendation from one local assembly, gave them access at once to the hearts and homes and privileges of Christians everywhere. “When a Christian entered a strange city,” says Neander, “his first enquiry was for the Church: and here he was received as a brother.” But lack of confidence in the doctrines, the discipline, or the practices of an assembly, surely must, and ought to hinder this intercommunion. If I, as a parent, seek to preserve my child from associations injurious to its welfare, how can I, with a good conscience towards God, commend one of His children to an assembly, whose spiritual atmosphere and condition I believed would be prejudicial to his soul’s well-being? Or, again, how should I be justified in receiving those coming from assemblies, in whose walk and faithfulness to the Lord I had no confidence? I have, indeed, heard of brethren commending saints to a place, whither they have said that they could not go themselves; and of their sanctioning others in remaining in fellowship with assemblies, to which, on account of their principles and practice, they could not themselves belong: but can they reconcile such manifest inconsistencies in the heart-searching presence of God?

author and the power: a unity, therefore, which is utterly inconsistent with the sacrifice or denial either of truth or holiness.

If the first of these questions is answered in the affirmative, that part of my letter is proved utterly unsound, in which I ask, "Where do we find in Scripture the reception or rejection of whole bodies?" (p. 15.) The question must evidently have arisen from my ignorance, or misapprehension of the mind of God. I now see most plainly that I was wrong; and that we have clear testimonies, both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, not only of individual, but *corporate* rejection. This I will endeavour to shew; and while I confess that it is a humbling and sorrowful thing to have written and published error, I rejoice in that abounding grace that has opened my eyes to see it; and permits me to expose and refute it. May that same grace discover to any, who are in the same error, the will of God, and enable them at any cost to follow it.

But before I proceed further, it may be well to say, that I recognise more truly than ever (because more experimentally), the ruin of the Church as to its outward form of order and power. I see ruin and confusion everywhere. But then, I also see more plainly that the *principles* of the Church of God are not ruined. These are still the same; necessarily so, because they are *God's* principles. Christ's relationship to the Church, the Church's relationship to Christ, whatever the ruin and the failure, are, blessed be God! eternally the same. The principles then, that spring from that relationship, are not altered; they apply as truly to "the two or three gathered in these last days, unto the name of Christ, as they did at the first forming and ordering of the Church by the power of the Holy Ghost. Is it the will of God, that His children should be gathered together at all? If it is, on what principles are they to be gathered? How are they to be associated together? Are they to meet as *Man's* assembly or *God's* assembly? That seems to me to be the plain, straightforward question. The assembly must be either *Man's*, or *God's*. It must be gathered, and regulated, either on the grounds and principles of human conventionalism, or on the principles of the Church of God, as revealed in His word. Ought "the two or three," who

profess to meet in the name of Jesus, to recognise any other authority than his: or any other principles, than those of the Church of God? Or rather, will He, in whose name they profess to meet, sanction with that blessed name any other principles?

For instance, that "holiness becometh God's house" is an eternal principle. To deny it, would be to affirm, that light could have fellowship with darkness, and Christ with Belial. It applies as much to a feeble company of God's children, meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus; they are as much called upon to purge out the old leaven, and to put away the wicked person from among themselves; as in the day when the Church collectively stood in its manifested unity and power. To deny this, and to use the humbling truth of the "Ruin of the Church," as a reason for refusing to judge evil, and to be separate from it, while professing to meet in the name of the Lord Jesus, would surely be one of the worst forms of evil, and to use that name to sanction fellowship with iniquity.

But is not the same principle applicable to bodies, as well as to individuals? May there not exist such corporate evil and corruption as call for uncompromising resistance and separation, when *service and testimony have failed to produce repentance*? If we are bound to separate from an evil individual, are we not equally bound to be separate from an evil congregation? If we are called upon to have no company with a disorderly brother, are we not equally enjoined not to walk with a disorderly assembly? I see, indeed, that I admitted this very principle in the note⁴ (p. 11), where I said, "Our course here is—3dly, to reject any coming from a place or teacher avowedly heretical (*i.e.* known to be so), unless they would cease from all fellowship with such place and teacher." A *sound* principle, I

⁴ The inconsistency of this note with the general bearing of my letter, was pointed out to me by several brethren, some of whom wished to get rid of the note, and others to get rid of the letter. The note was, I believe, the result of waiting upon God for guidance in a practical case; the case of one who professed to be clear himself of Mr. Newton's evil doctrines, but refused to separate from him and those who adhered to him. We judged that he came under the principle of that solemn word (2 John 11); he was "a partaker of his evil deeds:" and we felt that we could not in loyalty of heart to Christ have fellowship with him, till he ceased to have fellowship with evil. His refusal to do so, proved that his heart was not true to Christ.

believe, but one which proves the general argument of the letter unsound : for what is this principle but that of corporate rejection ?

In dealing with a practical case I saw the application of this principle in cases of heretical doctrine ; but I ought to have seen how it also bore on every *allowance* of evil and corruption in doctrine, principle, or practice : on the simplest of all grounds—"Evil cannot have to say to, or go on with God, or God with it." For "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

Let us now turn to that word of God, to which I appealed, when I asked the question, "Where do we find in Scripture either the reception or rejection of whole bodies?" To make my argument more clear, I will, however, first consider the subject of discipline as it relates to evil walk or evil doctrine in individuals ; and afterwards in its relation to whole bodies.

I would, in the first place, refer briefly to some of those Scriptures of the Old Testament, in connection with those of the New, which, in giving us the history of "our fathers, who were under the cloud and passed through the sea," were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. x).

In the record of the patriarchs, we have instructions as to the principles of our *individual* walk and responsibility before God ; but in the history of Israel, His people according to the flesh, we find principles which apply to us, not only in our individual, but in our *corporate* responsibility as the Church of God, and members one of another. We see them thus applied by the apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, for instance, from the example of those that refused Him, who spake on earth (chap. xii.), despised Moses' Law, and could not enter into the promised rest because of unbelief, we have deduced these solemn warnings of the severe punishment awaiting those who neglect God's great salvation, and turn away from Him who speaketh from heaven. In the Epistles of Jude and Peter, we are warned, through the example of Israel, of the sin of these last days in turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the Lordship of Christ. But it is to the Epistle of the Corinthians, in connection with the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, that I shall chiefly refer, because

that epistle is addressed to a *local* assembly, or Church of God; and its especial subject is the order, the discipline, and service, of the congregation of God in its *corporate* responsibilities: just as those Books of the Old Testament, before mentioned, speak of the order, discipline, and service of the congregation of Israel, God's people according to the flesh.

Our subject is not the question of *redemption*: neither is it of *separation* from the world. Service and discipline have no place in Egypt; we must be *out* of it by the grace and power of God, before, as God's purchased and free people, our hearts can enter into these things. We speak of the character and responsibilities of those who have sung the song of redemption, and can say, "Thou in Thy mercy hast *led forth* the people Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength to Thy holy habitation."—Exodus xv. Neither is it the question of *reception* of one another. "Those that God has cleansed for Himself;" those that are the members of the one body of Christ, are members of one another, brethren, fellowheirs of the grace of life. Our subject is the corporate character, and walk, and responsibilities of those thus redeemed, thus separated from the world unto God, and gathered as his redeemed and separated people. This is the subject of the Epistle to the Corinthians, as well as of those books referred to above. I confess that I committed error, when I sought for principles of conduct and order in the epistles to the seven Churches; though the rebukes of the Lord for their not acting upon these principles, plainly imply the existence of them. I ought rather to have judged their conduct by appealing to this epistle, which contains so fully the order of service and discipline in the assemblies of God.

