

*The Cross —  
the end of Division*

*“ I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that there be no divisions among you.”*

*(1 Cor. 1.10).*

Sequel to “IS CHRIST DIVIDED?”

# THE CROSS — THE END OF DIVISION

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## Division Sustained by Misapplied Scripture \*

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There is nothing more sorrowful to a lover of Christ than the present state of division among true and faithful believers. There are many so-called “brethren” in particular who are sound on fundamental faith, and consistent in their conduct, yet in defiance of divine injunction are there divisions among them. It is strange indeed that these are mainly the result of differences in the interpretation of scripture. Yet how is it that the truth itself, which should be the source of all comfort and joy, is allowed to become the cause of such distress and sorrow?

The parties that had formed among the Corinthians grieved the apostle, and he complains that “whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” He had preached the cross among them, and when he came he had been “determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Consequent upon His death, resurrection and ascension they were one in Christ, and a spiritual unity did in fact exist—a unity of the Spirit to be kept in the bond of peace. But they allowed men to divide them on non-essentials, and to take their eyes off Christ—the very process by which Satan has turned the saints aside down through the ages.

Likewise, we in our day have succumbed to human influences, and the writer feels constrained to draw attention to the havoc wrought by rigid adherence to ideas formed by tradition instead of scripture. Consequently the true principles of Christian fellowship have been misrepresented, brought into disrepute, and abandoned by thousands of godly believers. It is indeed high time to awake out of our complacent sleep and confess in humiliation that “Israel hath sinned.”

### Unjustified Division

It would be generally agreed that these divisions among the Corinthians were not justified, on the contrary they were evil. Even those who were saying “I am of Christ” however correct in their doctrine were wrong in their pretension and intolerance of others, and this was a mark of the flesh, to be

\* To misapply Scripture is to add to it—a practice often used by the adversary to undermine the truth. Current examples thereof are given on pages 2, 4, 6 and 9 following.

condemned. Consequently Paul beseeches them *not* to divide, though they obviously held many divergent views and doctrines. Even when some among them denied the resurrection (ch. 15.12) he only uses the occasion to bring out more glorious truths connected therewith.

Often a deceived heart, instead of holding the truth in love, makes it the most fruitful cause of controversy ! In fact past divisions are thought to be the more justified if they related to doctrine, whereas the will of the flesh which forced the division is far more reprehensible in God's sight. Those who may hold erroneous views (as distinct from those who teach them) will never receive help if they are disciplined—this is the last way to achieve spiritual unity, and certainly not God's way.

The writer knows of no scripture which justifies division among the saints of God on doctrine other than what is foundational namely, that affecting the Person and atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Two scriptures which apply to those actively opposing the truth are frequently taken out of their context to support separation from Christian brethren. Firstly, the iniquity of 2 Timothy 2. 19 relates to the conduct of the two perverts of verse 17 who had apparently departed from the faith, blasphemed, and made shipwreck according to 1 Tim. 1. 19/20. Likewise, 2 John ver. 7/10 clearly refers to deceivers, "who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." All such must be refused, yet often this extreme action is applied to believers on the slenderest pretext.

Furthermore, while a false teacher may have to be excluded, this does not justify division from all who may have fallen into error although such action has long been enforced by the misapplication of another Scripture, to which we now refer.

### **"A Little Leaven . . ." the Germ of Division**

These words—"a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"—are found in 1 Cor. 5. 6., and Gal. 5. 9., so they evidently contain an important principle for our instruction. On frequent occasions the reference in Galatians 5 has been appealed to as a warning against erroneous doctrine, which is likened to the sin of leaven. But a careful reading of the context will show that the apostle's real concern is the working of the religious flesh with its legal demands.

The symbol of leaven in scripture represents a corrupting influence that tends to spread, and it can only operate through the weakness of our sinful nature. It is that which puffs up or makes much of the first man, and as with the Corinthians it

is the evidence of a low spiritual state. The only answer to it is the truth of the Cross, presented so forcibly in ch. 1. God has decreed that "no flesh should glory in His presence" and yet through divine grace and consequent upon the Cross Paul can add "but of Him are ye in Christ Jesus." On this wonderful level division is unthinkable !

