

Why Go Over the Sea?

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“Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say: Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart that thou mayest do it.”
(Deut. xxx: 13, 14.)

In these words Moses presses on his people that no matter where they were—scattered it may be to the “Very ends of heaven”—yet if their *heart* were but right, if the Word had only found a lodgment *there*, they could obey it. Obedience did not necessitate going over the sea; and our own beloved apostle, whilst he does not quote the words of Moses with exactness, yet so uses them, that what is obscurely suggested by Moses, is clearly expressed by himself. It is a question of the *heart* being right with God—of His Word being *loved*, and of the heart desirous

to obey it. So he applies it, not as Moses to the law, but to Christ: "*if thou shall confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*"

Now it is because we believe that a principle is involved in this Scripture, and the way it is used by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, that is of most valuable practical service for us to-day, that we thus refer to it.

Were the word so "nigh" us—in our *hearts*—did we "*tremble at*" it—fear above all things disobedience to it for an instant, believe that it is quite sufficient for every emergency, it may well be questioned if we should not instinctively suspect that anything that led to the need of a deputation, or delegation, or representation of brethren going "over the sea," excellent as the motive may have been, had not in it some dangers, and did not possibly involve some principle *not of faith*. For until the return of that delegation of

messenger brethren from over the sea the mass of saints in that “confederacy” must just go along, not in personal exercise and submission to a “word very nigh” them; but if Scripture touches the matter clearly, in disobedience to Scripture.

This is certainly serious if true—let us see if it be true. We will make no charges, nor bring up anything that shall induce controversy; but simply state what is admitted.

First then there is what is called a *Circle of Fellowship*: this is not only admitted, but indeed claimed to be necessary and justifiable. It is asserted to be the only alternative to *Independency*. It is, however, a Circle of Assemblies that in no case includes all, but indeed frequently very few, of the Lord’s people. This, too, is not only admitted but explained, and made the basis of a further claim, for this few is “the little flock” or “the remnant”—humble names, covering excessive assumptions as may be readily seen.

But when we ask what name does the *Word of God* give this necessary, and justifiable, and peculiarly devoted Circle of Fellowship? it is not so easy to determine.

We find no "Circle of Fellowship" mentioned there in that way at all events; what is there? There is the Church or Assembly; there are the local churches or assemblies. Is this Circle then the same thing as the Church, only under another name. (The local assembly it cannot possibly be, since it is a *circle* of assemblies.) If there were but *one* such circle, and that inclusive in principle of all saved souls, we ought surely not to quarrel with the mere term—this would be but captious. But there are many of these circles, and all in opposition either to all the others, or to some of the others, each making exactly the same claim for itself, and which, if true, destroys utterly that of all the rest. But each one then thus confessedly puts outside its barriers very many of the Lord's beloved and blood-bought

people. Not one of them then—no matter what the claim—can be the Church which admittedly includes what these exclude. What is it then? What are they *all*? There is but one answer possibly to truth, and although it pains both to speak and hear it, and there is a natural effort to escape from the edge that cuts, yet it is better to be plainly stated: *It is a sect; they all are sects; they cannot possibly be anything else.* Is there any need to “*go over the sea*” to discover whether a sect is justifiable, or continued connection with it pleasing to God? Is not the Word nigher than that? Oh that it were indeed “in our *hearts.*” And as the word “Sect” is the one Scripture applies to whatever “*cuts off,*” or does not in principle include every *true and manifested member of the One Body, walking in holiness and love;* it is not an accusation against our beloved brethren, but against the unscriptural thing that is a reproach to us all, and mars our usefulness and testimony, and makes us like shorn Samson a

cause of sport—of scornful ridicule to the enemies of God's truth on every side.

Whence do sects come? Nor is there need to "go over the sea" for an answer. "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery: six forms of corruption. Enmities, strifes, jealousies, indignations, contentions, divisions, SECTS (A. V. "heresies" R. V. mar. "parties"), envyings, murders; nine forms of violence, running from hidden "hatred" to open "murder" with sects well on the way to this end. Then the list finishes with two usually regarded as mere evidences of good fellowship: drunkenness, revelling. A pretty companionship for "Sects," is it not?*

But, thank God, whilst the flesh is in all believers still; and but too active in lusting as these constantly multiplying "Sects" prove, yet is there *Another* who is also active in and amongst them: in desiring against the flesh: the Holy Spirit;

ever making them *desire* to get together, even as a flock of sheep around its one Shepherd. This has been strongly manifested of late, and indeed it is in this connection that some brethren, who may surely be termed, in all respect, representative of a certain limited Circle of Fellowship here have "gone over the sea." There is a movement on foot to do away with a barrier between two of these Circles. There is a widespread recognition that *this* barrier at least was not divinely formed, and hence is of evil construction and there is a "*desire*" for it to be torn down.

Assume that this is done, what has resulted? Has it altered the nature of the two constituent parts? Has it touched the root of the matter at all? Not in the slightest degree. *There is one larger Sect where there were two smaller ones* for Sect it still is since its limits are not co-equal with the *manifested* members of the Body of Christ, it still "*cuts off*" many evident members of that Body, there are still

barriers that exclude many of the Sheep of Christ.