"Ye shall be *holy* unto me, for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be *mine*," was the reiterated language of Him who had separated Israel to Himself, that He might dwell among them and be their God; just as He has said to us on still higher and more blessed grounds, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter ii. 16).

This separation was manifestly to be of a twofold character, external and internal. *External* from the nations around them (Deut. vii.); and *internal* from all that was inconsistent with the character of Him who had brought

them to Himself. The external separation was secured by *coming out* from the evil around them; the internal by *putting out* from within all that was contrary to the holiness of God. To us, brought nigh through the accomplished redemption of Christ, and union with Him by the power of the Holy Ghost, the first is presented to us in such words as, "*Come ye out, and be ye separate*" (2 Cor. vi.), while the other is expressed in such passages, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. vii.). "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven" (1 Cor. v.). "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. v.).

The holiness of God, and the unleavened purity that became His redeemed people, was, in fact, one of the very first lessons that God taught Israel; and that, too, on the very night in which they quitted the house of bondage for ever. While the sprinkled blood and the flesh of the spotless lamb told them of the grace that saved them from judgment, and spread a table for them in the presence of their enemies, their girded loins, and shod feet and pilgrim staves declared their strangership in Egypt. They were taught, moreover, that if the sprinkled blood saved from judgment *without*, judgment must be exercised from *within*. There must be the internal *purging out* of the leaven, or else the *cutting off* from Israel. "Ye shall put away leaven *out* of your houses" (Ex. xii. 15). "Seven days shall no leaven be found in your houses; for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, that soul shall be *cut off* from the congregation of Israel" (xii. 19). Three things are distinctly marked here—the individual, the house, and the congregation of Israel. The house was to be purged of leaven; the individual eating it was to be cut off; the excision was to be from the congregation. Thus, in connection with redemption by the blood, we see maintained the holiness of their Saviour-God; individual responsibility—the responsibility of the household—and the corporate unity of Israel. The congregation was responsible for the conduct of the individuals that composed it. The use made of this type by the apostles of the circumcision and uncircumcision is familiar to us all, and shews us its deep practical value and importance to the saints of God (see 1 Peter, i. 14—21, and 1 Cor. v.). We must pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, because we know that we are redeemed from

our vain conversation by the precious blood of the Lamb. Our passover must be kept with unleavened bread: leaven is not to be allowed in the house of God; a little leaven leavens the whole lump; the old leaven is to be purged out; the wicked person is to be cut off, or put away from the congregation of God; the responsibility of those *within* to judge those within; while, as in Egypt, those *without* are left to God's judgment (v. 12, 13); are the solemn lessons taught us by the Holy Ghost from this striking type. The grace of our Saviour-God teacheth us that He, who "gave Himself for us, did so to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus ii. 12—14).

And here let me ask before God, whether the ruin of the Church has set aside all or any of these principles? Did Israel's weakness or ruin ever set aside the ordinances given to them on the night of their redemption? The ten tribes had long revolted from David's house; evil and corruption had marked the history of Israel and Judah, when Hezekiah, and after him Josiah, kept the Lord's passover (2 Chron. xxx. xxxv). Later still, a small, feeble remnant of the captivity returned from Babylon to the land of their fathers (Ezra vii.), and they celebrated the passover; but a reference to the deeply-interesting and instructive history of these events will show that not one of these principles was set aside, for they were *God's* principles. The corporate unity of Israel is recognised; the leaven is put away; the feast of unleavened bread is kept; and those did eat who had purified themselves, and "separated themselves from the filthiness of the heathen of the land." And does not this apply to us? Are not the feeblest assemblies of God's children, meeting in the name of Jesus, as much bound to act on the same principles as the assembly at Corinth in dealing with evil? Is not the old leaven as much to be put out *now* as then? Is not the wicked person as much to be put away from among ourselves *now*, as when the Church stood in manifested power and unity? Surely, separateness from evil is not a question of numbers, or of power, but a *moral* question, founded upon the great eternal principle, that "Holiness becometh the house of the Lord for ever!" Alas! that any should be found among those who, in former days, at much personal cost and sorrow, but to preserve a conscience void of

offence towards God, separated from the various religious bodies around us, because of principles and practices among them which they judged contrary to the revealed will of God;—Alas! I say, that any such should brand as Pharisaism the divine principle of separation from evil!

Again—When Israel, saved from their enemies, were brought into the wilderness, and God, their Redeemer, had pitched his tabernacle in the midst of them, we see the same great eternal principle still more fully developed. They, who had celebrated His name as “glorious in Holiness” in the destruction of their enemies, learnt that He who had led them forth in His mercy, and was guiding them in His strength to His holy habitation, called them to be holy, because He was holy (Lev. xi. 44, 45).

Did He dwell among them on the Mercy-seat? He commanded the children of Israel to put forth *without* the camp every leper, every one that had an issue, and whosoever was defiled by the dead, “that they might not defile *their* camp, in the midst whereof *He* dwelt” (Numb. v. 1—4).

Did He, in His wondrous grace, invite them to feast with Himself upon the sacrifices, that were *His* food? (Lev. iii. vii.) He declared, that the soul that ate of the sacrifices of the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul should be *cut off* from His people (Lev. vii. 20, 21).

I have referred to these two cases out of many others, because we find the principles maintained in them used by the Apostle to correct evils that had arisen in the assembly of God at Corinth. But this, I think, it is of the deepest importance to notice, that in the very opening of his epistle to them, before ever he seeks to correct the disorders in the assembly, he first labours to impress upon their hearts and consciences the fundamental truth as to *what* that assembly was. It was GOD'S ASSEMBLY. The Corinthians had evidently let this slip; the evils allowed among them manifested it. How could they have tolerated for a moment the wicked person among them, if their hearts had realised the grace and the responsibility of this blessed, yet solemn relationship to God? He addresses them at once, therefore, not as the assembly of Paul, or Apollos, but as *God's* assembly—the *Church of God* at Corinth. He recognises, too, at the outset, in addressing the *local* assembly, the fellowship and unity of the whole body of Christ (v. 2); for the sectarianism, that would mar the unity of the *local*

