

(Background on the pamphlet)

To the many brethren that I love:

After one reads the many Brethren quotes that are offered here, it may well be asked, what brought about the changes we see today? I do not suggest that I have that answer, but I present their comments and quotes with the hope to help any sincere reader to find some answers. Today, most brethren leaders have inherited the exclusive 'traditions' they find themselves practicing. The Bible does require the people of God to exclude the ungodly and the wicked (1Cor 5:9-13) from among themselves, but NOT the truly godly with whom one may have a disagreement.

I only ask for you to consider these comments prayerfully. Some may have a different take on this work, as a result of the unique circumstances of their experience in the assemblies. I highly value the 50 years of time personally spent among the exclusive TW Brethren (~21 years in Grand Rapids, some 30 years in both Cleveland and Cuyahoga Falls, OH). If any personal bias is reflected in my comments, I ask your forgiveness, But I encourage the reader to carefully consider the scriptures referenced. For the Word of God should have the same authority over us, as it had over those early brethren.

Convinced of the need to understand that there will always be some differences among the redeemed people of God; because we are human, and we often fail to understand the scriptures clearly. Some things that I have seen with today's TW Brethren, in my lifetime, would truly shock the early brethren whom I have quoted. So I resist the temptation to try to influence Brethren when I visit them, and take full responsibility for my own comments.

I wish you brethren well, you are my friends, and I know our Lord's interest is, and has always been, in the well being of ALL of His people! I do love you, but He loves you very much!

– An unworthy servant of Christ. - Henry J. DeGraaf
December, 2014 - Stow, Ohio 44224

About Brethren

You may have come across this pamphlet with very little knowledge of who “Plymouth Brethren” are or of their history. The movement began in Dublin, Ireland, and in England, in 1827, with believers drawn to their simplicity of worship, a clear gospel message, and their diligent study of the Bible. The Brethren movement quickly spread elsewhere into Europe, America, and in many nations following their preaching of the gospel, emphasis on “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers” (Acts 2:42). And as a church, led by the Holy Spirit, expecting the soon return of Christ.

Trouble and division was soon to follow, leading into two separate streams, one known as ‘Open Brethren’ and the other known as ‘Closed’ or ‘Exclusive Brethren’. This pamphlet is addressed to the latter group, which by this present time is now further divided into many variations of that exclusive stream.

Over the years, certain practices regarding fellowship among the ‘Closed’ group gradually changed to become what may be observed today among those known as Exclusives. Early leaders,¹ seeing sectarian tendencies, were troubled, believing some assemblies were leaving their nonsectarian beginnings. So they wrote to warn against it, as some among them tried to protect what they believed to be ‘the truth’ raising walls to exclude believers from the churches, and from other Brethren assemblies, from whom they had separated. These today are often referred to as the TWs, in reference to a Tunbridge Wells assembly in England in 1910. (Dissenters are excluded from participating in communion, a primary focus of their worship.)

Those walls have keep these Brethren separate, but did not help them to walk in the truth of the One Body. Becoming more focused on fellowship among themselves, they became more and more isolated from the Body of Christ as a whole.

¹ A few of these: John Nelson Darby, William Kelly, and C.H Mackintosh, along with a few later leaders are quoted here.

Preface to the 2013 edition:

Among the early “Plymouth” Brethren, after an inspired start, a pall of division soon fell on what was once truly a work of the Holy Spirit. However, in those early years (1845-1900s) of the Brethren movement, division alone did not prevent individual believers from being received, even though coming from another group. Today this is no longer the case.

Early Brethren were pioneers in the practice of receiving all known godly believers for communion, while refusing others.² Joining the assembly was not an issue. Today this is now reversed. Many churches will freely receive known Christians, while exclusive brethren require even the most godly to “take their place” with them first. The *early practice* of brethren reveals the importance they placed on keeping the unity of the Spirit, **not** of their own body only, but the essential truth of the One Body discovered by searching the scriptures.

What developed later among the Exclusive branch of these Brethren was a sense of entitlement. Where at first none would dare turn away a godly Christian from the Lord’s Table, fleshly³ squabbling eventually caused this to become a standard practice. Walls were raised, barring believers from the “other side” of every division, excluding godly believers who dearly valued and strove to apply the same truths that they themselves held. (I refer to those who would not first leave “the other side” of a division, disowning the group from which they came.)

After the recent Ottawa divisions, many have now left the TWs. When visiting TW tables, those unable to declare an allegiance to “the correct side” are often required, via a letter, to take sides in order to break bread. Any personal reservations, doubts, or questions expressed, as to their actions to exclude individuals or other Brethren groups, is sufficient to guarantee being turned away from the Lord’s Table. This has been the case for many saints in the various divisions among these brethren.

Having personally visited three North American “exclusive TW” assemblies in 2012, and others later, I can confirm that the practice of excluding visitors, known to be godly, for the most part continues unchanged. For me, this is the compelling reason to re-publish and distribute this pamphlet.

It must be understood that in many of the quotes used herein, the term "received" is defined and understood to mean received *in simplicity*, not, "received into fellowship", as brethren usually speak of reception today. When these early brethren wrote of “receiving” a Christian, they were speaking of allowing him to partake of the emblems on Sunday morning, if visiting. There was no question of his joining a given brethren fellowship, or of renouncing the “wrong side” of a division. In a letter to a Professor Tholuck, Mr. Darby wrote:

“By invitation I went to Plymouth to preach. My habit was to preach wherever people wished, whether in (public) buildings or in private houses. More than once, even with ministers of the National⁴ Church, we have broken bread on Monday evenings after meetings for Christian edification; where each was free to read, to speak, to pray, or to give out a hymn.”⁵

This approach, though not generally seen anymore, was not only considered acceptable, but was commonly practiced among the early brethren, as will be seen in the many quotations presented in this pamphlet.