But the apostle sees the cause of their sectarian state to be the working of the old leaven and he continues to plead "that ye may learn not to think of men above what is written, that none of you be puffed up for one against another" (ch. 4. 6.). It has truly been said that leaven always works in a lukewarm atmosphere and such indeed existed with the Corinthians and produced various evil results. We each need to search our own hearts in view of the challenging words "Ye are puffed up . . . your boasting is not good." In such a condition we cannot avoid becoming partisan with our judgment impaired.

It is in the contemplation of the cross and death of Christ that we learn *His* greatness, and find the common ground of *our* nothingness. Here we should learn to judge our sinful nature with all its thoughts of pride, position and party, and exclaim with Paul "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ".

### **"Christ hath made us free"**

In Galatians the apostle again presents Christ as crucified, that He might redeem us from the curse of the law. A new order has been established wherein the first man has been superseded by Christ Jesus, the flesh by the Spirit, and the law by grace. He then pleads "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with a yoke of bondage."

A yoke of bondage is a rule of law which involves in part a surrender of that liberty and grace which now belongs to all believers in Christ. This burden may be imposed by godly persons with the most pious intent, but, with it there often exists a hidden motive of seeking to correct the flesh in others. This finds expression by some kind of coercion or demand which enforces opinions or doctrines in such a way as to bring souls into bondage. It is this perverted zeal, this energy of the religious flesh, which the apostle likens to leaven, as the context clearly indicates.

While its beginnings are small, the 'little leaven' can soon envelop a whole company which surrenders the liberty of the

Spirit for the bondage of religious demand. But the apostle argues that if the flesh could be corrected by this process, then Christ has died in vain ! Yet this legal spirit, which characterised the religious Jew, is found today with intolerant Christians who are not truly established in grace. On this self-righteous basis the flesh is easily provoked—a little leaven spreads, and leavens the whole lump !

### **Association and Defilement**

Old Testament types have been freely used to illustrate the principle that association with evil defiles, such as contact with leprosy (in Lev. 13/14), a running issue (Lev. 15) and a dead body (Num. 19.11). But the tragedy is that these scriptures are wrongly applied to true Christians who are perfectly clear of any fundamental error or evil. To argue that association with such is defiling is monstrous, and a sad reflection upon the pharisaical state of any system which teaches it.

Ardent believers have used the term “association with evil” in many contexts, and it is true that as a general principle association with evil is defiling. But the Lord Jesus taught that what proceeds from within the heart of man defiles him most. It is not error of doctrine honestly held, but the works of the flesh such as a root of bitterness by which many are defiled. (See Heb. 12. 15. James 3. 6). Of course defilement from the world is a different matter with which we are not here concerned.

Contrary to what has been taught the leaven of Galatians 5. 9 does not relate directly to associations or doctrine but the assertion of the fleshly will in the “compelling”, the legal demands and the consequent bondage. ‘Doctrine’ as such is not the main theme here, for twice it is emphasised that “in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision” (ch. 5.6 and 6.15). It was the fundamental truth of the Cross they were not obeying, which leads Paul to rebuke them as “Foolish Galatians . . . before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been set forth crucified. . .” (See ch. 3., 1.). Their basic error was to act in the flesh, by legal conduct and practice—so far removed from the grace of Christ.

The fifth chapter fully confirms that the apostle’s whole concern was the state of their relations one with another. “For brethren, ye have been called to liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour

one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (ver. 13/15). Any influence other than that of love will produce contention among believers, and so the apostle proceeds to list the works of the flesh which truly defile the Christian circle—“hatred, strifes, jealousies, contentions, disputes, schools of opinion” (ver. 20-N.T.).

Defilement (even as seen in the types) can only be removed by the death of Christ, and this should maintain all in constant humility and self-judgment for it states here “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh . . .”

Such is the leavening process against which we are solemnly warned. We have presumed to be clear of it, but have allowed it to work within, while deluding ourselves that we could escape defilement by dissociating from other faithful Christians. In Gal. 2. 12, Paul rebukes even Peter for such conduct, and later asks “Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh ? ”

The many denominational Christians who are exemplary in their faith and walk should be loved and respected. It is striking that there were those in Sardis who were commended for not defiling their garments though in the midst of a “dead” profession. Contacts which strengthen our spiritual bonds with such souls must be desirable.