assembly, would equally make that local assembly an independent body, separate from the unity of the whole body of Christ. If they had met merely on the ground that they were brethren or Christians, Paul and Apollos and Cephas might indeed have been gloried in among them, for they were worthily chief men among the brethren; but this would have constituted it a *human* assembly. To say "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos," was to be carnal, and to walk as men (chap. iii. 1—4). It was not himself that Paul had preached; he had not been crucified for them; they had not been baptised into his name; he was not their foundation. It was *God* that had chosen them, not man (chap. i. 27, 28). It was of *God* that they were in Christ Jesus. It was *God* that had made Him to them wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that they might glory alone in the Lord (i. 30, 31). Their faith stood not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of *God* (chap. ii. 5). It was *God's* testimony that Paul declared (ii. 1). *God's* wisdom, the deep things of *God*, revealed and known only by the Spirit of *God*, that Paul spoke among such as were perfect (ii. 6—11). It was the Spirit of *God* that they had received, that they might know the things freely given to them of *God* (ii. 12). The labourers were *God's* labourers; the husbandry was *God's*; the increase was of *God's* giving. Paul had, indeed, by the grace of *God*, been a wise master builder; but what was the foundation he had laid? It was Jesus Christ. And what was built upon it: was it a school, or temple for man's fame or pleasure? No, says the Apostle, "Ye are *God's* building." "Know ye not," is his solemn appeal to their hearts and consciences, "that ye are the *temple of God*, and that the *Spirit of God* dwelleth in you?" This is the ground upon which he addresses them in his epistle. He could recognise no other. The assembly was *God's* assembly, not man's. If it had met on other and lower grounds, he might assuredly have dealt with the individuals that composed it as dear to Christ, and as saints of God; but he could not have recognised and maintained it corporately. He must have called them to repent of their corporate position; glad as he would have been, at the same time, to recognise all that was of God in their walk and service. Faith can only sanction what it can recognise to be according to the mind and will and commandments

of God. The instructions and exhortations that follow in this epistle are addressed to the Corinthians on no other ground than that they were *God's* assembly—His temple, wherein He dwelt by His Spirit. They cannot be applied now to any other assemblies than *God's* assemblies; but they do apply, wherever in truth and loyalty of heart to Christ even two or three are gathered together unto the name of the Lord Jesus, as such.

I may be pardoned for having so long dwelt upon this point, as I believe it is of the deepest possible importance; I might say, of *all* importance in these last evil days. The lack of holding it clearly, simply and loyally, self-evident as it may appear to some who read these pages, is, I am persuaded, at the root of many of the difficulties felt in judging and determining the questions which have so painfully exercised our hearts and consciences. How solemn, and yet how simple, the enquiry. Is this assembly, with which I am connected, *God's* assembly? Can my faith and conscience recognise it as such? Does *God* so recognise it, as that His word applies to it, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of *God*, and that the Spirit of *God* dwelleth in you?"⁵

This fundamental point being established, the Apostle applies to the assembly the same great principle of *internal* corporate sanctification, which characterised the congregation of Israel in the wilderness. Their camp was *God's dwelling* place; no defilement was to be allowed therein; the unclean were to be put out. There was to be no respect of persons; Miriam, Aaron's sister, and the prophetess that led Israel's triumphant song on the banks of the Red Sea, was to be shut out of the camp, when she had been defiled by leprosy (Num. xii.). It was no question as to redemption, or of reception into the con-

⁵ To those who may question whether this expression can be used of a *local* assembly (that assembly of course being so gathered on the principles that apply to the whole body, the Church, as *locally* to represent in principle the corporate unity of the whole), I would submit for consideration the threefold use of this expression in its application since Pentecost: 1stly, to the *universal* Church, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph. ii. 19—22); 2ndly, as here, to the *local* assembly, *God's* temple at Corinth; and, 3rdly, to an *individual* saint, as in 1 Cor. vi. 19, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost."

gregation of Israel; or as to whether the unclean person were an Israelite, a Levite, or a priest. Discipline, of course, could only reach those that were *within*: none could be put *out* of the camp, but those whose normal and privileged place was *inside* it. It was not, moreover, a question between one Israelite and another; where Pharisaic pride and self-righteousness, and party-feeling could find a place; but *God would not suffer uncleanness where He dwelt.*

This was the solemn question at Corinth. "Ye are the temple of God:" is defilement to be suffered in *God's* temple? How deeply weighty the warning, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." It is *God's* temple. His temple is holy, and must be kept holy. Nothing must be brought into it, or suffered in it, inconsistent with the character of Him, whose grace leads him to dwell there. Its vessels, its furniture, its ways, must all be according to the holiness of the indwelling God. "Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever."

Mark, too, whose office it was to keep the camp clean: or, rather, I might say, it was no official work at all. God had loved Israel, chosen Israel, redeemed Israel, pitched his tabernacle in the midst of Israel; and Israel's affections, conscience, ways, were to respond to the gracious claims of his sovereign mercy and holy love. We do not, therefore find officers appointed for this purpose; but God commanded "the children of Israel to put out the unclean;" and it is added, "the children of Israel did so" (Num. v).

And ought not this to be much more true of the Church of God? While brotherly kindness and tenderness and love have their place, ought not the zeal of His house to eat us up? If God, in his sovereign mercy, has made His people His dwelling place, in a far higher and truer sense than Israel was, is it not the duty of each, the duty of all; of the least and of the greatest; not to suffer His dwelling place to be defiled? The word "duty," is but a poor, cold word in such a case. Officials, such as priests and Levites, might indeed suffer the house of God to be made a den of thieves; but He, that was *the Son*, could not abide it. Officials might challenge His authority, but the zeal of a Son for His Father's glory and the holiness

of His house, ate Him up; He so identified himself with His Father's name, that the reproaches of those that reproached Him, fell upon himself (Ps. lxxix).

Alas! in Corinth this zeal was lacking. Their very apprehension of their assembly being "the temple of God" needed to be revived. Not only were they giving the servants the Master's place, but they were even conniving at moral evil, which Gentiles would not name. But how did that true servant, whom they would have unduly exalted, feel when he witnessed this? Such chapters as 2 Cor. ii. vii. viii. xii. reveal to us what was passing in his heart; his deep fellowship with Christ in his zeal for his Father's house. While they were puffed up who ought to have mourned, his heart was filled with anguish and affliction (2 Cor. ii. 4). He laboured to rouse them from this shameful state of careless indifference to the Lord's glory. He succeeded. Some, indeed, challenged his authority as an Apostle, as His Master was challenged before him; but the hearts and consciences of the body responded to his appeals and rebukes. Instead of being offended at his plainness, they sorrowed after a godly sort. How blessed, how beautiful in its season, the fruit seen in the 7th chapter of the second Epistle! Carefulness, cleansing of themselves, indignation, fear, desire, revenge, proved their repentance and sorrow to be according to God. The unclean was put outside the camp; gathered in the name, and with the power of the Lord Jesus, they put away from among themselves the wicked person; "in all things they approved themselves to be clear in this matter." It was not, that there was no evil still to be found among them; chapter xii. 20, 21, proves that; but there was sorrow according to God, with its blessed fruits; there was *obedience*, so that Paul could rejoice that he had *confidence* in them in all things (vii, 15, 16). Their declension, as was said before, demanded service and not separation; and the faithful service of the Apostle was owned of God to the restoration of his people.

