

Darby on Reception to Fellowship

(extracts)

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. It is not whether we exclude persons unsound in faith or ungodly in practice; nor whether we, deliberately walking with those who are unsound and ungodly, are not in the same guilt- not clear in the matter. The first in unquestioned; the last, brethren have insisted on, and I among them, at very painful cost to ourselves. This is, to me, all clear and plain from scripture. There may be subtle pleas to get evil allowed, but we have always been firm, and God, I believe, has fully owned it. The question is not there; but 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. It may give more trouble, require more care to treat every case on its merits, on the principle of the unity of all Christ's members, than say "you do not belong to us, you cannot come"; but the whole principle of meeting is gone. The path is not of God...

...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 the walk is undefiled. If a person came and made it a condition to be allowed to go to both, he would not come in simplicity in the unity of the body; I know it to be evil, and cannot allow it, and he has no right to impose any conditions on the church of God. It must exercise discipline as cases arise according to the Word. Nor, indeed, do I think a person regularly going from one to another systematically can be honest in going to either; he is setting up to be superior to both, and condescending to each. That is not, *in that act*, "a pure heart."

May the Lord guide you. 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. In all that concerns faithfulness, God is my witness, I seek no looseness; but Satan is busy to lead us one side or the other, to destroy the largeness of the unity of the body, or to make it mere looseness in practice and 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.

There is no membership of brethren. Membership of an assembly is unknown in 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.

Excerpt from a letter written from Kingston on April 19, 1869

The question you put as to receiving is to me always a delicate one. The point is to conciliate sound discipline, and being wholly outside the camp, which is of increasing importance, and avoiding being a sect, which I should as anxiously do. Receiving all members of Christ's body is not a sect clearly, and that is the principle on which I unite, but they must walk orderly and be under discipline, and not pretend to impose conditions on the church of God. If therefore they came claiming as a condition liberty to go elsewhere, I could not allow it because I know it is wrong, and the church of God cannot allow what is wrong. 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], but I could not accept what made us part of the camp, nor any sort of claim to go to both, to be inside and outside. This is equally pretentious and dishonest... But I receive a person who comes in simplicity, with a good conscience, for the sake of spiritual communion, though they may not yet see clearly ecclesiastically; but the assembly is bound to exercise discipline as to them, and know their walk and purity of heart in coming whenever they do. They cannot come in and out just as they please, because the conscience of the assembly is engaged in the matter, and its duty to God, and to Him at whose Table they are. Looseness in this is more fatal than ever now. If a person practically says I will come to take a place in the body of Christ when I like, and go into sects and evil when I like for convenience or pleasure, that is not a pure heart. It is making their own will the rule of God's assembly, and subjecting the assembly to it, and that cannot be- is clearly wrong.

Letter written in 1873

As regards your first question, I think there is a mistake as to the position of the assembly, both in the sister and also of the brother who objected, perhaps in all. 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. 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. At the beginning it was not so, that is, there was no such examination. Now I believe it a duty according to II Timothy 2. Nobody comes in but as a believer. This again makes the distinction of member of the particular assembly.

Still, I do not think a practice such as this sister's is satisfactory. I admit fully every case must stand on its own merits, and so be dealt with. Where breaking bread is intermitted, it is all well to mention it, though this be in some cases uncalled for, where the assembly knows about it and is satisfied. But if

persons break bread, they are as subject to discipline as if always there, because it is the church of God which is in question, though represented by two or three: Christ is there. If it is merely an occasional coming as a stranger, and the person not known, it is well to mention. What is not satisfactory in such cases is: first, it is accepting the person by the assembly as if he had another fellowship besides membership of Christ, which I do not recognise at all. And, secondly, I should fear there was a reluctance to take honestly the reproach of the position, the true separated position of saints, and [the wish] to be able to say to others, I do not belong to them, I only go as a believer: I only go as a believer, only I accept the position. Waiting for them to get clear is all well.

A true believer has *title* at the Table; but if they meet as members of Christ's body, they are all one body, as partakers of one loaf. I do not admit them. I own their title, wait upon their want of light, but would not allow them to put me in a position of a sect (and, 'full fellowship' means that), making allowance for their ignorance and waiting upon it. They do not come really to break bread with us on the ground of the unity of the body, if they think they are not one with us in coming; for if we are true and right, they are not one with the body of Christ, the only principle of meeting I know at all. I repeat, in the present state of the church we must have patience, as their minds have been moulded in church membership; but I ought not to falsify my own position, nor sanction it in the mind of another. If the person is known to all, and known to be there to break bread, all mention is needless; it is a testimony to the unity of the body: if an occasional thing, the person who introduces is responsible. I remember a case, where one growing in truth came to help sometimes in a Sunday school, and from the other side of London, and asked the brethren if he might not break bread when there- time even did not allow of him to get back to his Baptist service- and he enjoyed the communion of saints. The brethren allowed him gladly; and, if my recollection is right, his name was not given out when he came afterwards. Very soon he was amongst brethren entirely, but his fellowship was as full when he was not: and had he given occasion, he would have been refused in discipline, just as if there every Sunday.

The other question is for me a more delicate one, because it is a question of the state of the soul, as of the church, when darkness covers it. Many, many souls cry Abba, Father (that is, have the Spirit of adoption) which are clear in nothing, save that their confidence is in Christ and His work only: and as doubting is taught in the church, and a plain full gospel unknown, and even rejected by teachers, this state is the natural consequence; and it often requires spirituality to discern the real state of a soul, if really under law undelivered or legalised by teaching. Hard cold knowledge of doctrine is not what I seek. Then there is the danger of throwing back a soul just when it wants to be encouraged. Doubts brought in by conflict, when a soul can really say Abba, are not a ground of rejection, though it shews a soul not well established. But a soul exercised, but not yet resting in Christ's work, is not in a right state for communion. So with young converts: it is far better for them to wait until they have peace, only carefully shewing it is not to reject them, but for their own good. I should not look for understanding deliverance, but being personally able to say Abba, Father.

Extract of a letter written from San Francisco in August of 1875