### **Division confused with Separation**

In a world of evil and unholiness, not only of a moral kind but of spiritual wickedness, it is the bounden duty of all true believers to “come out . . . and be separate”. This separation must also exclude all who deny the Person and Work of Christ on which our faith and testimony rest.

This essential separation between the church and the world is an obligation, but to impose non-essential division within the church is a sectarian sin, and contrary to the will of the Lord. For many years, however, the history of Brethren has been marred by internal division and controversy which has often been sustained under the guise of separation from evil. Thus our skilful adversary has long beclouded the judgment of earnest men of God in order to deceive the flock and facilitate his evil designs of scattering. Consequently many divisions claimed to be honouring to the Lord have in fact resulted in scorn and dishonour.

In the pursuit of correctness and light each ensuing crisis has seen zeal combined with bitterness instead of brotherly love and forbearance. By prolonged occupation with disputings on controversial matters non-essential to fellowship we

have searched for unity of thought and failed to keep the unity of the Spirit. Indeed, like the Pharisees we have passed over sound "judgment and the love of God."

The leaven of malice and wickedness is found in our own sinful nature, setting one at variance with his brother, and spreading through meetings and wider circles, unless the truth of the Cross is applied in constant self-judgment. Thus Paul after pressing for oneness of mind and heart, repeatedly engages the attention with the profound reality of the Cross (See I Cor. 1. 17/18; Phil. 2. 8; Col. 2. 14., Eph. 2. 14/16). When rightly understood the Cross is the end of all division among Christians even as it should mark their moral separation from the world (See Gal. 6. 14; Phil 3. 18/19).

To support the vain attempt to reach agreement on all points of doctrine many quote "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" whereas these words are used by God to show that He could not continue with an idolatrous nation! Another example of misapplied scripture, which certainly calls for separation, but not division within.

### **"Mark them which cause Divisions"**

This matter is of such importance in the apostle's mind that he speaks with the utmost severity against those who were holding the saints in this bondage. He would not be subject for an hour to such brethren and withstood Peter to the face because "he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Gal.2.12)—just as we refuse fellowship with certain today. Finally, he says "he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment" (ch.5.10).

Likewise, elsewhere in his writings Paul warns the saints against such trouble-makers. For instance "I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine (of Christ) which ye have learned; and avoid them. For such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom.16. 17/18). Within this category would come the false teachers whose doctrines, if unchecked, would tend to divide the church.

Not unnaturally it has been the practice in past divisions to segregate into parties under teachers who are highly revered and esteemed by their respective adherents. But when the tragic fruits of this action which has bred deep-seated prejudice are seen today, surely it behoves us to learn afresh the divine



principles of grace and truth from the scriptures. Thus Paul had to correct those who should have been even teachers “ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb.5.12)

These conflicts may have developed from most pious and worthy motives, but it is “by their fruits ye shall know them”. The germ of leaven is sown, human opinions are forced and prevail, and thus the way is opened for division and sectarianism, which is heresy.

### **Error distinct from Heresy**

It is important to observe that erroneous doctrine or heterodoxy is not the same as heresy, which is far more serious and a work of the flesh. The word “heresy”, used 9 times in the New Testament, is always *division* based on human opinions. Whether relating to truth or error, the forcing apart of the saints of God and the formation of a party or sect based on those opinions is heresy or sectarianism. Those responsible are heretics and are to be rejected according to Titus 3.10, but as Mr. Darby writes this does not apply “to every one that is in error, even where the error is grave”.\*

Sound doctrine must ever be jealously guarded and preserved, that is, sound teaching. It is the *teaching* of error or heterodoxy which is serious because it tends to undermine the faith and lead to parties and division. Nevertheless, being human the wisest saint of God is prone to error, and how much more the simple, the ill-taught, the weak and the prejudiced. Many sincere souls may have their judgment obscured and cling to some error though they genuinely believe it to be the truth. Hence Jude exhorts—“of some have compassion, making a difference.”

The church or body of Christ is the sphere where all members may receive food, nurture and blessing from the Head as love is flowing unhindered among them, and only thus can true spiritual progress and growth be enjoyed. Thus the apostle desires “that we be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men . . . , but speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ” (Eph.4. 14/15).

