

24th February, 1955.

To the Saints meeting at  
The Room, Timberhill,  
Norwich.

Beloved brethren in the Lord,

On the evening of Tuesday, 15th inst., you declared your position in relation to myself. Owing to my refusal to withdraw a tract which was admitted to be sound as to doctrine and true as to fact, you pronounced me to be "an heretical man" according to Titus 3 vv.10 & 11, and, as such, excommunicated me from your fellowship, which you claim to be that of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is not at all my object in this letter to dispute the justice of this, (rather I would give myself over to Him who judges righteously), but to define my position in relation to you with whom I have enjoyed such happy communion in the time that is now past. This I deem to be necessary, for otherwise you would naturally assume that I still regard you as the expression of the assembly of God in Norwich and that, sooner or later, I would desire to resume my links with you.

It has become clear to me of late that any claim which you may have had upon the allegiance of a Christian, as such, has been completely forfeited - that in fact your fellowship is not the fellowship of God's Son at all but one of your own devising and, hence, simply sectarian. This I shall now seek to demonstrate and to show, also, that you have publicly renounced the principles upon which brethren have gathered from the days of J.N.D. onward.

It has ever been held among us that the only possible title that a person could have to break bread was that he, or she, was a member of the body of Christ, walking orderly, of course, and sound in the faith. We have said, also, and I think rightly, that for practical fellowship in a broken day, there must be the evidence of one calling on the Lord out of a pure heart - 2 Tim. 2vv.22. These have been, and are still claimed to be, the basic principles governing fellowship amongst us; I am convinced that they are scriptural and, as such, would command the conscience of every saint subject to the authority of God's Word.

But what is the present position? It is now current practice to excommunicate persons who are alike sound in the faith and godly in walk, solely on the basis that they are unable to apprehend what is claimed to be fresh light from God. That claim might be challenged, but I waive it now; the present point is this: the degree of light is made the test of communion. And I unhesitatingly affirm, with J.N.D., that if this is done and "agreement with us is made the rule", then "the principle of brethren's meetings is gone, and another sect is made, say with more light, and that is all." (Letter dated April 19th 1869). I would entreat the beloved brethren to weigh this word, for I am persuaded, before God, that the root of that which troubles so many godly brethren lies here. Scripture knows only one fellowship and it is God who calls to it; who are we to reject those whom God has received? Save only this, that, in a day of ruin, we are to go on with those who are morally in accord with their profession - who "call upon the Lord out of a pure heart."

It is urged by the advocates of this extreme discipline that we are exhorted to be "united in the same mind and in the same opinion." This is true and should surely be taken to heart. But where is there even a hint that failure to respond to the exhortation was to be met by ecclesiastical action? On the contrary: in other passages, it is clearly taken for granted that divergence of thought would exist and most valuable instruction is given regarding such a state of affairs - confessedly an imperfect state, but do we not all have to avow with Paul that now we know "in part"? In Philipians 3 v.15, this beloved apostle speaks thus:

"As many therefore as are perfect, let us be thus minded; and if ye are any otherwise minded this also God shall reveal to you." He is content to wait for God to reveal it; but you are not content to wait; if they cannot see as you see, you will have none of them. How different are the breathings of charity as expressed by him who was pre-eminently the minister of assembly truth: "But whereto we have attained, let us walk in the same steps"! He says nothing of a time limit, much less excommunication, but he is careful to provide them with a model upon whom they can fix their eyes. "But will not this interfere with the worship of God?" some may say. Let Scripture reply: "Now the God of endurance and of encouragement give you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we have the apostle contemplating the worship of God being harmoniously taken up by a company of saints who certainly were not agreed on all points. Some had, in the liberty which the full light of Christianity alone can bring, discarded the ordinances of Judaism; others were not, as yet, in the full gain of the light that was shining. What was to be done? It does not appear that it had occurred to anyone that excommunication was to be resorted to; but some were, apparently, passing censure upon others. Those in liberty were in danger of despising those who were not; and those who were not in the full benefit of divine light were, seemingly, inclined to judge those who were. But this the apostle will not have; to his own Master each one stands or falls - let each be fully persuaded in his own mind. Then he proceeds to show them how God can be glorified in such a case. Hast thou faith? That is, 'Hast thou apprehended the full light of God?' It is well; thou, then, who art strong, bear the infirmities of the weak. Shew thy greatness by a charity worthy of one who has advanced far in the knowledge of Him who despised no man, but bore the burdens of all!

But who that path of service  
Those steps removed from ill,  
Thy patient love to serve us,  
With human tongue can tell?

It will not be easy, but it is the way of Christ; we have His example and the God of all endurance and encouragement to sustain us. He, and He alone, is able to give us to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus so that, spite of our different measures of apprehension, the worship of God flows unhindered. What a happy path of liberty; a duty, too, for every saint where false doctrine is not in question.

But I must return from this happy contemplation of Christian love and forbearance to the actual condition prevailing amongst you. The sectarianism which has been referred to above as now being formally established amongst you, is the more serious because you have abandoned none of your claims to be the expression of the assembly of God. To abandon this ground for sectarianism would be sad indeed; but to combine sectarian principles with catholic pretensions is a terrible thing and God will surely judge it. The Baptists reject those who do not accept their distinctive doctrines, yet they will still acknowledge them as Christians; this is sectarianism and bad enough, - but you, dear brethren, reject those who do not receive your distinctive doctrines - and declare them unworthy of any Christian fellowship; this is iniquity; this is the pride of Babylon, the assumption of Rome. For my part I cannot own it; it is wickedness.

Nor is this all. The teachings which are generally accepted amongst you, which you claim to be "divinely-accredited", are said to carry the full weight of divine authority ("Features of Authority in the Ministry" - S. McCallum). I beg of you, beloved brethren, to ponder this fearful claim. It is to place your teachings on the same level as the Holy Scriptures - for, manifestly, they cannot carry more than the full weight of divine authority. Do not be deceived, brethren; God is not mocked; He will not suffer such pretension to pass unjudged.

greater the light the greater the ruin. I have not arrived at this judgment without deep sorrow of heart for I have loved the brethren and owe them much. Moreover, I have felt, and would desire to feel more deeply, my own part in this fearful failure. And I love the brethren still, with all my heart, and pray for their deliverance from a bondage the like of which has been bound upon Christian souls but once before.

Nevertheless my path is clear. Sectarianism I cannot own; indeed, linked as it is with catholic pretensions, it is abhorrent; and one shrinks instinctively from the assumption which would exalt the teachings of men to the level of God's Word. No doubt there are traces of the former glory - of the time when the light communicated to elect vessels was held in the Spirit's power; and this causes the heart to linger yearningly, however clear the judgment, as that which has once been owned of God must ever do. Yet the system which has developed from such auspicious beginnings stands condemned in the light of God's Word, and I find it impossible to own it as a true expression of Christ's body, the assembly.

Yours affectionately and  
faithfully in the Lord,

(Signed) ROBERT GRUBB.

*July 1955*