In this pamphlet I use the phrase, "a visitor known to be godly." Others might say "as a Christian," to show the possible temporary nature of such a reception. Some may feel very uneasy about receiving visiting Christians in such a manner, but it must be understood that the only scriptural principle for reception is having membership in the One Body of Christ, **not** into the "body of a Brethren fellowship" or a brethren assembly or worldwide network of assemblies. - © H.J. DeGraaf Nov. 21, 2014

² 1 Corinthians 5:11. In those early days, the surrounding churches either received nearly anyone for communion, or only received those who had first formally joined with them.

³ “Fleshly” includes: “hatred, strifes, jealousies, angers, contentions, disputes, schools of opinion and envying.” (Galatians 5:20-21 - JND)

⁴ That is, Anglican.

⁵ *A Letter to Professor Tholuck*, J. N. Darby, Bible Truth Publishers, 59 Industrial Road, Addison, IL 60101, phone: (630) 543-1441

**A Historical Review of
Comments Concerning Reception
At the Lord's Table**

TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT
(Ephesians 4:1-6)

The state of affairs that existed when the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy must still be a matter for our concern today: Asia had turned away from Paul (*2 Timothy* 1:15) and his instruction to Timothy (*2 Timothy* 2) was:

1. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
2. "Commit to faithful men." (what he had heard from Paul.)
3. "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," and not to entangle himself with the affairs of this life.
4. "Study to show thyself approved unto GOD, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2:15)

Timothy was also instructed to: "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2:22)

This instruction was given to a "man of God" (*1 Tim.* 6:11) in a "great house", with "not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; some to honor, and some to dishonor." He was to "purge himself from these," to be "fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (*2 Tim.* 2:20 & 21)

TW Brethren apparently have incorrectly applied this instruction to set aside the clear necessity to keep the unity of the Spirit! What we so easily forget is the need to have *GRACE*: to "walk worthy...with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to: "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph 4:1-6)

2 TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

We also need *spiritual discernment* to know, *Who* are "them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"? With *wisdom* to keep the unity of the Spirit, and *power* to also obey all those verses in *2 Tim.* 2 (22-26), as true members of the body of Christ!

Do we, the so-called "gathered saints," have a right anymore to claim that we *have* a unity from the Spirit, as seen in our dealings with one another? Do we have any real testimony of unity today, collectively, which testimony can clearly be seen by those looking on? What would it mean to lose this unity, rather than obeying the clear injunction in scripture to keep it? What kind of acts would deny it and sacrifice it to expediency?

The purpose of this booklet is to present the practical truth of the unity of the Spirit, as brethren once taught it from the scriptures, and as it applies to *ALL* believers.

In 1882, William Kelly, writing for *Bible Treasury*, stressed the importance of the unity of the Spirit by writing:

"The unity of the Spirit is a constant responsibility for the children of God to keep with diligence as long as they are upon the earth. He abides with us forever. To keep it therefore is always a paramount duty."⁶

In 1897, A.H. Rule wrote in similar vein when he said:

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit". "This is a simple exhortation - a thing to be carried out in connection with a state of 'all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.' To keep the unity of the Spirit is not an impossibility. It is possible by the grace of God ... Let it not be said that this unity cannot be kept, for it can."⁷

⁶ *Bible Treasury*, vol. 14, page 169

⁷ *Selected Ministry of AH Rule*, vol. 2, pages 113 & 114

Grace, the Power of Unity and Gathering

(Acts 17:11, 2:42-47; 17:11)

Much has been written to correct wrong ideas pertaining to what exactly brings about and maintains unity. Godly brethren who devoted their lives to teaching and ministering in assemblies of believers, gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, sought by the power of the Holy Spirit to maintain this unity in grace. Let us see what they believed and taught as they understood the word of God. We will examine in particular how these brethren handled the reception of godly Christians. The reader is encouraged to read all of the sources quoted, as well as the scriptures, to test what is given here.

"That ye may with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, according as the Christ also has received you to [the] glory of God." (*Romans 15:6-7* - JND trans.)

John Nelson Darby, for example, wrote:

"The active power that gathers is always grace -- love. Separation from evil may be called for... But this in itself is never a gathering power... Power to gather is in grace, in love working; if you please, faith working by love... (*Galatians 5:6*) Besides, grace alone fully reveals God; and hence without grace that to which we are to be gathered is not manifested."⁸

It is clear from this excerpt that Mr. Darby was teaching that separation from evil, though a necessity, is not what is actually meant to unite believers. While doctrinal and ecclesiastical correctness is necessary, it is not a gathering power like the grace of the Holy Spirit.

We are gathered by and to a Good, rather than against an error. Too often believers have attempted to define their unity by uniting **against** believers with whom they hold differences of opinion. They cannot so do without becoming yet another sect.

The reception of godly believers, even those still connected with some other church fellowship, was always the custom of these early brethren. Brethren did not wish to become a sect, and so they differentiated themselves from other communities of Christians by keeping no membership lists, and receiving to the Lord's Table all godly Christians, regardless of church affiliation. They feared carrying on in any other way, lest they become yet another Christian sect, or "church." This is evident in the following statement by **A.H. Rule**:

"It has been the custom of those gathered to the Lord's name, from the first, to receive at the Lord's table known godly souls, who were sound in doctrine and upright in walk, even though still connected with some system, and this without raising the question of their breaking bread with such system.... they love the Lord, are sound in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, are godly in their walk - perhaps more so than many who have correct views of ecclesiastical truths - and they recognize that the table at which we break bread is the Lord's table, though they may think the same of other tables which are sectarian - the Lord has received them and he appreciates, (if we do not) their desire to remember Him - why should we raise a barrier to such?" Why exclude them, or at least make the conditions so hard they cannot participate, without being rude...?