### **Forbearance and Fellowship**

The tendency in recent years to enforce a doctrinal unity is to be deplored, and would have been stoutly resisted by

*\*See further excerpts from J.N.D.’s writings on page 11.*

brethren 100 years ago. Where all are united on their foundational faith such a course is schismatic, and there are many points of doctrine on which we should bear with one another in love. Hence when meeting an attack on the character of the sufferings of Christ (which many would say touched His Person) Mr. Darby remarks :--

“This truth I hold, avow; and do not, and with God’s grace shall not, give up. I do not press their holding it. It is not the truth on which fellowship and the testimony of brethren as witnesses for God rest, but instruction and profit for those who are in communion. Hence I in no way require its acceptance, I make it no term of communion at all. The testimony of the church of God is to be maintained independent of it. I reject no one for rejecting it. The truest saint may be ignorant of what is edifying. I would not disturb the peace of any, but I shall hold to what I believe to be the truth, and the Blessed Lord will decide the consequences. I should not think of making it a term or question of communion”.

(‘Sufferings of Christ,’ p.8.)

Consequently, grace and forbearance should be extended towards those who may have been influenced or prejudiced by false teaching. Where the enemy has succeeded in diverting any of the flock they require special love or care. So the servant of the Lord must be gentle, patient, in meekness instructing even those that oppose—that they may be recovered. Fellowship and forbearance should always go together (Eph.4. 1/3) and those who have been preserved from error should be foremost in grace towards the weak “for whom Christ died.”

It has become an accepted principle to turn away from those believers who do not accept our interpretation of scripture, without realising our own propensity to error. While a false teacher should be disciplined, the practice of subsequently insisting on division throughout the ranks in relation thereto is neither scriptural nor does it allow for spiritual care and the healing grace of God. (See Gal. 6. 1-5).

By the display of love we should embrace in our thoughts and actions *all* Christians who are sound in faith and walk, whether or not they have been ensnared by the wiles of the devil. It is only the mighty power of divine love and grace seen at Calvary which has overcome all that we were by nature, so that we might be one in Christ Jesus. As Chas. Wesley

wrote—

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,  
Rendered all distinctions void,  
Names and sects and parties fall  
Thou, O Christ art, all in all.

### **Sectarianism—A Denial of the Truth**

If sectarianism be the formation of a fellowship so narrowed by cherished opinions as to shun intercourse with other true and faithful saints of God, and surely it is this, then the parties of brethren are sects and all are equally guilty.

The movement of God under J. N. Darby and others was to free souls from the narrow sects of Christendom so that they might witness to the truth of the one body to which all believers belong. However, in his subtlety our adversary has reformed the sectarianism in such a way as to deceive the simple and re-scatter the flock. Each resultant “fellowship” is as much a contradiction of the one body as any denominational church or independent assembly.

Division is not of God, and when Paul hears that “there be divisions among you” in 1Cor. 11.18 he traces this to its cause—“for there must also be sects among you”. Far from calling for division as many have taken this scripture to mean he mourns that such has become evident among them. As a godly commentator has written “There is no necessity for divisions on God’s part, but a conditional necessity—as supposing the sun to be risen, it must be day. Thus upon the supposition of pride and envyings, strife and contentions among members of the church . . . heresies (or divisions) must and will be.” To claim from this scripture that division is designed and approved of God is preposterous since all such strife comes from the sinful flesh which He has condemned at the Cross.

Let us awaken to our fallen estate and return to the one and only true ground of fellowship, that is to gather to the Lord Jesus, which is the privilege of all His own, requiring no other allegiance but the confession of His name, and conduct consistent therewith.

It is against apostasy that we must earnestly contend for the faith—not against our brethren, or we shall be deceived by our evil adversary into doing his own work. Thus has he perverted the zeal of many men of God and scattered them into separate parties so that instead of being a living testimony to Christ they become an abject spectacle of failure, some even glorying in their weakness!

The faithful are those who seek to strengthen the bonds of unity, even at the cost of some errors, counting on the power and presence of the Lord to purify everything—even our holy offerings.

### **The Great Shepherd of the Sheep**

It has been truly stated that doctrine is not the bond perfectness but love (Col.3. 14.) We are not exhorted to keep a mental or doctrinal unity but a spiritual—“the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” We learn the truth in Jesus, but not only so—it is essentially “grace and truth.”