A larger Sect! What results? Greater self-complacency, less openness to conviction, greater claims. Not of course openly expressed, that would never do. On the contrary, there must be a certain amount of decent lowliness of speech, even in order to maintain self-complacency; but this confession of parties to each other is very limited, the root is never reached. *If the very existence of parties or sects in the Church of God is a sin*, there must be confession of *this*, and repentance involves a forsaking of this sin, does it not, my brethren? But have we ever heard a party confessing the sin of its own existence? It is an impossibility. As a party it would cease to exist.

The Word is very nigh *thee*—*thee* my reader, *thee* no matter which side of the sea thou art. It is intensely individual, as is responsibility primarily in this last hour. You need not,

oh you *must* not await any return from "over the sea." Be yourself simply obedient to the clear light God gives you on His Word. Repent of your failure to obey in the past, recognize and approve all that that Word recognizes and approves, you will, beyond a shadow of uncertainty, find yourself in One Circle *inclusive of every dear saint so manifested*. (Does that not appeal to you?) Disavow and ignore all that the Scriptures reprobate; and lo, without a journey "over the sea;" not *one*, but *all* human barriers are down instantaneously; all saints are recognized as "in fellowship," all sects are reprobated and ignored, except as confessed before God as a common sin in which we all share; does not your conscience approve of that? Then may the materials that have formed these false barriers between saints be more worthily used in excluding this wretched world and the sin that so easily besets us all. Then may the love of all saints to one another be free to show itself in mutual comfort, and mu-

tual and much-needed exhortation. Then may the energy that the redeemed have wasted in suicidal strife, be used, as God would have it, in striving together, with heart close to heart, for the common faith dear to them all, and which is so insolently attacked in this "day of rebuke and blasphemy;" oh happy consummation most devoutly to be wished.

Let me add one word to do away with an evident misconception. It has been said and written that one who takes this position of fellowshiping *saints* as such, irrespective of parties or circles, consider our brethren in these contending Circles—"exclusive," or "open," or "what-not"—as being "too particular" in their care as to reception.

It is no mere turn of language, but sober fact when we assure them that the case is just the *reverse*. We do not esteem them nearly particular enough, but (unconsciously, of course), altogether too loose and indifferent as to their reception of and identification with evil.

If evil is of *one* character only and if the works of the flesh are only *corrupt*, not *violent*; if danger is only on one side of our narrow way, then are we quite unjustified in so speaking, for great is their care on the one side. But if evil be dual; if it be equally evil, being *corrupt* evil, to receive fundamentally false-teachers, and to reject one's beloved brethren this being of the *violent* character—if the Third Epistle of John is as much a part of the inspired Word as the Second Epistle, then do our beloved brethren, in their attitude to so many of God's blood-bought saints, shew a marvelous carelessness, an inexplicable indifference, an astounding looseness in their admission of *evil* into their midst, that would make any charge of their being "too particular" simply ridiculous.

We are sorrowfully convinced they are following what is absolutely evil (3 John 9-11), and will rue it forever. Can we keep silent?

Is this a malicious accusation? God forbid.

Are we not distinctly told not to suffer sin upon our brother ; and love, true love, divine and genuine love will, at the cost of being misunderstood, and, as God knows, shrinking from this, seek to save those we love from so manifest a sin and danger—this is surely not accusation. Again, we would not, and do not, separate ourselves from those of whom we speak. We are absolutely one with them ; they are “in our hearts to die and live with them :” their sorrow is our sorrow, their shame our shame, their sin our sin ; we are one with them forevermore. We include them all as we do every dear child of God in our Circle of Fellowship, for we are determined God being our Helper to be no longer governed practically in our conduct by humanly constructed parties or circles of whatever name ; but to recognize and practically act on what is alone incontrovertibly found in Scripture :

1st, *the local assembly*, which is, apart altogether from the numbers that actually gather, the

Body of Christ in the spot in which it assembles, perhaps a private house as Phil. ii :2, Rom. xvi :5 ; *if* the Lord Jesus is alone their Head ; and *if* they, in spirit and in principle, include and count as one with them every member of that Body, evidenced by holiness and love, everywhere.

2nd is practically the same thing. Saints comprising the Body of Christ on the earth wherever they may be found. We will not permit any barrier of our making between us, nor put one of the strength of a straw before them and their approach to the Lord's Table.* We own that simple obedience leads us to love, serve (Gal. v), yea, exercise mutual submission with every one of them (Pet. v), and to remember that it is not members of an unscriptural "circle of fellowship" who need one another, as do the members of our natural bodies, but members of *the Body of Christ* (I Cor. xii). Unscriptural parties tend

*This assumes that they are not subjects of scriptural discipline—*then no fellowship at all.*

to unscriptural independency. This Word again is not over the sea but very nigh us—may it be in our hearts.

And *doing it*, we shall never have part nor lot in rejecting saints clearly manifested as having been received by Christ to the glory of God: *doing it*, we shall walk in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free of fellowshipping all saints: *doing it*, we shall not need to separate from our brethren even in the “party” with which we have been connected; for *doing it*, the barriers will fall; or to save them, those in pre-eminence will see that we are, by one means or another, put outside those barriers, where we may (if we allow no retaliatory hardness of spirit), enjoy sweeter fellowship with Him who is also outside a closed door in these last days.

He comes quickly; oh may we be found of Him in peace.

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