

A Fragment Upon the Down-Grade Controversy (November, 1887)

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon's sermon addresses the dangers of compromising truth for the sake of unity within the church amid the Down-Grade controversy.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14, Galatians 1:8

Topics: "Truth vs. Unity", "The Importance of Doctrinal Integrity"

Description

C.H. Spurgeon addresses the Down-Grade controversy, expressing his deep concern over the growing alliance between orthodox believers and those who deny core Christian doctrines. He emphasizes the danger of pursuing unity at the expense of truth, warning that such compromises can lead to a betrayal of Christ and His gospel. Spurgeon calls for a return to loyalty to Christ, urging believers to recognize the seriousness of their associations with those who openly reject essential tenets of faith. He advocates for individual discernment and the necessity of withdrawing from unions that compromise the integrity of the gospel. Ultimately, he longs for a future where true believers can unite in a spirit of genuine fellowship based on shared faith in Christ.

Transcript

BY this time many of our readers will be weary of the Down-Grade controversy: they cannot be one-tenth so much tired of it, or tried by it, as we are. When the first article appeared, a friend wrote to warn us that he who touched this theme would gain no honor thereby, but would bring a host of enemies around him. We believed his prophecy, and with this as part of the reckoning we went on, for a solemn sense of duty impelled us. The result is not other than we looked for: the treatment our protest has received is neither better nor worse than we expected: possibly we have personally received more respect than we reckoned on.

Hitherto (and this matter is now merely in its beginning), the chief answer has come from the public teachers, and as far as their public answer is concerned, it amounts, at its best interpretation, to the admission that there may be a little amiss, but not enough to speak about. They are sorry that a few brethren go rather too far, but they are dear brethren still. Many good men lament the fact that liberty is, in certain instances, degenerating into license, but they solace themselves with the belief that on the whole it is a sign of health and vigor: the bough is so fruitful that it runs over the wall.

At any rate, denominational peace must be kept up, and there must be no discordant charge of defection to break the chorus of mutual congratulation. The intense desire for union has its commendable side, and we are far from undervaluing it. Precious also is the protest for liberty, which certain valorous souls have lifted up. We rejoice that our brethren will not submit their consciences to any man; but the mercy is that we do not know of any man who desires that they should.

Specially is the object of their brave opposition as free from a desire to rule over them as from the wish to be ruled by them. It is a pity that such loyalty to liberty could not be associated with an equally warm expression of resolve to be loyal to Christ and his gospel. It would be a grievous fault if the sons of the Puritans did not maintain the freedom of their consciences; but it will be no less a crime if they withdraw those consciences from under the yoke of Christ.

To pursue union at the expense of truth is treason to the Lord Jesus. If we are prepared to enter into solemn league and covenant for the defense of the crown-rights of King Jesus, we cannot give up the crown-jewels of his gospel for the sake of a larger charity. He is our Master and Lord, and we will keep his words: to tamper with his doctrine would be to be traitors to himself. Yet, almost unconsciously, good men and true may drift into compromises which they would not at first propose, but which they seem forced to justify.

Yielding to be the creatures of circumstances, they allow another to gird them, and lead them whither they would not; and when they wake up, and find themselves in an undesirable condition, they have not always the resolution to break away from it. Especially in the company of their equally-erring brethren, they are not inclined to consider their ways, and are not anxious to have them remarked upon; and, therefore, in this brief paper we venture to make an earnest appeal from brethren assembled, to brethren at home in their studies quietly turning over the matter.

As much as possible we beg them to forget the obnoxious reprovor, and to look the state of affairs carefully in the face, and see if it strikes them as it does us. We will put it plainly, not to provoke, but to be understood. As a matter of fact, believers in Christ's atonement are now in declared religious union with those who make light of it; believers in Holy Scripture are in confederacy with those who deny plenary inspiration; those who hold evangelical doctrine are in open alliance with those who call the fall a fable, who deny the personality of the Holy Ghost, who call justification by faith immoral, and hold that there is another probation after death, and a future restitution for the lost.

Yes, we have before us the wretched spectacle of professedly orthodox Christians publicly avowing their union with those who deny the faith, and scarcely concealing their contempt for those who cannot be guilty of such gross disloyalty to Christ. To be very plain, we are unable to call these things Christian Unions, they begin to look like Confederacies in Evil. Before the face of God we fear that they wear no other aspect. To our inmost heart, this is a sad truth from which we cannot break away.

It is lawful to unite with all sorts of men for good and benevolent and necessary purposes, even as at a fire, Pagan and Papist and Protestant may each one hand on the buckets and in a sinking ship, heathen and Christian alike are bound to take turns at the pumps. For useful, philanthropical, and political purposes, united action is allowable among men of the most diverse views in religion. But the case before us is that of a distinctly religious communion, a professed fellowship in Christ.

