

REPLY

TO

An Inquiry Concerning the Circular

ENTITLED

“AN ALLEGORY,”

BY

J. H. BURRIDGE.

GOTHAM GROVE, BRISTOL.

Dear Brother in the Lord :

Your kind letter to hand; thanks for sending “Smallpox Allegory.” I would much rather be occupied with something better, but when I see the fallacy of certain things that are likely to perplex many of the Lord’s dear people, I feel bound to help them if I can. But in doing so I would not have it thought that I am defending a party or saying what I say in support of any party spirit. I would rather look at the Lord’s people as one, and treat of matters concerning their attitude and conduct towards each other from a fair and scriptural point of view, for there is failure enough amongst us wherever we look, whether among those known as Exclusive Brethren or as Open Brethren, so that for my part, I do not feel justified in either vindicating one company or condemning another, for humiliation becometh us all.

Nevertheless, I believe, even in such a state of things as obtains among the Lord's people at the present time, that holiness becometh the Assembly of God. Nor would I remain in an Assembly (great as my desire for Christian fellowship and united effort in the cause of Christ is) that tolerated error of a fundamental nature.

But though I have been up and down the country among Open Brethren now for nearly five years, yet during that time I have not found a meeting in recognized fellowship that would tolerate, on the part of any brother, an attack upon any of the truths that are held *by our Exclusive Brethren* to be the foundation truths of Christianity.

And yet I am far from thinking that they are perfect. There is much failure among them as there is also among the Exclusive Brethren.

It is such failures that Mr. A. N. Groves refers to in his letter to J. N. D., when he says, "I would infinitely rather bear with all their evils than separate from their good," though he calls this failure evil in contrast to good, and is speaking of all true believers, and not of Open Brethren only. Would it not have prevented much needless strife, division, and dishonor to our blessed Lord if Exclusive Brethren had done this?

It is indeed most pitiable to find some of the Lord's servants so persistent in their endeavors to fix charges of false doctrine on a company of many thousands of their brethren, instead of being delighted to find that these brethren are anxious as a whole and endeavor as a whole to maintain the truth that is dear to themselves. Would it not be much better if they would occupy themselves in opening the eyes of the lambs of Christ's flock to evil doctrine, where it really does exist, instead of trying to perplex such lambs by trying to fix charges upon a company of people as sound in the faith as themselves? This is indeed wretched work, indicative of an unchrist like spirit, and certainly not conducive of happiness and fruitfulness in the souls of those who thus busy themselves.

As to the "Smallpox Allegory," I read it when it first appeared, while I was still in the "exclusive school." But the fallacy of it was even at that time manifest to me, though many were deceived by its plausibility. The thing that grieves me most, on seeing a reprint of it in America, is the prejudicial blindness of those who have got it done, who are as dear to me as those of the "open school," and whom I often find myself standing up for in the presence of some who would be their accusers, and these, most of them in an "exclusive school," for there are now many such schools that will not receive even from each other, for smallpox, or some other disease, in the eyes

of each Exclusive school is rampant in all the rest. Each school severally flatters itself that it is the only school free from contagious disease. Now I always had the warmest feelings towards the late C. S., and was truly grieved to find that when the Lord took him, a party of brethren, whom he could not support, wickedly took occasion of his departure to justify themselves, and to condemn an opposite party, saying that he was taken away in judgment; and that for no other reason than that he did not agree with them. Can anything be more sad than this? Can anything manifest a worse and more unchristlike condition of soul? We should expect this from no where else but the "exclusive school." Albeit the Scripture does not say in vain, "With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." Do we not see this verified in a remarkable way in the present condition of the "exclusive school"? They have been falsely charging their brethren of the "open school" for years past, and now they are divided into half a dozen "schools," and there is not one party of them that are not the subjects of false accusations from all the rest. Is not this solemn? Should we not remember it in all we do or say? Though the grace of our blessed God will superabound all our failures for our eternal blessing, yet this retributive government brings our evil back upon our own head now. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

Yet our dear brethren are not exercised about this thing, but still persist in the same evil. One feels like crying out "dear brethren, give up this wretched work which is so dishonoring to our blessed Lord, and let us learn what spirit we are of." For what advantage is it to us to know the truth of Christianity if we do not know and exhibit the spirit of it?

I had been in the habit of looking upon C. S. as a brother not given to ecclesiastical pretension to the same extent as some other of our brethren, but the "Allegory" makes it clear that he was committed to the same prejudice.

Sincerity I do not doubt in any of them. I was sincere myself for years in the same attitude toward the Lord's people, known as Open Brethren. It is the spirit of Christ connected with an exercised conscience that is wanting.