And here, dear brethren, may it not be profitable to inquire, how far our past condition resembled the Corinthians? Has not much of our sin and misery sprung from the very feeble apprehensions among us, of what the Church of the living God really is; what its unity and responsibilities; and what the holiness and separateness from

evil within and without, that became those professing to be gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in dependance upon, and in subjection to, the guidance and power of the Holy Ghost? Has it not, with some of us at least, been a light thing to say, that we meet in the name of Jesus? Consequently, has there not been among us party spirit, glorying in men, over estimation of knowledge compared with grace, and "puffing-up" where deep humility of soul specially became us? And in these sorrowful questions, which have been suffered to arise to test the real state of our hearts before God, has it not been made manifest, how much more *man* has filled the eye than He with whom we have to do? How alive we have been to what affects ourselves; how slow of heart to resent what has touched the glory of our Lord and Saviour. One profitable lesson has, I trust, been taught me by the bitter experience of the last few years; that it needs, that the spiritual affections and conscience be in true and living exercise before God, in order that any true, godly, spiritual judgment should be formed concerning our own condition, the condition of others, the devices of the enemy; and in short, on any question, wherein God's glory and the good of His chosen are concerned. Knowledge is not power in the things of God. We must abide in the sanctuary to have the judgment of the sanctuary; and all other judgment is worthless and deceptive, natural and fleshly. Alas! how manifest it has been, that our own souls may be puffed-up, and self-confident, in circumstances which would fill the heart of one, who valued the Lord's glory in His people, with dismay and sorrow: that we may be at "ease in Zion," while others are crying and sighing on account of its abominations; that we may even feel bitterness and anger against those, whose zeal for the glory of Christ, and the faith once delivered to the saints, lead them to testify against and resist evil, which our own distance from God, and consequent lukewarmness, prevent our discerning; so that we may even brand those as troublers of Israel, who will not calmly tolerate that which dishonours the God of Israel. The Lord teach us to profit by the experience of the past.

"But," it is replied by some, "the Apostle in the epistle to the Corinthians takes up the question of discipline in connection with moral evil; this we do not object to: but

where is the scriptural warrant for its exercise in cases of evil *doctrine*?"

I will shortly consider this objection. First, I would say, that *faith* respects *all* the *doctrines* of God, as *love* respects all His commandments. We ought no more to surrender any plain truth of God, than give up any of his commandments. We dare no more sanction departure from his revealed *mind*, than from his revealed *will*. We are called upon earnestly to contend for "the *faith* once delivered to the saints," as well as to be holy in all manner of conversation. Luther well said, "Love beareth all things; faith beareth nothing." I may surrender my own rights; but I dare not, as a loyal servant, surrender any part of the will, or truth, or authority of God. Indeed, he that said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, He it is that loveth me;" hath also said, "If a man love me he will keep my *words*. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my *sayings*, and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's that sent me" (John. xiv. 21—24). Love will keep the *words* of Christ, as well as his *commandments*.

Secondly, this objection shews that the value of *the truth*, *all* the truth of God, is not duly estimated. It is by the word of truth God begets his children (James i. 18—21); it is by the truth he sanctifies them (John xvii. 17). It was to bear witness to the truth that Christ came into the world (John xviii. 37). The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. iii. 15). Christ himself is the living truth (John. xiv. 6). The name of the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Truth; his office "to guide into all truth" (John xvi. 13). While, on the other hand, we see that the effort of Satan from the beginning has been to corrupt, silence, and destroy the testimony to the truth of God. "He abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it." And this is the very character of his children: they believed not Christ, because he told them the truth; yea, they sought to kill him because He told them the truth, that he had heard of God (John viii. 40—45).

But thirdly—not to appeal to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, where we find such solemn commands against "adulterating the Word of God" [2 Cor. ii. 17 Greek]. "Ye shall not *add* unto the Word, which I command you,

neither shall ye *diminish* from it" (Deut. iii. 2)—how plain, and how reiterated are the warnings and denunciations of all false doctrine in the New.

Did any pervert the Gospel of Christ by bringing in Judaism, circumcision, the law? It is written in Gal. i. 7—9, "If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be *accursed* (anathema)!" Paul gave no place by subjection, no, not for an hour, to those who sought to bring them from their liberty in Christ into bondage, that *the truth* of the Gospel might continue with them (chap. ii. 4, 5). He withstood Peter to the face, when he saw that he and Barnabas walked not uprightly, according to *the truth* of the Gospel (chap. ii. 11, 15). It was not only that souls were endangered by this corruption—human selfishness can come in here—but, "if righteousness come by the law, Christ would have died in vain." The same principle of the leaven, used in Corinthians in application to moral evil, is here applied to false *doctrine*. "*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump* (v. 9). "I would they were even cut off that trouble you (Gal. v. 12). In 1 Tim. iv. 1, the Spirit connects departure from the faith with seducing spirits and doctrines of devils: "forbidding to marry, commanding to abstain from meats," this, too, under the garb of holiness, is traced up to the seduction of the enemy. Is this to be allowed in the Church of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth? Timothy is commanded to *withdraw* himself (I need not say, that if Timothy did so, all that were loyal to Christ would also do it) from such teachers as are described (chap. vi. 3—5), men who consent not to wholesome words, and the *doctrine that is according to godliness*. In his Second Epistle to Timothy, under another figure, still more striking than that of leaven, Paul describes the ruinous effects of false doctrine, not only in the souls of those who teach it, but on theirs who come under their influence. "Their word will eat like a canker (*marg. gangrene*)." Hymeneus and Philetus are mentioned as examples of it. The question is not, whether they were Christians; it was no question of reception; they were *within*, or they could not have thus done the work of the enemy in seduction; neither did they deny what are commonly called the doctrines necessary to salvation; but they taught that "the resurrection was past already," and thus overthrew the faith of some. Are such to be suffered

in the temple of the Spirit of truth? The word of God says, "If a man, therefore, shall *purge himself from these* he shall be a vessel unto honour." It is the same word as in 1 Cor. v., "*Purge out the old leaven.*" The great principle to govern the walk of a child of God is, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, *depart from iniquity,*" whether it be in doctrine or in practice (2 Tim. ii. 19). The elect lady is warned against those that transgress, and abide not in the *doctrine* of Christ; not to receive such into her house, nor to bid them "God speed": to bid such God speed is to become "*partakers of their evil deeds.*" The saints at Rome are besought to "mark those who caused divisions, and offences contrary to the *doctrine they had learned,* and avoid them" (Rom. xvi. 17,⁶ com. vi. 17). The reproofs of Christ to the Churches at Pergamos and Thyatira, because they had among them those that taught the doctrines of Balaam, and suffered Jezebel to teach, afford also the plainest proof of the sin of allowing false doctrine and the teachers of it in the Church of God.

The application of these principles to cases of individual evil is allowed by many, who, however, question the course that is to be pursued towards assemblies, where evil, unjudged and unrepented of, exists. "Is there such a thing as *corporate* rejection? Do we find, in the word of God, cases that warrant our separation from whole bodies and assemblies of Christians, because of evil among them?"

⁶ Some have sought to limit the application of this passage to those who caused offences against the doctrines contained in the concluding chapters of this Epistle, but I believe most unwarrantably; the 17th verse of the sixth chapter, as well as the whole context of this passage down to the 20th verse, prove the contrary. "Your obedience is come abroad unto all men." Compare, too, verses 25, 26. The remarks of our brother, A. Pridham, in his notes on these verses, in his Reflections on the Epistle to the Romans, are well worthy of consideration. "In the present instance, corruption of doctrine is the danger chiefly warned against. This is, indeed, ever the most dangerous, because the most insidious evil, and the most readily communicative of injurious effect. The effects, too, of false doctrines are far less easily removed in ordinary cases, than a vicious habit of a usual kind. False doctrine, because it directly dishonours Christ by setting a lie in the place of Himself, who is the Truth (for let the ramifications of error be what they may, they *all* touch Christ directly or indirectly), deteriorates of necessity the whole tone of the man in whose mind they find acceptance. But it is in its contagious effects upon a whole company of Christians that the presence of false doctrine is chiefly to be dreaded," etc., p. 380—384.