"I fear there is at M-- too hard a front on this line of things, raising barriers which place the meeting almost on sectarian ground..."⁹

⁸ Collected Writings of JND, vol. 1, pages 366 & 374, *Stow-Hill ed.*, or 569-570 & 582-583, *Morrish ed.*

⁹ *Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule*, vol. 2, pages 122-123

Again, even as late as **1903, Walter Potter** echoed the same sentiments, saying, "It would surely not be of the Lord to require of a godly exercised soul, connected with any of the, what we may call orthodox, denominations that he sever his connection with his Church, before we allow him to participate with us at the Table. To do this, it seems to me, is to practically deny the ground upon which we are gathered."¹⁰

J.N. Darby had written similarly in 1869, saying:

"The question is, as to reception of saints to partake of the table of the Lord with us, whether any can be admitted who are not formally and regularly amongst us... suppose a person known to be godly and sound in faith, who has not left some ecclesiastical system - nay, thinks scripture favours an ordained ministry, but is glad when the occasion occurs - suppose we alone are in the place, or he is not in connection with any other body in the place, staying with a brother, or the like - is he to be excluded because he is of some system as to which his conscience is not enlightened - nay, which he may think more right? He is a godly member of the body, known such. Is he to be shut out? If so the degree of light is title to communion, and the unity of the body is denied by the assembly which refuses him. The principle of meeting as members of Christ walking in godliness is given up, agreement with us is made the rule, and the assembly becomes a sect with its members like any other. They meet on their principles, Baptist or other - you on yours, and if they do not belong to you formally as such, you do not let them in. The principle of brethren's meetings is gone, and another sect is made, say with more light, and that is all."¹¹

In another letter Darby furthered this point, adding the interesting view that such a visiting Christian would be subject to discipline, even though not "in fellowship" or a member there, those two concepts being utterly foreign to Mr. Darby's understanding of scriptural gathering:

"The principle of meeting is the unity of the body, so that a person known as a Christian is free to come: only the person who introduces him should have the confidence of the assembly as to his competency to judge of the person he introduces..."

"a person breaking bread is thereby subject to the discipline of God's house, if called for, just as if he had been constantly there. Nor do I accept any condition from them as that they are free to go anywhere: the assembly is to follow God's word, and can bind itself by no condition. Nor do I impose any; because as the assembly is bound by the word and can accept none, so is the person subject to the discipline of the assembly according to the word."¹²

Falsifying the testimony of Christ in the assembly

> What does this mean? (More comments on page 14)

In another letter, Mr. Darby vigorously denied the idea that assemblies should even have a membership in the form of who is "in fellowship" and who is "out of fellowship." He wrote:

"When persons break bread, they are in the only fellowship I know -- owned members of the body of Christ. The moment you make another *full* fellowship, you make people members of your assembly, and the whole principle of meeting is falsified."¹³

¹² *Letters of JND, vol. 3, pages 459-460, Stow-Hill ed., or 543, Morrish ed.*

¹³ *Letters of JND, vol. 2, page 349, Stow-Hill ed., or 420, Morrish*

¹⁰ "Receiving at the Table," by WP, a tract available at BTP.

¹¹ *Letters of JND, vol. 2, page 10, Stow-Hill ed, or 12-13, Morrish ed.*

William Kelly, writing in 1882, condemned the practice of turning godly members of Christ's body away from the Lord's Table, as a work of Satan, attempting to undermine the testimony of Christ to create a sect:

"For a long time Satan has been endeavouring to falsify the testimony of Christ amongst those professedly gathered to His name. One of his wiles has been, under pretence of light and righteousness, to undermine grace and truth in recognizing freely the members of Christ's body. Misconceiving the stand against neutrality, they would make no Christian welcome to the Lord's Table who did not judge his old position by more or less intelligence of the one body... "This is, to my mind, not unbelief only but a bad and base principle... to prove how little they themselves appreciate the one body... they let knowledge override relationship to Christ,... And those who are most wrong are apt to talk most loudly of that which they really imperil or unwittingly annul." ¹⁴

Allowing known believers to break bread while still identified with another church fellowship, was at one time commonplace practice, and a practice *wholly unfamiliar* today to many who claim to be "gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" and who wish to be seen as something other than just another church. But today they do have a membership just like the rest.

After looking at the ministry of Mr. Darby, and of others a century ago, and seeing so little of it practiced today, it is a healthy exercise to ask, "Why the change?" What would these brethren have written today? Would they not have seen modern Brethren as a sect? Some suggested Mr. Darby had changed his mind on it later in life, but he said: "I have never changed my views at all" ¹⁵ (See complete quote for context.)

C.H. Mackintosh then clearly expresses the reason we need to properly understand and to be able to answer this matter in the light of scripture, lest we do become a sect:

"The celebration of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper should be the distinct expression of the unity of ALL believers, and not merely of the unity of a certain number gathered on certain principles, which distinguish them from others. If there be any term of communion proposed, save the all-important one of faith in the atonement of Christ, and a walk consistent with that faith, **the table becomes the table of a sect**, and possesses no claims upon the hearts of the faithful. Furthermore, if by sitting at the table I must identify myself with anyone thing, whether it be principle or practice, not enjoined in Scripture, as a term of communion, there also **the table becomes the table of a sect.**"¹⁶

"For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also [is] the Christ" (*1 Corinthians* 12:12, JND)

What is our authority for what we practice?

It is not the purpose of this booklet to answer every issue that could be raised on reception; the various sources cited here are sufficient for that. The present purpose is only to help us to understand, in their own words, how the "original" brethren understood the scriptural principles of reception. Many consider the written ministry of these Brethren as authoritative because of how their lives were lived, showing that they closely held to the authority of the **Word of God**. Is it not the Word of God alone that ought to have authority over us, as it had over them? (For more on "His authority" see Mr. Kelly's quote, on page 13.)