But what is the result to this Exclusive school of this supposed vigilance in shutting out all contagious disease? The result is that some terrible disease—some wrong principle or evil disposition—has been raging among them till the school is scattered and divided into half a dozen pieces. If the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth has been in our midst, the leaven of malice and wickedness has also been there, and that to an appalling extent.

The fallacy of the "Smallpox Allegory" is in its entire want of a scriptural basis. There is not *one single scripture* that can be produced to justify the application of such a figure. Hence, no Scripture is given for the application but one which really condemns it: "Whosoever transgresseth (or goeth beyond) and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. * * * If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed."

What possible application has this to those who do bring the doctrine? We have not here a man who is personally free from smallpox, though coming from a school where a case exists, but one who is *personally* diseased with it. It says, "Receive *him* not." Hence, the "Open school" would not receive him nor wish him God speed. The only other texts quoted are from Second Timothy, both passages inculcating separation from corruptions of christendom, not from real children of God. Neither of these scriptures lend the slightest support to the application made in the "Smallpox Allegory," nor is there any other passage that would do so. The principle illustrated in it is anti-scriptural. It really leaves the lambs and sheep of Christ to the mercy of the wolves, instead of gathering them to Christ and around his word.

Where does Scripture warrant an assembly to refuse a child of God who is sound—though not perhaps well instructed—because he comes from a meeting where there is a teacher who is not sound?

Scripture is clear enough that *the person* who teaches false doctrine, and any person who is morally or doctrinally wicked, should be refused or put away.

Recognized inter-communion is another thing. All along Exclusive Brethren have been receiving children of God continually on their own individual condition of soul, and their relation to our Lord Jesus Christ, and not their relation to a church.

The figure illustrates an idea that has existence in the minds of some brethren, but no existence whatever in the Scriptures.

If the "Smallpox Allegory" condemns the Open school for receiving those who are personally free from disease, though coming from a school where it exists, Scripture does not. What the latter enjoins them to do is to guard against the disease *itself* by excluding all who are personally suffering from it, but to do all that is possible to keep those from it who are free by receiving them under the sheltering wing of sound and Godly shepherds and sound teaching.

If we may use the figure at all as an illustration, this certainly is more scriptural than the other.

Thus we see that the "Smallpox Allegory" has no scriptural application to the case. Hence, it is nothing more than an effort to cast dust in the eyes of the simple.

Did I say that the "Allegory" illustrates an idea or principle held by some brethren? But do they hold it as a principle? The strange part about it is that if we are to go by their own teaching and practice for years past, they only in a boycotting spirit apply the principle to one school, and ignore it with regard to others, and the school thus boycotted is the only other school who will not admit cases of "smallpox," while to those who *have such cases* in their midst the principle is not applied. I repeat, the only school to which the principle is applied is the one that will only receive those personally free from the disease (false doctrine, Newtonian or any other), and would put out any individuals who happened to take the disease while in the school. But other schools which receive those personally suffering from the disease (I am continuing the use of the figure to show its fallacy), and have many cases among them, are not thus treated, for they say (the writer of the "Allegory" has often emphasized it) that it is right to receive individuals who are personally sound in the faith, or in the words of the "Allegory," free from smallpox, though they come from the Congregational or Baptist school, in which cases of smallpox abound. A case in point came under my notice eight months ago in the town of I—. An Exclusive meeting there that would not think of allowing a brother or sister from the Open meeting to break bread, nevertheless allowed a person from the Congregational Church to do so, though continuing to go to the Congregational Church. I am not saying that they were wrong in supposing the person was sound in the faith, but I cite it as a proof of what I here state, viz., that the principle of the "Allegory" is applied only to the "Open school," whereas, if it were a true and scriptural principle, it should be applied generally. But we all know that the "Exclusive school" has received individuals from the churches around (as Christians, as they would say) from the first. Moreover, they know if they have scriptural views of the Church of God and the Lord's table, that they cannot scripturally refuse children of God who are personally sound in the faith.

It is admitted that those who are thus sound, when brought under a more enlightened ministry, will have no desire to return to an unsound teacher.

I know that some of our brethren labor to reason this inconsistency away by saying that the "Open school" is in a different position, and professes what the others do not, etc., etc. But this is an empty and illogical argument. The only

difference in their position is that they are more free from "smallpox," hence, if any difference is made, it should be in their favor, surely.

If the principle applies at all, it applies to all schools, and certainly a little more forcibly to such schools as have cases of "smallpox" in their midst than to that one which would not admit a case and would exclude any one from their midst who happened to take it.