Is this to be made so wide that those who contradict each other on vital points may yet pretend to be at one? Furthermore, we should greatly object to the shifting about for heresy which some speak of; but in

this case the heresy is avowed, and is thrust forward in no diffident style. No words could be more explicit had they been selected as a challenge. We have not to deal with those tares which were like the wheat, but with thorns and thistles which declare themselves openly.

Whether the Down-Grade evil has operated on few or many is a question which may be waived: it has operated manifestly enough upon some, and they glory in it. Yet professedly sound believers are in full accord with these outspokenly heterodox men, and are linked with them in set and formal union. Is this according to the mind of the God of truth? The largest charity towards those who are loyal to the Lord Jesus, and yet do not see with us on secondary matters, is the duty of all true Christians.

But how are we to act towards those who deny his vicarious sacrifice, and ridicule the great truth of justification by his righteousness? These are not mistaken friends, but enemies of the cross of Christ. There is no use in employing circumlocutions and polite terms of expression:--where Christ is not received as to the cleansing power of his blood and the justifying merit of his righteousness, he is not received at all. It used to be generally accepted in the Christian Church that the line of Christian communion was drawn hard and fast, at the Deity of our Lord; but even this would appear to be altered now.

In various ways the chasm has been bridged, and during the past few years several ministers have crossed into Unitarianism, and have declared that they perceived little or no difference in the two sides of the gulf. In all probability there was no difference to perceive in the regions where they abode. It is our solemn conviction that where there can be no real spiritual communion there should be no pretense of fellowship. Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin.

Those who know and love the truth of God cannot have fellowship with that which is diametrically opposed thereto, and there can be no reason why they should pretend that they have such fellowship. We cheerfully admit that among men who possess the divine life, and a consequent discernment of truth, there will be differences of attainment and perception; and that these differences are no barriers to love and union. But it is another matter when we come to receiving or rejecting the vicarious sacrifice and the justifying righteousness of our Lord.

We who believe Holy Scripture to be the inspired truth of God cannot have fellowship with those who deny the authority from which we derive all our teaching. We go to our pulpits to save a fallen race, and believe that they must be saved in this life, or perish for ever: how can we profess brotherhood with those who deny the fall of man, and hold out to him the hope of another probation after death? They have all the liberty in the world, and we would be the last to abridge it; but that liberty cannot demand our co-operation.

If these men believe such things, let them teach them, and construct churches, unions, and brotherhoods for themselves! Why must they come among us? When they enter among us at unawares, and are resolved to stay, what can we do? The question is not soon answered; but, surely, in no case will we give them fellowship, or profess to do so. During the past month many have put to us the anxious question, "What shall we do?" To these we have had no answer to give except that each one must act for himself after seeking direction of the Lord.

In our own case we intimated our course of action in last month's paper. We retire at once and distinctly from the Baptist Union. The Baptist Churches are each one of them self-contained and independent. The Baptist Union is only a voluntary association of such churches, and it is a simple matter for a church or an individual to withdraw from it. The Union, as at present constituted, has no disciplinary power, for it has no doctrinal basis whatever, and we see no reason why every form of belief and misbelief should not be

comprehended in it so long as immersion only is acknowledged as baptism.

There is no use in blaming the Union for harboring errors of the extremest kind, for, so far as we can see, it is powerless to help itself, if it even wished to do so. Those who originally founded it made it "without form and void," and so it must remain. At least, we do not see any likelihood of a change. A large number have this state of things in admiration, and will go on with it; we have no such admiration, and therefore have ceased from it. But we want outsiders to know that we are in nowise altered in our faith, or in our denominational position.

As a baptized believer, our place is where it has ever been. Why not start a new Denomination? This is not a question for which we have any liking. There are denominations enough. If there were a new denomination formed the thieves and robbers who have entered other "gardens walled round" would climb into this also, and so nothing would be gained. Besides, the expedient is not needed among churches which are each one self-governing and self-determining: such churches can find their own affinities without difficulty, and can keep their own coasts clear of invaders.

Since each vessel is seaworthy in herself, let the hampering ropes be cut clean away, and no more lines of communication be thrown out until we know that we are alongside a friend who sails under the same glorious flag. In the isolation of independency, tempered by the love of the Spirit which binds us to all the faithful in Christ Jesus, we think the lovers of the gospel will for the present find their immediate safety. Oh, that the day would come when, in a larger communion than any sect can offer, all those who are one in Christ may be able to blend in manifest unity! This can only come by the way of growing spiritual life, clearer light upon the one eternal truth, and a closer cleaving in all things to him who is the Head, even Christ Jesus.

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