¹⁴ The Bible Treasury, vol. 14, page 171

¹⁵ Letters of JND, vol. 3, page 460, Stow-Hill ed., or 543 Morrish

¹⁶ Thoughts on the Lord's Supper, page 18, Misc. Writings of CHM, Volume 3, Loizeaux Brothers ed. (emphasis added.)

Should not our hearts also then submit to the same scriptures that guided them? We must answer yes, for our hearts desire also ought to be to submit to the same scriptures that guided these godly brethren. The Word of God alone must have authority over us, as it had over them.

We most certainly need to be careful that our practice of reception is not just something we say we believe, an empty form - a formal routine, something we only pay lip service to. We need to be willing to live it. We will be judged not only on what we claim, but on what we do. If we neglect the **central principles of scripture**, we will find ourselves following only the more recent traditions of men, rather than the Word of God, finding also that we have ceased being any sort of testimony to the unity of the body of Christ!

It is vital that we consider these matters with a spiritual mind, (*1 Cor*: 3:1) avoiding strife (*1 Cor*: 3:3, *James* 3:17); and "not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand," (*2 Cor*: 10:16) but rather, as being taught by the Holy Spirit. (*1 Cor*: 2:11, & 13-15) "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (*Phil* 2:13)

"That ye may with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, according as the Christ also has received you to [the] glory of God" (*Romans* 15:6-7 JND)

How do we glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Not by correcting error and judging evil, but by receiving one another, even as Christ has received us. Serious error indeed must be corrected, and evil must be judged, as other scriptures clearly teach. But the point of this scripture is that the reception of all His own glorifies the loving God and Father of all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither the correction of error nor the judging of evil is even mentioned anywhere in *Romans* 14:1-15:7, only the importance of receiving brethren with whom we may disagree.

So, Why then is Reception Handled Differently today?

Possible reasons an assembly might exclude known godly visitors from the Lord's Table:

1. Some think that a believer associated with any other Christian group is thereby **ecclesiastically defiled**, and consequently must first break from those other believers first before accepting him or her, lest we be likewise defiled by their association.

2. a. Some feel that what has been described above is only what "**Open Brethren**" practice, and is therefore wrong.

b. Others believe that this practice was always wrong, and brethren have **gradually learned** over the years the error and danger inherent in it, despite it being practiced erroneously during the early days of the Brethren.

3. Some feel that opportunities for receiving someone "as a Christian" are extremely rare, because the truth of separation from evil is so poorly understood by the church in general, that a person coming **first needs to be "instructed"** in order to avoid defiling the assembly with his ignorance.

4. Some feel that a person who does not desire to come into fellowship with us, but wishes to break bread just for now, "as a Christian," is not calling on the Lord out of a pure heart but is clearly **insincere** in some way.

5. The assembly could simply be **ignorantly** failing to accept all godly Christians, unless they first "choose sides" in their fleshly divisions. So they fail to realize that being gathered to anything other than the unity of the Spirit is **sectarian ground**.

Some responses to the above stated reasons are:

1. As to the idea that any believer who associates with another church group is thereby defiled, A.H. Rule said:

“Our habit has been to receive a godly Baptist or Presbyterian and the like. But where the avowed creed of a sect involves wickedness - bad fundamental doctrine, or unmoral conduct - a person still connected with such would not be received. He must sever his connection with a position in which he supports such a creed, before being received.”¹⁷

This continues to present a problem for those who would refuse godly Baptist or Presbyterian believers on the grounds that they are defiled and apt to defile any assembly that accepts them. Of course this idea can be “worked around” by simply pointing out that some modern Baptist and Presbyterian fellowships now tolerate sexual perversion as a point of doctrine. But this is not true of all fellowships of either of these denominations.

2. **a. A.H. Rule** addressed the idea that this is an “Open Brethren” error by writing:

“Nor is this the ground taken by the so-called Open Brethren. Some of their assemblies throw the door open to all Christians, especially to all professedly separate from system, and some are absolutely exclusive, and refuse to receive anyone who does not first break with system. They - at least many of them would break bread with us if we would receive them, showing they are ignorant of the principles of the one body and the unity of the Spirit.”¹⁸

2. **b.** In 1882, toward the end of the first generation of the brethren movement, William Kelly plainly showed that the notion of rejecting those from other groups had arisen in their day, but that these faithful early brethren were still, at that time, earnestly fighting against the error. Again, he writes:

“For a long time Satan has been endeavoring to falsify the testimony of Christ amongst those professedly gathered to His name. One of his wiles has been, under pretense of light and righteousness, to undermine grace and truth in recognising freely the members of Christ’s body. Utterly misconceiving the stand against neutrality, they would make no Christian welcome to the Lord’s table who did not judge his old position by more or less intelligence of the one body and one Spirit; that is, without a virtual pledge never again to enter their so-called church or chapel. This is, to my mind, not unbelief only, but a bad and base principle. It is an underhand way to make a sect of those that know the church, but really prove how little they themselves appreciate the one body; else they could not let knowledge override relationship to Christ, as they do.”¹⁹

3. **A. H. Rule** addressed this idea by writing:

As to instructing beforehand* - “this would be equivalent to telling her that her participation in the ordinance was not desired by the meeting; and, of course, anyone of a sensitive disposition would, under the circumstances, refrain... such a course of handling would, it seems to me, quite unfit any such one to participate in that joyous and holy feast to the edification of his (or her) soul.”²⁰

* (that is, “as to instructing visitors before the meeting”)

¹⁹ *The Bible Treasury*, vol. 14, page 171: *On Receiving from Ebrington Street*

²⁰ *Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule*, vol. 2, page 122

¹⁷ *Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule*, vol. 2, page 92

¹⁸ *Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule*, vol. 2, page 123 (See also page 93)

For his part, William Kelly argued strongly against making a requirement of what he calls “ecclesiastical intelligence,” also arguing that doing so results in the formation of a sect instead of relying on the Spirit to unite us:

“Far from looking for or valuing ecclesiastical intelligence before souls take their place at the Lord's table, it is quite a mistake for us to expect it... “The moment the church lays down an extra-scriptural test, she takes the place of the Lord, and there is a practical assumption, yea, **a virtual denial, of His authority.** The result is to form a sect in departure from the unity of the Spirit”²¹

4. As to the idea that only occasionally visiting an exclusive fellowship demonstrates lack of a pure heart, Mr. Darby wrote:

“There is no difference between (breaking bread as) “a Christian” and fellowship, though some may not always be there; because the only fellowship or membership is of the body of Christ, and if a person breaks bread and is thus recognized as a member of the body of Christ, he is subject to all the discipline of the house. I may not enforce constant attendance with us only, because he may come with the desire to shew unity of spirit, and yet think that his ways are more orderly conscientiously. If his heart be pure, (2 *Tim.* 2) I have no reason to exclude him; but if anything in his path require he should be excluded, he is liable to it like anyone else.”²²

"If it was ignorance, and they came bona fide in the spirit of unity, to that which is the symbol of unity, I should not reject them, because they had not in fact broken (with it)..."²³

On the subject of reason 5, as well as 2 and 3, Mr. Darby wrote that he would not fellowship with an assembly which behaved in this way, arguing that this practice would have turned the assembly into a sect, saying:

“If an assembly refused a person known to be a Christian and blameless, because he was not of the assembly, I should not go. I own no membership but of Christ. **An assembly composed of such of its members is at once a sect.**”²⁴

In a similar line, he also wrote, “Remember, you are acting as representing the whole church of God, and if you depart from a right path as to the principle of meeting, **separating yourselves from it is to be a local sect on your own principles.**”²⁵

We have already noticed both Darby and Kelly’s use of the term “falsify” in reference to the ‘principle of meeting’ and to the “testimony of Christ.” (Falsify is a strong word!) But here, Mr. Darby goes even further. In one of his earliest articles on the subject, Darby argues that the concept of seeking the interests of any one particular group, rather than the unity of all, makes one an *enemy* of the work of the Spirit of God:

“True unity is the unity of the Spirit, and it must be wrought by the operation of the Spirit...” he is an enemy to the work of the Spirit of God who seeks the interests of any particular denomination; and those who believe in 'the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ' ought carefully to keep from such a spirit...”

²¹ *Wm. Kelly, Bible Treasury, vol. 14, pages 170 & 168*

²² *Letters of JND, vol. 2, pages 109-110, Stow-Hill ed., or 130, Morrish ed.*

²³ *Letters of JND, vol. 2, page 212, Stow-Hill ed., or 254, Morrish*

²⁴ *Letters of JND, vol. 3, page 460, Stow-Hill ed., or 543, Morrish*

²⁵ *Letters of JND, vol. 2, page 12, Stow-Hill ed., or 14, Morrish.*

Further on in the same article, Darby condemns the concept and practice (the one so common today in this 21st century and seen as normal or usual by many) calling it a “mental disease,” and as “seeking their own” rather than the things of the Lord:

"This is a most subtle and prevailing mental disease, '**he followeth not us,**' even when men are really Christians. Let the people of God see if they be not hindering the manifestation of the church by this spirit... Christians are little aware how this prevails in their minds; how they seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ; and how it dries up the springs of grace and spiritual communion; how it precludes that order to which blessing is attached - the gathering together in the Lord's name."

Continuing in the same article, he declared that any group of Christians that did not practically embrace all the children of God would be unable to find “fullness of blessing,” saying:

“No meeting, which is not framed to embrace all the children of God in the full basis of the kingdom of the Son, can find the fullness of blessing, because it does not contemplate it - because its faith does not embrace it”²⁶

Some may see such statements by Darby to be rather extreme. But can we honestly expect anything other than a lack of “fullness of blessing” if we carry on in this way, for reasons of expedience, or if only to follow an established tradition?

In another place, Mr. Darby argued that failing to receive all saints robs the force of an assembly decision to exclude any walking inappropriately, and that it represents error on the one side (destroying the unity), due to seeking to avoid the opposite extreme (allowing looseness in practice or doctrine), writing:

“I seek no looseness; but Satan is busy to lead us to one side or the other, to destroy the largeness of the unity of the body, or to make it mere looseness in practice or doctrine; we must not fall into one in avoiding the other. Reception of all true saints is what gives its force to the exclusion of those walking loosely. If I exclude all who walk godly as well, who do not follow with us, it loses its force, for those who are godly are shut out too.”

Continuing in the same letter, Mr. Darby also stressed that we are meant to be members, not of our own body of “brethren” nor of any assembly of it, but of Christ’s body alone, saying:

“There is **no membership of brethren**. Membership of an assembly is unknown to scripture. It is members of Christ's body. **If people must be all of you, it is practically membership of your body**. The Lord keep us from it; that is simply dissenting ground... I should, if I came to -----, require clear evidence what ground you are meeting upon.”²⁷

There are now numerous divisions of Brethren, with each group accepting members to its own body. Thus, Brethren, whose very origin was to stand against sectarianism, have degenerated into an endless assortment of micro-sects. This is made clear in First Corinthians where the apostle writes, "I hear there exist divisions among you, and I partly give credit (to it). For there must also be sects among you, that the approved may become manifest among you." (*1 Cor. 11:18b-19 - JND*)

From the way this is stated, it is plain that the divisions in that day had not progressed to the point of meeting separately, casting out godly Christians, nor is there any hint of their turning anyone away from the Lord’s Table.

²⁶ *Collected Writings of JND, vol. 1, page 24-25, Stow-Hill ed., or 37-38, Morrish ed.*

²⁷ *Letters of JND, vol. 2, page 12, Stow-Hill ed., or 14, Morrish ed.*

These were divisions “among” (in the middle of) the group, rather than fully separated groups having lost the unity of the Spirit to a degree the people of the town would notice.