The argument in my letter, in which I myself answered these questions in the negative, was founded on the epistles to the seven Churches. I desire presently to reconsider that portion of the word; and to shew how those very epistles condemn my position; but I would first turn to some passages in the Old Testament, that throw light upon the question.

In Deut. xiii., there is instruction of most solemn importance bearing upon the controversy which calls forth these remarks. In the eleven first verses, God instructs His people how they are to deal with seducers, whether in the person of a false prophet, or in the person of a brother, a son, a daughter, or the wife of our bosom, or the friend dear as one's own soul; "*Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death.*" We know how the Lord Jesus, Jehovah manifest in the flesh, applied the same principle of paramount love and loyalty to himself, when he said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. x). But in the latter part of this chapter we learn the course that was to be pursued, in case they heard that any city in Israel departed from the Lord. Were the other cities of Israel to be indifferent to it? Was each city to maintain its own *local* discipline, and to be careless of the Lord's glory and truth among the other cities of Israel? Would not this be to deny Israel's corporate unity and responsibility on the one hand, and to shew indifference to the Lord's glory on the other?

"Thou shalt then *enquire*, and make *search*, and *ask diligently*:" this was the first step. If the thing was found, after honest enquiry, to be "true and certain," the whole city, and all within it, was to be utterly destroyed (v. 15, 18). Here is the principle of *corporate* excision, because of unjudged and unrepented evil in one of the cities of Israel.

Is not a local assembly of Christians now analogous to one of these cities of Israel? And if evil, touching the person of Christ, or the truth of God, is heard to exist in any one of these assemblies, are not *all* called upon to exercise holy and jealous investigation as to its truth? Will the Lord

allow of indifference or neutrality? Will He sanction a position of *independency*? Are not all equally bound to "enquire diligently?" Is not the refusal to investigate, especially on the ground that the city is at a distance, or that there is no danger to ourselves, or that it would not be for the comfort or edification of any particular assembly, entirely opposed both to the practical recognition of the unity of the Church of Christ, and these plain commandments of God? Must not such a course arise either from independency in principle, or practical indifference to the glory of Christ and the holiness of his house, or both?

The same great principle is taught in the history of Achan, where the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel *corporately*, because of his individual sin. "They could not stand before their enemies till the accursed thing was taken away from among them."

Again, at the close of the Book of Joshua, we find the whole congregation of Israel arming and going to battle against the two and a half tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manassch. They had heard of the altar their brethren had built by Jordan; they judged that these tribes had *corporately* departed from the Lord; and they appeal to the histories of Peor and Achan, where the whole *congregation* had suffered for the sin that was among them, to shew that the *whole congregation of Israel* would suffer unless they *put away the sin* (xxii. 15-20). Their challenge of this altar proved their jealous loyalty to their Lord; though the answer of their brethren showed that their fears were groundless.

Beautiful, indeed, was the spirit manifested by the wrongfully accused tribes on this occasion. They did not proudly resent the conduct of their brethren as an attempt to interfere with their discipline, and refuse to answer their enquiries even though they might justly have complained of the spirit and tone in which they were made.

But in the case of the Benjamites it is made still plainer that there is such a thing as *corporate* excision. The men of Gibeah had grossly sinned against the Lord; and the children of Israel gathered together against the guilty city, "knit together as one man;" they then sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, calling upon them to deliver up those who had committed this wickedness, that "*they might put away evil from Israel*" (Judges xx. 1-13).

We notice here the same great principles—1st. The corporate unity and responsibility of Israel. 2ndly. The sin of Gibeah, like the leaven, leavens the whole lump; it was “*evil in Israel.*” 3rdly. The evil must be purged out, or all Israel would partake of it.

But Benjamin refused either to judge the evil themselves, or to allow their brethren to deal with it.⁷ They thus became *partakers of the sin* (1 Tim. v. 22; 2 John 11; Rev. xviii, 4). The children of Israel then made war upon Benjamin; and at length the Lord delivered Benjamin into their hand; and they, who had before been the sword of the Lord against the inhabitants of Canaan, now became his sword in inflicting His righteous judgments upon his own people.

It is an easy thing to point out much that was wrong in the ways of Israel on this occasion; alas! it is not difficult to find cause for blame in those even who honestly seek to please God: in all, save in Him who was the perfect Servant. It is easy to mark their failure in not having *begun* by humbling themselves before God for their own sin, and the sin of their brother Benjamin; in not having first taken counsel of God; and in their apparent lack of brotherly affection for Benjamin: and assuredly it would be well to profit by the impartial testimony given us by the Spirit of God of their failure, and of his holy rebuke and chastening, until their souls were brought into that low place, out of which He could lift them up, and use them in his service. Such a use of this solemn history would, indeed, be profitable for “instruction and reproof and correction” to all those, who seek to contend for God against evil among his people. But surely it would argue great spiritual blindness and perversion of this scripture to condemn Israel’s path on this occasion, because of their failure as they walked in it. Their cause was a righteous one; their battle was *the Lord’s*; though those, who fought it, needed his scourge and discipline before He gave them victory. Their previous defeats, and Benjamin’s successes,

⁷ Of course, if they had “transacted,” to use the language of another, “their own discipline,” [though I seriously object to the expression, because discipline, if exercised “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” is ratified in heaven; it is *His* discipline if truly exercised in His name;] then there would have been no call for their brethren to “interfere,” as the same writer says, “with each other’s discipline.”—See *Introduction to Principles and their Results*, p. 12, 13.

no more proved that their cause was bad, and that the Lord was on Benjamin's side, than the success of the inhabitants of Ai, and the defeat of Joshua, proved that God was on the side of the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan. Surely it would be wholly to pervert this scripture, to argue from it, as has been done, that brotherly affection is to set aside zeal for the Lord's glory, If anything should teach us God's intolerance of evil in his own people, surely the fact ought to do so, that He would not give the victory to those even who were upon *His* side in his controversy with Gibeah, till their own souls had been disciplined by their defeats, and they had wept and humbled themselves with fasting before Him.

Did He *approve* of indifference in this controversy? Did He allow neutrality? The inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, who stood aloof from the conflict, might have congratulated themselves on their wisdom, when they heard of the humiliating defeats sustained by their brethren in warring against Benjamin, and on their own security and comfort; but their utter destruction, because "they came not up to Mizpeh to the Lord," manifested God's solemn judgment of their conduct—"He that is not for me is against me." Let it not be forgotten that *the battle was the Lord's*; it was *He* that smote Benjamin before His Israel, when "the due time was come." The battle did not cease till the evil was put away from Israel; though Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, "There is one tribe cut off from Israel" (Judges xxx). They could sing unto the Lord in triumph, when the victory was over the Egyptians; but they mourned, even while they conquered, because "Benjamin was their brother" (1 Cor. v. 1).

I could adduce other instances from the scriptures of the Old Testament; but these, I should judge, are quite sufficient for those who bow to the authority of the Word of God, to show that there is such a principle in the Word as the cutting off of whole bodies of God's people. There is such a thing as *corporate rejection*.

Let us apply this example to the case in the Church at Corinth.