Albeit, is it not passing strange that the leaders of the "Exclusive school" and the writer of the "Allegory" have been blind to the fact that whatever they think of the measures taken by the "Open school," they have been effectual in keeping out "smallpox" from their midst for forty years? For there has not been an outbreak of the error illustrated by "smallpox" during this time, and I have not found a teacher among them who does not abhor the teaching in question. Is it not strange, I say, that seeing "forty years" have passed and no outbreak of "smallpox" in the "Open school," yet the "Exclusive school" persists in condemning them and the measures they have taken against it?

While on the other hand, I am humbled to say, in the "Exclusive school" "smallpox," or some other disease that is considered infectious, has been continually breaking out, for during the last fifteen years especially there has every three or four years been an outbreak of disease (evil) so infectious that part of the "school" have been obliged to separate themselves from the other part, which they considered infected by such disease.

As to what is said in this paper about bitterness and slander, I need not dwell upon. Doubtless there have been wrong things said on all sides, but every unprejudiced person who knows anything at all about the two "schools" knows that the preponderance of these evils has been in the Exclusive one.

What, then, becomes of this "Allegory," and with it all that is said about the "Letter of the Ten?" Why do our brethren keep waving this letter before the eyes of the Lord's people as some wicked document? Let them prove that it is wrong to receive a child of God sound in the faith because he comes from a congregation where there is a teacher who is not sound, for this is the simple point, and the controverted point of the letter, and the subject of the "Allegory" we have been considering. This they have not done, nor can they do.

Then what, oh! what can we who see the delusion do to remove it from the minds of our beloved brethren, so that as

the children of God and members of the body of Christ we may be more united?

I have dwelt largely on this "Allegory" because it is based upon the "Letter of the Ten," and the point, simple as it is, of both it and the letter is the point of the bitter and long controversy between so many of the Lord's redeemed people—namely, the reception of a child of God on his personal faith and soundness, though he come from a congregation in which an unsound teacher is tolerated. We maintain that it is not only right and scriptural to receive such, but against Scripture, contrary to the spirit of Christ, and a grievous want of love and care on our part, and perilous to the faith of the one who applies, to refuse. Is not this so? If it is, we have been making a great ado and kicking up a tremendous fuss—nay, wickedly setting ourselves in array against thousands of God's children for a wrong that has no existence, save in the imagination of our own hearts, engendered by an evil disposition and ill feeling. Brethren, let us have done with this wretched and Christ dishonoring work!

There are just one or two more things in this paper that require a few remarks.

As to the letter by James Wright, given on page 4, I only need say that it is not surprising that many Open Brethren should sincerely think that what J. N. D. wrote on the third class sufferings of Christ was erroneous, since many of the Exclusive Brethren themselves did at the time, and I think all must admit that at least some questionable applications are made in that work. However, I am sure we need to be very careful when we approach the Psalms, as to the application we make of them, or parts of them, to Christ.

The other part of this letter simply has to do with the old point, which we have been considering.

At the bottom of page 5, C. S. speaks of the editor of the *Christian*, as one of the leaders of the "Open school."

To this I have only to say that it is misleading, if not dishonest. The editor of the *Christian*, so far from being a leader among them, has not been in their fellowship for years before this paper was written. C. S. speaks of the leaders of this "Open school" as regretting that Mr. Spurgeon, as well as Mr. Darby, should withdraw from evil, and then the only example he can give is that one who is not even in fellowship with Open Brethren, much less one of their leaders. What a sad want of equity is manifest in all this. Moreover, how strange that C. S. should endeavor to give the Exclusive school the weight of Mr. Spurgeon's name and benefit of his godly action,

committing him to the judgment of those who think it wrong to receive sound children of God!!

In the first place, all Open Brethren's meetings and leaders were in the fullest sympathy with C. H. Spurgeon at the time of his action. And all know, who know anything about him or read his papers at that time, that his belief and action was in accordance with the judgment and action of the "Open school," and that so far from refusing those who were personally sound, though coming from a congregation where an unsound teacher had a place, he would be delighted to receive and instruct them. Mr. Spurgeon's idea of separation was from evil persons, not from sound children of God; from the unsound teachers themselves, and not from individuals who were sound. This is precisely the idea of the "Open school."

With regard to A. N. Groves' letter, referred to on page 6, I ask, would any reader, from what appears here, know that the words quoted were penned *twelve years before the division took place*, before there was any "Exclusive school" in contradistinction from the "Open school?"