It is plain that the New Testament church in Jerusalem, with its thousands of individual Christians, could never have met in a single room, yet they were always referred to as a single group. So also the churches in Rome, Corinth, and every other place mentioned in the New Testament. God recognized no division between godly Christians other than distance. Yet today, like all the “churches” they condemn, “Brethren” assemblies, separating themselves from all other Christians, refusing to so much as allow them to eat at what they claim is “the Lord’s Table,” while they know that these “outsiders” are godly members of the body of Christ, they remain content with themselves and their practice.

But what do the scriptures say about these Christians they so boldly reject? “let a man prove* himself, and thus eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.” (*1 Cor.* 11:28 - JND)

* *examine*, KJV

So CHM writing: “If, once for all, it be asked, What means the term ‘approved?’ it may be answered. It is in the first place, to be personally true to the Lord in the act of breaking bread; and in the next place, to shake off all schism, and take our stand, firmly and decidedly, upon the broad principle which will embrace all the members of the flock of Christ. We are not only to be careful that we ourselves are walking in purity of heart and life before the Lord; but also, that the table of which we partake has nothing connected with it that could at all act as a barrier to the unity of the Church.”²⁸

Call not thou common or unclean:

Our responsibility is to receive those whom Christ has received, thus giving glory to God. (*Romans* 15:7) That principle is also presented in Acts 10, by God Himself, speaking to Peter, whose legal and sectarian traditions had to be corrected by a direct word. Previously, unable to freely bring the gospel of salvation to the gentile Cornelius, Peter himself needed instruction, and to learn this lesson: do not call what God hath cleansed, “*common or unclean.*” (*vs.* 28) Only then was he sent to speak to Cornelius, “*words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*” (*Acts* 11:14) Peter was now free to say:

“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (*Acts* 10:47 - JND)

Baptism, the first Christian ordinance, is for believers and was not to be forbidden when clear evidence of salvation (*Eph.* 1:13) was manifest. Likewise with the Lord's Supper. Nowhere in scripture is it required or even suggested that the local company of believers should require a soul to wait or to sit back, when similar clear evidence or testimony can be given. It was no different even in the case of Saul. (*Acts* 9:26-31)

Are we to so dishonor our Lord, by casting a shadow on the cleansing power of the precious blood of Christ, in requiring souls to sit back and to wait when they are known to be believers walking before God with a good conscience? Is not scriptural testimony enough? (*Deut.* 19:15, *Matt.* 18:16) Is not the presence of the Lord in our midst (*Matt.* 18:20) sufficient to discern who are “them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”?

Mr. Darby taught that the assembly needs no lengthy or deep inquiry into a professed Christian’s sincerity, but should be satisfied with the testimony of a person or two, writing:

²⁸ *Thoughts on the Lord's Supper*, by CHM, page 22, *Misc. Writings of CHM*, Volume 3, Loizeaux Brothers ed.

“The assembly has to be satisfied as to the persons, but, as so receiving to break bread, is supposed to be satisfied on the testimony of the person introducing them, who is responsible to the assembly in this respect. This, or two or three visiting, is to me the question of adequate testimony to the conscience of the assembly... Nobody comes in but as a believer.”²⁹

Early brethren rejected the concept of there being some godly Christians who are “in fellowship” with an assembly, and other godly Christians who are “not in fellowship” with it. To them, this unscriptural distinction was sectarian, and nothing but a thinly veiled way of making membership with a specific group of believers, a requirement before access to the Lord’s Table would be granted.

The authors of division will *always* make this distinction, excluding any child of God, godly or otherwise, learned or ignorant, hailing from any other Christian group whatever. They wish to maintain a visible, although unwritten, sectarian membership, requiring the exclusion of even godly Christians. They apply this exclusion equally to those who hold doctrine significantly different from their own and to those who value the same truths as themselves but who prayerfully feel they were mistaken in some internal squabble.

If a person ‘not in fellowship’ presents himself at a brethren sect of this sort, whether or not they are godly is seldom considered. The only thing that generally counts for fellowship is whether or not the person in question is in ecclesiastical allegiance with themselves, and is thus “gathered” with their sect. Wherever this practice has surfaced, it should thus be painfully clear to all that the principle of gathering in the Lord’s Name, rather than to a human organization or sect, as held and practiced by Brethren in the 1800s, has been wholly abandoned.³⁰

²⁹ *Letters of JND, vol. 2, page 349, Stow-Hill ed., or 420, Morrish ed.*

³⁰ Note how often modern Brethren correspondence and conversation misquote Matt 18:20 as saying “to” rather than “in,”

Wherever the practice of excluding known godly believers is prevalent, the question should be raised: On what ground do those brethren gather? What spirit is it that brings them together and unifies them? Are they maintaining the unity of the Spirit in grace and love? What are they willing to sacrifice in order to triumph in petty human disputes? These disputes all spring from an inability to get along, and demonstrate a lack of that grace and love enjoined in scripture.

Many Brethren whom I personally know would be happy to share a meal with another godly believer. Why then should that same person be denied their place at the Lord's Table on a Lord's Day morning?

My sincere hope is that this pamphlet will be found to be helpful, and not divisive. It is understood that these truths may take time to be understood and to be put in practice. Seek help only from the Holy Spirit as He reveals to you the scriptures and the heart of a King greater than David, who said, "I will surely show thee kindness, for Jonathan thy father's sake." (2 *Sam.* 9:7)

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The author wishes to acknowledge the many who have offered helpful suggestions over the past year. I wish to thank my English composition expert for his help with writing details; for my Brethren research expert and publisher; and finally, for the kind sister who first scanned the 1986 edition to begin this process, all in helping to make this new edition a reality. Writing this pamphlet has been a major effort for me, so please use it carefully! Much more could be said or written on this subject matter, but I must leave it for now with the Lord. He is faithful! (See Final Note on Romans 15:7, page 26.)