There was evil, as we have seen, of the same defiling character as was found at Gibeah, in that assembly (ch. v), They ought to have dealt with it themselves; they failed to do so; Paul therefore called them to account, as Israel

did the Benjamites: now suppose they had refused to hearken, and had acted in the same proud self-will as Benjamin, the assembly in that case would have identified themselves with that which dishonoured the Lord, and defiled his house. Would it not then have stood in the same position towards the Lord that "the wicked person" did, a partaker of his evil deeds, and therefore of his plagues? (Rev. xviii. 4.) And would it not *corporately* have stood in the same relation to the whole Church as Benjamin did to the congregation of Israel? Could intercommunion with such an assembly have continued? (Jud. xxx. 7.) Must there not have been war? If the "evil was not *purged out*," must not those who were faithful to the Lord, have "*come out*," so as not to be partakers of the sin? Surely indiscriminate judgment would not have place even here; that word in Jude might still be found to apply, "of some have compassion making a difference, and others save with fear pulling them out of the fire," etc. This salvation would, of course, be plucking them out of that, which the Lord was about to visit with judgment.

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

I now come to the case of the seven Churches. I desire to dwell a little at length on this portion of the word of God, because the argument of my former letter was mainly founded upon it; and I have seen that argument repeated

elsewhere,* It is deeply humbling to have to confess my shortsightedness in reasoning as I did from these Epistles; which, so far from supporting my position, I now see, entirely subvert it.

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

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

Now, if I had said, that if evil was known to exist in an assembly of Christians, their degeneracy claimed service; such service as we see rendered by the Apostle to the Corinthians, the success of which filled his soul with thanksgiving; such service again, as we see ministered by Him in

* Principles and Results, by R. Ball.

these Epistles, who walked among the golden candlesticks, in making solemn appeals to their hearts and consciences to repent, and put away the evil; I should have rightly divided this portion of the word of God. If I had also said, that if this service was owned of God, and the corruption and evil were confessed and put away, [as we saw at Corinth] that then there would have been no cause for separation from such an assembly; but, on the contrary, a closer knitting of heart and fellowship than ever; who could have gainsaid it? But I went beyond this. I not only omitted altogether from consideration the Epistle to the Laodiceans, which would have settled the question at once as to corporate rejection: but I argued that no such thing was recognised in Scripture.

For besides the question, "How are assemblies to be dealt with, wherein corruption is found?" there is another very grave and solemn one, How are assemblies to be dealt with, *wherein corruption is refused to be judged and put away?* Supposing those Churches refused to repent; refused to judge and put away the evil; what then would have been the path of those individuals among them who desired to be faithful to the Lord? "He that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," what was to be *His* course, if the body refused to repent? Ought he to continue to have fellowship with it, or to be separate from it? How ought other assemblies to act in such a case? For example:—the Church at Ephesus, when the Lord addressed it at the time of John's vision at Patmos, had evidently not arrived at that point of declension where separation from it would have been the path of faithfulness to Christ. He still owned it as a golden candlestick. But it had fallen; for it had left its first love. Solemn indeed was His word to the assembly; while at the same time He owned all that was for God in it, "Repent, or I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, *except thou repent.*" I do not stay to inquire here what this threatened judgment to the assembly implies; but I only ask, Could it have been a path approved of the Lord, who, on the failure of the body addresses the heart and conscience of the *individual*, to have remained in communion with the assembly, if by its refusal to repent, it had consequently exposed itself to the execution of the Lord's judgment against it? Would not communion with

such a body, in that case, have been to have partaken of its sins, and consequently of its judgment?

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

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

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

of my mouth; be zealous, therefore, and *repent!*" Now let me ask any loyal heart, in case the body continued in its state of self-complacency, high-mindedness, and lukewarmness, and refused to repent; ought the saint that listened to his Lord's voice and opened the door, to go on with the lukewarm body? Could he continue in the fellowship of its worship? Could they be led by the Spirit? Could they pray in the Holy Ghost? Could He, who came to glorify Christ, guide the prayers, the praises, the fellowship, and service of such an Assembly? Ought he then, who heard "what the Spirit saith to the Churches," to remain in fellowship with an Assembly which Christ was about to spue out of his mouth? Would he not, by partaking of its sins, become partaker of its plagues? Ought he not rather to be separate from the evil that the Lord was about to judge? Is not the direction as binding *now* upon the man of God, as it was in the days of Timothy, where the form of godliness exists without the power, "from such turn away." 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

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

Bear with me, while I repeat again, that the question before us is not the ground of reception into the Church, but of godly discipline and faithfulness to Christ. Discipline can only be exercised on those already recognised as Christians. Neither is it the question, whether degeneracy or failure in an assembly demands service, rather than separation. I fully and heartily grant this. But the question is, as I have before stated, May not an assembly, such as Sardis and Laodicea, so depart from Christ in principle and practice, that, after service has failed, separa-

tion from it becomes a positive duty to Christ, and the only way of escape from participation in the evil, and the Lord's judgments because of it?

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

I now turn to the question, which was indeed the main subject of that letter, asked in p. 11:—"How are brethren to be dealt with coming from an assembly suspected or accused of being tainted with heretical teaching?" My former answer to this inquiry I now confess to be lamentably defective and unguarded.

In the case of an individual bringing letters of commendation from an assembly, whose known soundness of doctrine and consistency in walk inspired confidence before the Lord, there is no difficulty; but must it not be altogether different when persons come from places where laxity either in morals or doctrine is allowed? For what weight would be due to letters of commendation from those whose principles we could not ourselves commend? The very fact that a person came from such an assembly, ought justly to awaken suspicion, and demand holy and godly vigilance; otherwise, in receiving persons from such places as Pergamos and Thyatira, we might be receiving the holders of the doctrines of Balaam or the Nicolaitanes; and in case the *body* had refused to repent and put away the

evil, we should be receiving those who were morally identified with the sin and guilt of the assembly.

In my former letter, I maintained the principal of discrimination in judgment; rightly so I still believe; and that the reception of an individual, or his rejection, ought, as far as man's judgment reaches, to depend upon his own state of soul before God, as evidenced in his doctrines and walk. I saw nothing at that time to object to in the declaration of the memorandum from Tottenham. "We distinctly refuse to be parties to the exclusion of those (from communion), who, we are satisfied, are believers except on grounds personally applying to their faith and conduct." Nor do I now object to it, provided it is understood that *fellowship and association with others, be considered an important part of that conduct.*

For instance, if a person professed to be sound in the faith, and to reject Irvingism, Universalism, or any other false system or doctrine, which denied the truth, or touched the glory of the person, work and offices of the Lord Jesus; and yet, notwithstanding his professed rejection of such doctrines, continued to attend the ministry, or to have fellowship with those who held or taught them; ought not such a one be dealt with by the Churches of God "on grounds personally applying to his conduct?" Is *this conduct* that becomes a Christian? Can he be accounted "consistent in his walk" who refuses to be separate from such evil? Does not such *conduct* manifest indifference to the glory of Christ, however orthodox the creed, and morally blameless the character may appear? Ought the assemblies of Christ to receive into communion those who will not first separate from the fellowship of persons who hold principles and doctrines that affect the person of Christ and the truth of God?