The words occur in the famous letter of A. N. Groves to J. N. D., in the year 1836. The writer is withstanding certain sectarian barriers which were in his judgment *then* being set up. Its reappearance in the *Christian* the editor of that paper is responsible for. Mr. Groves believed it was right to have fellowship with those who have divine life wherever they were; to go with them as far as they went with the truth, but no farther, and if the truth went beyond them, to go beyond them with the truth. The words quoted in the "Allegory" were written in *this* connection and applied to *all* true Christians—not to the "Open school" only, for there was then no such distinction as *Open* and *Exclusive* "schools." And yet the writer of the "Allegory" gives them as words spoken by one of the Open school, and as applied to that "school" only.

Dear brother, does not all this show an anti-Christian *desire* on the part of our brethren to fix evil charges upon many thousands of their brethren, whereas the spirit of Christ and of love would *desire* to clear them if possible, and most certainly would believe no charge of evil that could not be fully established.

As to the merits of the said letter itself, I can only say, let those who read it judge. It is certainly a remarkable letter when read in the light of all that has taken place among brethren since it was written. Wisdom is justified of her children. I repeat, let the unprejudiced read and judge of it in the light of Scripture, and not in the light of brethrenism or any other ism.

I have only to add that I fully admit that in the present day great care and watchfulness is needed to preserve the holiness of God's assembly; that the exercise of judgment in making a difference; that true and faithful admonition and scriptural discipline should all have their place, otherwise evil may soon creep in.

May I here add a few words concerning the paper recently issued by our brethren on your side of the Atlantic?—*"Reasons for Our Position Toward Open Brethren."* I am truly sorry that brethren whom I love should show such a want of steadfastness and bring such child's play into the cause of Christ as is manifested on comparing their three circulars during the last two years. Could any candid mind read and compare these three papers (the one named above, and one dated June, 1893, "To our brethren in Christ in England and elsewhere gathered with us to the name of the Lord Jesus," and "the Plainfield circular") without being struck with the capriciousness which they evince. Surely, it is unworthy of our calling as children of God and servants of Christ Jesus to act in such a way.

The following is the first paragraph in the "Plainfield circular":

"In response to the call sent forth to brethren to assemble here to consider the questions in connection with our relation to (so-called) 'Open Brethren,' a large number came together. We would thankfully recognize the Lord's grace in enabling us to feel our dependence upon as well as our responsibility to Him, with love also to those that are His people. Several days were devoted to the consideration of the matter from all sides, and free expression of judgment was given. The following conclusions were accepted with great unanimity, for which we give thanks to God."

Such a scriptural course in this connection had never been taken before. Compare with this the two circulars of later date referred to above—also those advertised at the end of "Reasons for our position toward Open Brethren." It is scarcely credible that brethren who could convince such a meeting as the above, and then speak of it in this way, thus making known to the Lord's people generally that a large number gathered together recognizing the Lord's grace in enabling them to feel their dependence as well as their responsibility to Him; then devoting several days "to the consideration of matters from all sides and with free expression of judgment," and the conclusions accepted "with great unanimity," for which God be thanked! And yet the moment individuals began to complain, and prejudiced brethren from other parts (who had not been thus gathered in recognition of the Lord's grace, and in dependence upon Him to consider the matter

from all sides) began to censure, these very brethren, thus gathered, turned right round and retracted their conclusions (which were arrived at in a large meeting in dependence upon and feeling their responsibility to the Lord, and thus considering the matter from all sides and accepting the said conclusion with great unanimity), have fallen back upon their old arguments, and are now found making renewed attacks! How solemn! Are we not justified in asking, are our brethren really sincere? Well, I am inclined to think they are. But what influences are they yielding themselves to? That other influences than those of the grace of Christ, and their responsibility to Him and His truth, are at work, is certain on comparing the three papers mentioned. For that fixedness of purpose and singleness of eye that should characterize servants of Christ is most deplorably lacking. How perplexing to the sheep and lambs of Christ such wavering conduct must be! For the moment, at Plainfield, our brethren appeared to have abandoned that anti-Christian desire to fix the charge of evil doctrine on some thousands of their brethren as desirous as themselves of maintaining the truth; but alas! how soon they have returned to their old practice. Oh! I am sure they are unhappy in it. We cannot be found taking sides with the accuser to such an extent with a good conscience. But, surely, the candid and unprejudiced of the Lord's people would rather form their conclusions from the result of investigations made at such a meeting, and in such a scriptural way, as described in the paragraph we have been looking at, than they would from the old arguments and groundless charges subsequently returned to (by some leaders who were present), under the influence of the criticism and censure of some prejudiced individuals about the country, or from other countries, who were not present.

