

A LETTER

AS TO FAITHFULNESS
IN TAKING OUR PLACE
OUTSIDE THE CAMP.

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A LETTER

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MY DEAR BROTHER,—You ask me for something clear as to *our* holding aloof from the work of system—by “our” you mean those who gather together in the Lord’s name, and are seeking to hold fast His word and not to deny His name—those who seek to walk in “the truth.”

It would be easy for me to say :

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If a Christian has realised that Jesus suffered without the gate (that is, outside the centre of a system of worldly ordinances), and if he has gone forth to Him without the camp, how can he in any wise have fellowship with that which goes on within the camp? But a difficulty arises in the minds of many, because of the fact that (like Eldad and Medad, who prophesied in the camp, and of whom Joshua said, "My lord Moses, forbid them") there are those who preach the gospel, and through whom souls are converted, while they still remain in the camp. Those who have this difficulty are those who have the conversion of souls much on their hearts, but who, I judge, look at it more from their own

feelings than from being in fellowship with the love of God, and its outflow according to *His own glory* and His righteous grace. Hence it is not merely that they rejoice that Christ is preached, though it be in the camp (and who would forbid them to preach?), but they seek to have *fellowship* with it, and often accept the idea of so-called broader views than the narrow path of obedience and separation to Christ permits. With some, service is put before communion—Martha before Mary, and they own that they prefer Martha to Mary. To such I can only commend the passage, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Sam. xv. 22.)

There are some doubtless who

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have found meetings of saints ready to their hand, and have taken their place in them without much exercise *as to going forth to Him* without the camp. For their sakes I would say a word as to the character of "the camp." It is evident from Exodus xix. 2 that it signified the encampment of the people whom God had redeemed out of Egypt, and with whom He was about to enter into covenant at the mount of God ; so that we may say it was an enclosure in which the people whom God owned to be His, and over whom He spread His cloud for a covering, rested. Now, whatever the *people* thought or did that was contrary to these gracious actings of God, *His* taking them to be His people was in truth and

faithfulness. He cannot be anything but what He is, for He is God. On their part there was neither truth nor faithfulness *as to their place with God*, and hence when Moses was gone up to God in the mount, they made a golden calf and set it in the camp, and changed their glory (for God was their glory) into the similitude of an ox that eateth hay, and Moses heard on coming down the sound of revelry in the camp, as "they offered sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced *in the work of their own hands.*" (Acts vii. 41.)

The testimony in that day to Israel was of the one true and only God, and His glory they lowered down to the work of their own hands, for they had said, "To-

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morrow is a feast to Jehovah." The testimony now is to the one Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom God is pleased to approach men, and to His Lordship as He sits at God's right hand—the One in whom is salvation, the great High Priest of our profession, who has died out of this world which rejected Him, and is gone within the veil, God's elect and precious foundation stone though disallowed of men. Christianity proper subsists in the truth of Christ, disowned of men, but raised from the dead and glorified by God on the one side; and on the other, that by the death of Christ man in nature has been proved to be lost and dead before God, and his salvation and hope are alone in

Christ, who was lifted up out of the earth. It is as thus lifted up on the tree that man is saved out of ruin and judgment by Him who hung there, and ruin and judgment are left behind to possess Christ and Christ only.

What took place with Israel was this, that in connecting Jehovah's name with the work of their hands, they associated His name with the idolatry and festivals of Egypt from whence they had been delivered, and this attempt to mix what was human, "the work of their own hands," with what was divine, now gave its character to the camp instead of Jehovah's glory. What Moses did in this state of things was to pitch a tent (for the tabernacle was not

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yet made, and yet this tent had the moral character of the tabernacle, for it is emphatically called "*the tabernacle*") without the camp, "afar off from the camp." Though it was a refuge for every one *who sought the Lord* and went outside the camp, yet it was there for the whole congregation, for Moses called it the tabernacle of the *congregation*—or the tent of meeting. It was for *every one* who sought Jehovah apart from the ways of the camp.

What has taken place in Christianity is the mixing in some way of the human element, the leaven of human thought and action, with the truth of Christ, so that it ceases to be the truth. Man in every way got his judgment in

the cross and has been disallowed of God, and in resurrection Christ, that one perfect Man, has been accepted of God. The effort has been and is to place the man rejected by God in association with the accepted Man; and that effort has formed again the moral character of the camp. The effort in the apostle's day was to go on with, or go back to, Judaism (the man rejected by God), instead of seeking companionship with Him who suffered without the gate, and has gone as the accepted Man within the veil. In our day this has succeeded, and Christianity has become systematised by man, and Christ's holy name has been linked with human arrangement, "the work of their own hands."

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The effect of this is a great slighting of the Spirit of God. He came as the Witness of the judgment of the world, as well as of its sinful condition; and He came to bear witness of God's acceptance of Christ in resurrection, and to glorify Him. If the human elements which joined aforetime to crucify Christ are acknowledged as having part in Christianity, it must grieve the Spirit of God, and slight Him—human energy supplanting the energy of the Spirit. Now, if our eyes are open to see the true character of this mixture of woollen and linen (Deut. xxii. 11), Christ Himself becomes to us the tabernacle to which we repair without the camp, and if He is

the tabernacle to us how can we promote fellowship with those who abide in the camp? If they prophesy there instead of going out to the tabernacle, we do not seek to oppose or forbid, but we cannot have fellowship with the principle of the camp.

There is one more point which is important. Going without the camp, though it be *to* Him, is not realising in communion what we possess *in* Him, and if souls are occupied with merely taking a right position, there will be the tendency to seek for something elsewhere, because they are not drawing from the fulness of the Head. The Epistle to the Colossians meets this difficulty, shewing also that one who does not hold

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the Head seeks elsewhere, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. It is the fleshly mind which would add the elements of the world to Christ. In growing up to the Head Christians have no need to recognise any worldly element. Christ's body (and all true Christians are of it) is, so to speak, self-contained; every joint of supply deriving from Christ, the body builds itself up in love. (Eph. iv. 16.) No human element can effect that, and as we are conscious of the fulness of the Head and of being complete in Him, we seek to guard what we have in Him from admixture with the elements of the world. No saint would look to any one but Christ for salvation, but some do rejoice in the work of

men's hands, in that which has given Christendom the character of "the camp," and beautiful singing, eloquence, fine buildings, and the adaptation of God's truth to men's ideas are found therein.

That grace overrides man's failure, and that God should use the prophesying of an Eldad or a Medad in the camp to the conversion of souls, is no warrant for one who has gone without *to Him* to return thither, or have fellowship with its ways, though one can rejoice in God's grace going out in spite of man's failure ; but the real place to appreciate that grace, and to grow up into Christ in all things, is found in holding to the Head, and drawing from His fulness.

“If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be *as my mouth*: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.”
(Jer. xv. 19.)

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