This was the great and serious question that gave rise to this painful controversy. It is a question of *principle* and a most solemn one; for if we profess to meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in dependance upon the guidance and presence of the Holy Ghost; and recognize in our hearts and consciences that the Assembly is not ours, but *God's*; the question is whether HE, in whose name we meet, sanctions the admission of such into HIS assembly: for we are only *servants*, not masters there.

As my former letter dealt with *principles* rather than

entered into the question or judgment of persons or facts, I think it better in this letter to confine myself to principles; though I may in a subsequent letter judge it my painful duty to enter into the question of facts, and give my judgment concerning them. I therefore put the following cases hypothetically; * I reason on the *supposition* only that they are ascertained facts.

First case. Suppose errors touching the person of the Lord Jesus had been taught in an assembly, errors of so grave a character, that if true, they would have "made Christ himself to have needed a Saviour;" "errors that touch the very foundation of our faith;" errors moreover widely diffused by teaching, by manuscripts privately circulated, and by printed tracts. Suppose that these errors had been, by the grace of God, brought to light, and publicly refuted and exposed—the manuscripts containing them laid bare—and the tendency of these awful doctrines clearly and solemnly pointed out. Suppose, in addition to all this testimony against them, some of the very leaders of the party of the heretical teacher had had their eyes opened by the abounding grace of God to the character of these doctrines; and had been also enabled honestly and humbly to bear their testimony against them; first, by separating from the assembly in which they had been taught, when that assembly refused to judge the errors, or to allow them to be judged; and secondly, by making a public printed confession of their shame and sorrow for having held them. In such a case how ought the assembly, from which, for the Lord's sake, they had separated to be regarded? Are not its members partakers of the evil deeds of the false teacher, even though they may put forth a declaration that they do not hold his errors? Ought any to be received from such an assembly until they had renounced communion with it? Ought *intercommunion* with the assembly to be allowed till it had *confessed* its sin, and proved its repentance sincere by its entire separation from the evil?

Second case. Supposing that all the facts stated above were true, another case presents itself for solemn considera-

* In this letter I put these cases hypothetically; though I believe, on evidence which to my own judgment is satisfactory, that they contain the material facts in question. In considering *principles*, it is well to leave out persons; in applying principles to any given case, the evidence must be first seriously and prayerfully weighed before God without respect of persons.

tion. Suppose some of those who continued to maintain fellowship with the heretical teacher, and with the assembly that upheld him, desired fellowship with Christians in a distant place. Suppose, also, that some of the leading brethren in that place, aware of the circumstances and alarmed at the sin and danger of receiving such persons, sought to awaken the minds of their fellow-labourers to the danger, with earnest and repeated entreaties, that at least solemn *enquiry* might be made into the nature of these evil doctrines, and a judgment come to about them; that these entreaties were disregarded; persons identified with the teacher and the assembly, and suspected of favouring these doctrines were received; and, at length, to preserve himself free from participation in the guilt of receiving such persons, one of the labourers had felt compelled to withdraw from the assembly, at the same time publicly warning it of the evil that was coming into their midst. Suppose, moreover, that the majority of the guides then called upon the whole assembly to *justify* their course in refusing the enquiry, and in receiving those persons among them; and to sanction the principles they had acted upon, by its solemn and deliberate vote; so that the principles of their leaders, embodied in a written document and submitted to their judgment, became the avowed principles of the assembly. Suppose, too, that besides the reasons for declining to judge the evil doctrines, this document asserted the principle, and the assembly sanctioned it by their vote, that, "*we are not warranted to reject those who come from under the teaching of an author fundamentally heretical, until we are satisfied that they had imbibed views subversive of fundamental truth,*"* and that this determination of the assembly drove out from its midst many godly brethren, who dared not sanction such principles and conduct, as being worthy of God and consistent with the holiness of His house; and that, after the earnest remonstrances and entreaties of many brethren in other parts, this course was persevered in, and the document maintaining it was unconfessed and

* Of course, no one would question the propriety of receiving such, if it were understood that they came *renouncing* the errors and *fellowship* of the teacher and assembly that held these errors. The controversy is assumed to have arisen on the ground, that those who were admitted, *refused* to separate either from the assembly or the teacher.

uncancelled. If these things were true of this assembly, how ought it to be regarded by other assemblies of Christ? Of course the *first* step plainly should be brotherly and faithful remonstrance and entreaty. But if that failed, could intercommunion with such an assembly, while in this state, be pleasing to the Lord? Could other assemblies receive letters of commendation from it, or give letters of commendation to it? If the division that had taken place, was made on godly principles, and had been caused by the wrong course and principles of the assembly, with whom ought those saints of God, who sought to be on their Lord's side, in so solemn a controversy, to stand? Ought it to be with those who *caused* the division by their ways and principles; or with those who, for their Lord's sake and honour, felt bound to be separate from evil?

In admitting persons coming from such an assembly, the following dangers are evident:—first, that in receiving from it, we may admit the adherents of the false teacher, whose views we have judged to be subversive of the faith; secondly, of receiving those who adopted the principles of the assembly; and thirdly, of intercommunion with those who had been *causers of division* by their principles and course. For surely, in the sight of God, the guilt of division does not always or necessarily lie with those who separate from an assembly; if it did, none are so guilty as ourselves, for numbers of us have separated from assemblies of Christians on lighter grounds. But, as we have heretofore maintained, it does lie with those, who, by their principles or conduct, force out those who could not otherwise preserve a conscience void of offence towards Christ.

How then are individuals coming from such an assembly to be dealt with? In all grace, but in all faithfulness to Christ. It appears to me, that that word in Jude applies here, as in every case, where there is room to fear contamination by admitting into the assemblies of God that which would bring defilement into them. "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." This is the principle of *discrimination in judgment*. It is instruction suited to these last days; addressed to those, who in the midst of apostasy, when the tares are ripening for judgment, are called upon on the

one hand "earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints?" and on the other, to "build themselves up on their most holy faith:" like those builders of old, who "had every one his sword girded by his side, and so builded," Neh. iv. 16—18. This instruction is given, not as to how they are to deal with the Lord's enemies, but how they are to deal with their brethren, who might be mixed up with the corruption around them. There should be compassion in some cases; but the manifest hating, even the garment where a spot of the flesh was discerned. What holy vigilance is required in those, who are the children of a holy Father, and "holy! holy! holy Lord God;" whose liberty is to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus; whose faith is most holy faith; and whose prayers and worship are in the Holy Ghost!

This compassion and holy fear would, I suppose, apply to cases of *ignorance* both as to the existence of the evil, and of God's principles in dealing with it, when that ignorance was manifestly not wilful: compare Lev. iv. 14—19 with 2 Pet. iii. 5, in which case, however, instruction as to its existence, and in the principles of the word of God applicable to it, would be communicated in order to produce exercise of heart and conscience before the Lord.

Where there was a partial, and one-sided view of the facts, or a wrong judgment because of ignorance of the evidence; or of the course that ought to be pursued in dealing with the case; it also appears to me that patient instruction as to both, should be communicated previously to admission. If there were still difficulty felt in receiving the evidence as to facts; but at the same time manifest honest determination to enquire and judge the evil, and be separate from it, if the facts were proved to be true; and the horrible principle of intercommunion with evil, and indifferentism under the name of charity were abhorred, I should not, on that understanding, feel at liberty to refuse one whose walk was otherwise loyal and blameless. But, on the other hand, I could not receive, where I found either the principle of intercommunion with evil, the refusal to enquire and judge, or a careless indifferentism where the glory of Christ, or the holiness of his house are concerned. After all, the great and solemn point is, "*The temple of God is holy;*" and nothing should be *allowed* by those who meet in the name of the Lord Jesus, but what is worthy of that name.