Important note: Some have offered various quotes from the very same writers that seem to deny these principles. The following examples will show what such well intentioned individuals have unconsciously done.

J.N. Darby was quoted as saying: *“There cannot be too much care as to holiness and truth.”* But the total of what he said was:

“There cannot be too much care as to holiness and truth. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of Truth. But ignorance of ecclesiastical truth is not a ground of excommunication, where the conscience and walk is undefiled.”³¹

Another quoted a letter by “O,” saying, “Either a person is on the ground of the church of God or he is not. If he is not, he ought to be seriously instructed, and if possible made to understand before he practically takes that ground with us, that he makes himself a transgressor in having done so if he abandon it.” But the complete statement by “O” was:

“You say that your friend admits it would be inconsistent to receive ‘constantly’ at the table one who continued to go to and fro; but are there in scripture two kinds of receiving, one less important, and less definite, and less responsible than the other? Either a person is on the ground of the church of God or he is not. If he is not, he ought to be seriously instructed, and if possible made to understand before he practically takes that ground with us, that he makes himself a transgressor in having done so if he abandon it. But whether he understand it or no, you have no right to refuse him his place, if he be not otherwise disqualified.”³²

Thus we see that both of these quotations, although accurate, were cited entirely out of context, making the author seem to be saying exactly the opposite of what he actually said. This, although it was obviously unintentional, has been the case repeatedly in the past, and it always has to be the case, for the concepts presented in this pamphlet are the actual doctrines of the “original” brethren.

In 1882 William Kelly penned the following historical note:³³

“There are not many who remember the Plymouth division in 1845-6. Moral charges were not wanting, but it turned mainly on an effort of a large and influential party which lost faith in the Lord’s presence and the Holy Spirit’s free action in the assembly, seeking independency with its leaders. It is needless to say that the heavenly character and the unity of the church had faded away, as well as waiting for the Lord Jesus as an immediate hope. God would not suffer in our midst such lack of faith and of faithfulness. But the mass of the saints were beguiled by the error, and deaf to the warning; and but few separated, branded as schismatics by those who boasted of their numbers, gifts, and happiness.

“What was the relation of those who for the Lord’s and the truth’s sake were forced in conscience to stand apart? The high-minded majority utterly refused humiliation and rejoiced that those were outside from whom they had long and with increasing bitterness alienated. The then minority met at first only in private houses only to humble themselves and pray, as after a little to break bread. **But they never thought of rejecting the poor famished sheep who occasionally sought to break bread with them, without severing their connection with Ebrington Street.** For indeed they were not only bound there by many ties, but under great fear through the swelling words and persecuting deeds of their old leaders and friends, not least of sisters who played an

³¹ *Letters of J. N. D., vol. 2, page 11, Stow-Hill ed., or 13-14, Morrish ed.*

³² *The Bible Treasury, vol. 7, page 239*

³³ “The Unity of the Spirit, and what it is to keep it” (http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/7subjects/unity_sp.html)

unenviable part in that sad history. They had of course this moral safeguard, that none committed in will to the Plymouth defection, especially no chief, but scorned the seceders. Only the simple came, and because they came, were cut off by the Ebrington Street party. **But we received them freely in the Lord's name, even though they might be weak enough to wish fellowship still with their old friends.**

“But the moment the blasphemous herodoxy as to Christ appeared, there was an end of all this forbearance. The door was closed on all that continued with an antichristian faction.

As long as it was an ecclesiastical error, however firmly we refused it and came out from it, there was patience with those who failed to discern it or to judge it practically. Such known saints of Ebrington Street as came were cordially received; and who ever heard of even one in these circumstances refused? But on the contrary, when the false doctrine against Christ was known, an uncompromising stand was made from the first; and no soul was received thenceforward who did not clear himself from association with so deadly an insult to the Father and the Son. With partisans of that evil Bethesada identified itself, and necessitated the world-wide division which ensued in 1848.”³⁴

To understand what William Kelly was saying, we need to understand that the division he was discussing took place in two stages. In this note he clearly distinguished between the stand the brethren took at each of these stages, and why it was different in each case.

In the first stage of the division, the brethren separated from ecclesiastical error they found at Ebrington Street, which took the form of the infighting and schism all too familiar to us today. But while they were very decided in separating from this error, they still received, **at the breaking of bread**, those who continued there. To do otherwise would have been to just make another sect. But after a time, it was exposed that a previously undetected doctrine was being taught at this same Ebrington Street. The brethren concluded that this doctrine was blasphemous against Christ!

After this had been exposed, they required anyone from that place who wished to break bread with them to make a clean break with that evil. Thus, the basis for requiring full separation from the “other side” of this division was never simply that it was the “other side,” but that those remaining with them were tolerating blasphemy against Christ. The stand was against the perceived blasphemy, rather than against the people on the “other side” of the division.

So these nineteenth century brethren continued to fellowship, **even at the breaking of bread**, with those from whom they had separated, until they concluded that fundamental Christian truths were being denied. For they actively sought to walk in a practical unity with all “that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22)

So which concept is scriptural, the “original” brethren concept of seeking a practical unity with all “that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” or the modern Brethren concept of walking in separation from everything that is not “in fellowship”?

There can be no doubt that we are told concerning anyone who is “called brother,” that if he “be fornicator, or avaricious, or idolater, or abusive, or a drunkard, or rapacious, not to mix with [him]; with such a one not even to eat.” (1 Cor. 5:11 - JND) And we are also told, “Whosoever goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ has not God. He that abides in the doctrine, he has both the Father and the Son. If any one come to you and bring not this doctrine, do not receive him into [the] house, and greet him not; for he who greets him partakes in his wicked works.” (2 Jn. 1:9-11 - JND) But in applying, **and rigorously applying**, these scriptures, we also need to remember other equally important scriptures.