How beautifully in Galatians 5 the apostle urges the saints to turn from the works of the flesh, and “walk in the Spirit,” to be “led of the Spirit,” and to “live in the Spirit.” Finally “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering . . . against such there is no law.” We prove in our personal experience that the flesh is opposed to the Spirit. The one is perverse by nature, but the Other constantly strives to assert His own unity which brings untold blessing, if only we yield to His gracious will. (See Psalm 133.)

Let us therefore act in the Spirit of the Great Shepherd who would gather the weak and the lame together with the strong, so that they may bear one another’s infirmities. *He* does not separate some from others because they are defective but He draws them together to minister to their needs. If all were perfect He would not have provided the gifts “for the perfecting of the saints . . . and the edifying of the body of Christ.”

The Good Shepherd died that there might be one flock as there is One Shepherd, and no human leader or teacher should be allowed to divide and scatter His sheep. It, therefore, behoves all to examine their hearts and judge all traditional prejudice against fellow believers, humbly confessing their failure to keep the unity of the Spirit for the Lord’s pleasure and glory. This is the only righteous basis for reconciliation and unity, and thus may we awaken to our responsibility to recognise and seek the fellowship of all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

K. P. Frampton

## **HETERODOXY (Error) contrasted with HERESY** (J.N.D.)

As to heresies, I feel a difference between one who, for want of light or from early prejudice, cannot get rid of error, and one who propagates it because then there is the love of error, and the will of the flesh is at work; they are the fruits of the flesh. What is written as to heresy—not as to every one that is in error, even where the error is grave—is, “after the first and second admonition reject.”

(Letters I, p.56)

I trust that it is error, and not heresy. For the latter there must be the evil will of the flesh; and I trust that this is not the case with our brother.

(Letters III, p.117)

Heresy is a work of the flesh, as other grosser things, and surely has to be checked. Errors are often found to affect fundamental truth which many a simple saint may not perceive to do so.

(Letters III, p.248)

I judged the expressions very unhappy, and in themselves unjustifiable. To accuse him of any doctrinal heresy is mere malice; unjustifiable expressions, or even ideas, are totally different from explained and justified doctrine. He is not a person who discerns and is guarded in his expressions, but who follows his ideas; but of his soundness I have no doubt—indeed found him much matured and grown and more reason to be attached to him than ever.

(Letters III, p.306)

I make a difference between a person not rightly dividing the word of truth, and positively teaching on the part of the enemy what dishonours the Person of Christ, or saps any fundamental truth. Few are capable of not overstepping the bounds of sound doctrine, even in opposing positive error. Our beloved brother exposed himself to attacks by expressions. He was sound in his positive truth. I never for a moment would give him up, though the first to warn him, because I was satisfied he was sound in doctrine.

(Letters I, p.378)

## Concerning HERESY

In 1 Cor. xi. 18 the Apostle states that he hears there were divisions or factions among them when they came together in the church; and then, as I believe, asks, "for must there be even sects among you that they which are approved may be manifest among you?" He had condemned all divisions most decidedly in the early part of this letter, and could therefore scarcely be approving of them now. There is no question here about erroneous doctrine, which heresy is commonly, though wrongly, understood to mean; for the whole connection relates to the celebration of the Lord's supper.

The thoughts of God about Heresy are I believe precise and definite. His pleasure is that His people should be one in Christ; one family; members one of another; one body; fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth; knit together. Any thing therefore which is employed to interrupt this oneness, to separate those whom God has joined together, to rend away a whole limb or the smallest member from the whole body of Christ, is contrary to the will of God. This is heresy, or sectarianism; and he that practises it is a heretic. His Master's oft-expressed command is that all His people should be one, and by breaking this command he stands self-condemned, is subverted, and sinneth.

Be it an error or a truth on which he divides or seeks to divide, it alters not the case; he rends the body and is a sectarian, a heretic ! It may be he is true hearted, acting in all sincerity as far as he has light, yet his act speaks for itself, he is an heretic; just as the one who steals, whatever be the motive, is not the less a thief. His motive affects not the question at all. He may think that he is working for God, but a deceived heart has turned him aside, he is doing a work of the flesh, and is a heretic. This is the person who, after the first and second admonition, is to be rejected.

R.N.

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