Thirdly. There is still another case, which the sad consequences of our common sin and failure oblige me to notice, viz., that of assemblies that continue on terms of *intercommunion* with such an assembly as I have last supposed. How is such an assembly to be dealt with?

This question has most painfully exercised my heart and conscience; but, surely it must be answered, not from the feelings of a heart wrung by the pain of differing with and separation from brethren we love. It is a solemn question of the *principles* that should guide those who profess, in humility but godly sincerity, to be assembled together on the holy ground of fellowship in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, it appears to me, that the same course should be pursued, as in the case of an individual.

First. If the intercommunion is maintained through ignorance of the *facts* of the case, evidence, in proof of those facts, should be brought before the assembly. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word should be established." It cannot be expected, that an individual, or an assembly, should act upon our knowledge of facts, or until they have solemnly and prayerfully investigated the matter before God. If the assembly refused to obey that word, "Then shalt thou inquire, and make search and ask diligently" (Deut. xiii. 14), either from a selfish care for its own peace and quietness, or from a desire to maintain neutrality, when the Lord's glory and the holiness of His assemblies were at stake; or, if there was a manifest upholding of the evil course that had been pursued; the case would be painfully simple; its *intercommunion* with that assembly would manifestly identify it and the members composing it, with the evil as much as if they were really assembled together locally, at the same place and table. Their position appears to me morally identical, and the course to be pursued towards it, and individuals coming from it, the same.

How could I accept letters of commendation from an assembly where there was no barrier against the admission of the evils, which, I solemnly believed, denied the principles of the Church of God; and, on the ground of unity, maintained principles that betrayed latitudinarian carelessness as to the truth?

But here it may be necessary to notice an objection made

by many, and which once, through my ignorance and lack of spiritual discernment, presented a difficulty to myself, that "we receive persons coming from the Church of England and other systems around us."

But, first, it must be considered, that there is no analogy between the cases at all. Intercommunion of the freest and fullest kind has existed among brethren; but there has been no acknowledged intercommunion between brethren and the Church of England, or those other systems, which, for conscience' sake, many of us separated from. The fact of membership with the Church of England accredited no one as a Christian in our eyes. We never received letters of commendation from it, nor gave letters of commendation to it. *There was no intercommunion.* We were *outside* of it ourselves for conscience' sake, and met together on principles of communion utterly opposed to it. If we received a godly individual, it was on the ground of his own individual state before God; and not because he came from, or belonged to, the Establishment, etc. But the very opposite to this has been the case with regard to the assemblies we are now speaking of; with them *intercommunion* has existed. The question is, whether it ought to continue, if they will not do what the holiness of the Church, as God's house, demands.

Secondly. Individuals coming from the Establishment have been received on the principle of *discrimination in judgment*; which principle, in itself, implies the corporate judgment of that from which they come; which is the very principle I have been advocating above. But in receiving from a body of saints, if their being of that body is the ground on which I receive them, I thereby accredit the body to which they belong. In receiving an individual from among them, I virtually receive and accredit that body. For instance, a letter of commendation has been brought to me this afternoon by A.B. It commends the bearer to the assembly gathered here; first, as having broken bread at X, and afterwards at W; it is also signed by a brother YZ. In commending the bearer to us, these assemblies, of course, *accredited* the body gathered here, as an assembly of Christ, worthy of their confidence and fellowship as before the Lord; and by receiving the bearer, on their letter of commendation, we, as far as our testimony goes, *accredit* these assemblies, as well as the brother who signed

the letter of commendation. This is plainly not the case with the Establishment, or with assemblies not meeting on the ground of the unity of the body of Christ, from which, indeed, we are separated on that, as well as on other grounds.

If again it is objected, "But why not receive individuals coming from such bodies on their own individual responsibility, as is done from the Church of England?" The answer is plain and simple, That the cases are widely different: first, because persons belong to the Establishment, not as having made a deliberate judgment and choice of its principles and practice, but from the providential circumstances of birth, early prejudice, and education; and secondly, their being in it neither implies fellowship in its principles, nor with those that belong to it—a position, doubtless, wrong, and one which calls for instruction on the part of those that receive, as well as exercise of heart and conscience in their case before God. But fellowship among those professedly meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus is surely altogether another matter. Birth, education, early prejudice, natural associations did not bring us together; we met in spite of all these; it was, or surely ought to have been, an act of serious, prayerful, deliberate exercise of conscience and spiritual judgment before God, both as to the principles we were associated on, and the persons we were associated with. If gathered according to the mind of God, it was on the ground of the unity of the body of Christ, and consequently of our being members one of another; each *local* assembly thus gathered being the representative of the unity of the *whole* body; so that to be in fellowship with the local body was to be in fellowship with all so gathered elsewhere. Now this fellowship surely has its *responsibilities* as well as its privileges. If I am associated with a body of saints, I am thereby responsible, as one of that body, for its acts and principles; just as a member of a firm is responsible for the acts and liabilities of that firm; and if that body, by its acts and principles, loses the confidence of other bodies of saints, I must necessarily do so as long as I maintain unbroken fellowship with it. To deny this would necessarily deny all *corporate* responsibility.

I believe that I have now stated the chief points on which my judgment has been either modified or changed since

I wrote my former letter. The importance of the subjects, and the necessity of explaining the reasons of my recalling that letter, will, I trust, prove sufficient excuse for the length of my present one. I commend this letter and myself to the Lord's mercy; and I entreat my brethren to weigh what I have written prayerfully, and in singleness of eye and heart before the Lord. I have sought to write before Him. He knows the deep painful exercises of heart connected with the past errors of my mind and path, which I have passed through. He knows whether party feeling, or any selfish motive, has actuated, or blinded me. I can say before Him, that I am not conscious of aught save charity, unfeigned charity to all my brethren; while I desire grace to act uncompromisingly on the principles of His word. If these pages contain the mind and truth God, then let me entreat my brethren to pause how they reject it; if they contain some truth, mixed with error, none would, I trust, more desire than myself the rejection of the error, if the truth be but maintained. We are living in an evil day; truth is fallen in the streets; expediency is substituted for principle; latitudinarianism is called liberality, and indifference charity: here is one of our special dangers.

I would conclude with the weighty words, which were lately written to me by a brother, while faithfully pointing out to me the difference between natural amiability and affection, and divine charity:—"It is well to remember, that even brotherly kindness is not the bond of perfectness, but charity: this brings in *God*, and that changes all. He never can swerve from *holiness*, nor abandon the revelation of Himself, which is truth; or, if you please, the glory of Christ, who is the manifestation of it. Thus *Christ* becomes the *test* of everything that is nature, rough or smooth, and of all our conduct. This is the secret of all discernment, where *Christ* is our constant rule, and there is no pretension to go beyond our knowledge of Him, which is our place before God."

Your affectionate brother in Christ,

JAMES DECK.

Feb. 16, 1852.