One of these is a rather long passage in which we are given practical instruction as to **how** we are to walk in unity. That passage is Romans 14:1-15:7, and it develops this at length:

³⁴ Wm. Kelly, *Bible Treasury*, vol. 14, pages 171-172

Romans 14:1 - 15:7

Is the doctrine that we should receive brethren who have an imperfect understanding of the scriptures. It begins with the questions of vegetarianism and the keeping of the Sabbath, saying, "But thou, why judgest thou thy brother? or again, thou, why dost thou make little of thy brother? for we shall all be placed before the judgment-seat of God." (*Rom. 14:10 - JND*) And it ends with the words, "Now the God of endurance and of encouragement give to you to be like-minded 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. **Wherefore receive ye one another, according as the Christ also has received you to [the] glory of God.**" (*Rom. 15:5-7 - JND*) May we fully understand that our present acceptance and true freedom before a holy God is also based on this gospel truth!

Another of these is our Lord's words when He prayed "for those who believe on me through their word; **that they may be all one**, as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (*John. 17:20-21 - JND*)

Here the curtain is drawn back and we are admitted into the very council chambers of the Godhead. Here we see our Lord's last prayer before "He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden." (*Jn. 18:1 - JND*) This was truly our blessed Savior's dying request. And what did He desire? "**That they may be all one, as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.**" Do these words mean nothing to us? How can our hearts ignore this passionate plea, made as our Lord was preparing to give his all for us? This was only a very little while before His agony became so great that "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (*Lk. 22:44 - JND*) What are we going to do with our Lord's request, brethren? Apply it in a practical sense? Or try to explain it away? Do we love Him enough to care what He wanted? If so, we must seek to walk in a real, practical, unity with every godly Christian, with every soul redeemed by that precious blood He shed so soon after making this request.

Receiving one another as Christ also receives us.**(Romans 15:7)**

It is my personal conviction that Brethren today will often confuse their responsibility to receive fellow believers, with their responsibility to judge evil amongst themselves, when and if it becomes necessary to do that. When believers come together to assemble according to Matthew 18:20, the Lord's promise to bless *our faith* in such a promise, must be first and foremost. IF Romans 15:7 teaches us that a person **MUST** be received into the assembly of believers as a believer, then that must be first and foremost, – a believer in Christ's finished work on Calvary. IF there is any other fact or required action, other than a true and honest confession of one's faith (as in Romans 10:9, with baptism), that assembly soon becomes a fellowship based on *agreement with us* (and our doctrines). Can this be what has happened amongst the TW Brethren?

We know of course that our salvation is not based on our works, nor on our petty doctrines; neither on our efforts to please God, or man! Such was never God's plan. God's plan is, and must be, based on faith in the work of Christ alone! Thus all are received into the kingdom of God **only** as one who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, and believes in the heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9). I believe the Romans 15:7 verse is teaching us that **we also must** receive *one another* in *just the same way* as Christ has received us!

The true church then must be a 'fellowship' based and secured in Christ, on our confession of Christ's work, and our faith in God's work in raising Him from the dead! Receiving one another *in the same way* that Christ has received us, then becomes a reminder, and a lesson that we will never forget!

The "careful examination" of a person, as some now practice, requiring a waiting period (even when known), then has become an outward proof that their ground, or basis, of receiving persons is one that is based on "agreement with **us**" and with the doctrines taught by the group. Thus it **no longer** can be the ground, or basis, that warrants God's approval.

Why is this truth so difficult for today's Brethren to accept?
(See JND's letter on page 5.) - HJD

Suggested Reading:

1 John 1: 3-7

2: 14-17

3:14.

"1 John 1:1-7 beautifully gives us the ground of our fellowship together with the Lord, and with His apostles. It is important to see how it is all of Christ and nothing of ourselves, except the faith to believe the Word of God as to the Person, the Work, and Glory of our precious Saviour."

-- Doug Nicolet

The difficult challenge is:

³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? (Gal 3:3 NKJV)

³ Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? ^[a] (NIV)

NIV Footnote: ^[a]

Galations 3:3 In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit.

Scripture clearly instructs us to reject evil:

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Ephesians 5:11 - But also to "walk in the light, as He is in the light..." 1 John 1:7

"To Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ...

"To God, only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen." --Paul in Romans 16: 25-27

This pamphlet could be used to point Brethren to **truth** that would help them recover from their present state. By leaving a path of biblical simplicity, to cling to traditions and division, many are seeing their adult children now leaving the Meeting for various reasons. But this pamphlet was **not** intended to be used in a way that would cause internal conflict among the Lord's people. My hope is that it will be prayerfully used to awaken brethren to reconsider their practice of exclusion in the light of scripture.

The Enemy has used our neglect or ignorance of the truths of scripture to divide and nearly destroy what was once a testimony for His (Christ's) Name. We have helped him by believing we can defend and protect what God has established using those feeble weapons of our flesh. May God help to deliver us from it!

*"There's a wall up in the sanctuary that ought not to be there,
A wall that **does not guard the flock from the enemy we fear,**
Whose destructive work has hindered so, the Good News message, clear.
This wall soon must come down, in fact I saw it down somewhere!*

*"There's a wall up in the sanctuary, of my heart too I fear,
A wall up in that sanctuary, surely it must come down there too!
A wall that ought not to be there, Oh God I've sinned! In building here,
A wall that cannot honor Him, but tend to make a heart grow cold,"*

- from: Tearing Down Walls, Eph.2:14, Oct. '95 by HJD

(Please request permission before making more than five or seven copies. PDF copies are also available.)

As some may imagine that some quotations in this pamphlet may have been lifted out of context, most of the writings they were taken from can be read in their entirety.

Go to: <http://www.stempublishing.com/>. Reading the quotes in their entire contexts will demonstrate that each of these were indeed accurately represented.

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