As one present at the Plainfield Conference, the following paragraph thoroughly surprises and deeply grieves me:

"We can only say that, *had we been sure of what this letter from England now affirms*, before the meeting two years ago, the Plainfield circular would not have been sent out. That circular, violated by some, was confessedly but conditional on the evidence given us being found true. It called attention to the fact that the past was not clear, but the belief was entertained that the present principles and practices of Open Brethren were changed, and it was hoped that they would be led on further to judge the past, and to settle other questions still remaining. So far from this, they have but ignored the past, reiterated their former principles, and thus proven that "as their fathers did so do they." We are, therefore, in honesty bound to say *that we were misled by statements made us at the*

Plainfield meeting, and with our present knowledge that circular could not have been sent forth."

I am sorry that "in honesty I am bound to say" that a most sad want of moral rectitude is manifested here. They *were* sure that "The Letter of the Ten" was not withdrawn, as the following from the second circular (June 1, 1893) shows: It was there (at Plainfield) agreed that "intercommunion with those in fellowship with Bethesda or Open Brethren (so-called) was not contemplated, so long as 'The Letter of the Ten' with its evil principles was unjudged and allowed to stand."

The Plainfield circular itself also shows that they were sure of the fact that it had not been withdrawn—only in this latter they leave out in their reference to that letter the words "with its evil principles," because, as the circular goes on to show, they are at least gracious enough to accept the explanation of their brethren who wrote the letter, which, however, they again ignore in the second and third circulars. What a difference it makes in our judgment of matters concerning our brethren when the spirit and grace of Christ are allowed their place in our hearts! Then, and then only, will we investigate things in a fair and scriptural way, with a desire to clear our brethren, if they can be righteously cleared. But where there is an evil disposition the report, as long as it is evil, is taken for granted in spite of contradiction. It is so with us all, if we are not kept near the Lord in *self judgment*.

As to the principles of "The Letter of the Ten," taken with the explanation, I told our brethren at the Plainfield Conference that *some* meetings held them to be scriptural, while the majority, without saying they were unscriptural did not act upon them. At the same time I asked our brethren to lay aside all prejudice and plainly prove to me that the principle of receiving a child of God sound in the faith himself, but coming from a meeting, church or chapel which tolerated an erroneous teacher was wrong—*i. e.*, not that such would be allowed to play fast and loose by going to and fro, but for the instruction and recovery of such, *which is the point* of the letter in question. Maintaining, as I avowed at the same time, that if it is wrong in principle to receive such from one body of Christians, it is from any and all bodies where an erroneous teacher is allowed; and yet we, as Exclusives, have been doing so all along.

Yes, and even betimes allowing such individuals to go to and fro between the system, in which erroneous teachers might be found in numbers, and ourselves. This question, to the best of my knowledge, received no reply. Our brethren have *never yet produced a scripture showing that it is wrong*. Many may be produced to show that it is right. How, then, in the face of

these facts, can our brethren write: "We are, therefore, in honesty (?) bound to say that we were misled by statements made at the Plainfield meeting?" The "some" who are accused of violating the Plainfield circular are such as have failed to see that "the evidence given" has not been found true, and are willing to hold the circular to its conditions.

As to our Brother Holborrow's remarks, quoted in this paper, I cannot say that I go with him, nor, indeed, do I believe that it is right to try and solve what the scripture speaks of as an avowed mystery—"Great is the mystery of Godliness; God manifest in the flesh," etc. It is unholy, if not positively wicked to subject the person of Christ to the analysis of human intellect. All who have attempted it have brought trouble on themselves. But I think that Mr. Raven's attempt at such unholy analysis is tenfold worse than these simple remarks, which, after all, are only suppositions of what is possible to God, if He so designed it. But it is safer to keep what is written. Nevertheless, I do not know anything more sad in one who professes to serve Christ than the fictitious spirit, the catch-word vigilance and the extreme views that are seen in Mr. W. Richard's articles and replies; it seems to me to be inconsistent to almost an hypocritical degree for a brother to profess to be so anxious to maintain the truth, and yet just as anxious to fix charges upon thousands of his brethren in a spirit so contrary to the truth.

We need to know the spirit of Christianity as well as the truth of it, for "the kingdom of God is *not in word only, but in power.*"

I only need add, concerning this paper, that truly our brethren could not have found two more opportune texts by which to exhort each other than the two given at the close of this paper. May the gracious Lord apply them to their consciences concerning their present conduct in such a way as to open their eyes.

"Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God; and let the *Lord* do that which is good in His sight." (1. Chron. xix: 13.)

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity." (1. Cor., xvi: 13-14.)

One can but hope that these quotations indicate that the great want of valor for the *people and cities of our God*, as well as the want of charity in all things, which are manifest in the ways of our dear brethren, is not altogether unfelt by them.

Yours affectionately in Christ Jesus,

J. H. BURRIDGE.