

Epistle 171

by George Fox

George Fox's Epistle 171 emphasizes the necessity of love and the spirit of God in true Christian faith, rejecting human-made doctrines and practices.

Scripture: John 1:3, John 5:24, John 13:35, Romans 13:10, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 3:17, 1 Timothy 1:5, Hebrews 12:2, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Faith", "Unity in the Spirit"

Description

George Fox emphasizes the necessity of performing all actions in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, urging believers to dwell in love as the hallmark of true discipleship. He critiques the reliance on man-made religious practices and emphasizes that true faith and unity come from the Spirit of God, which empowers believers and leads them to genuine fellowship. Fox warns against the dangers of religious persecution and the hypocrisy of those who pray for forgiveness yet fail to extend it to others. He calls for a return to the pure faith that is a gift from God, which transcends all human traditions and divisions. Ultimately, he encourages believers to remain steadfast in the Spirit, which is the source of their strength and unity.

Transcript

Friends,--Let all that ye do be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ [Col 3:17], by whom all things were made [John 1:3] and created, that ye may do that which ye do in the true dominion; and then what ye do ye do in the power of God. And all Friends, dwell in love [1 Jn 4:16], for that is the mark of a disciple [John 13:35], and the fruits of faith and the spirit [Gal 5:22]; which love out of a pure heart is the end of the commandment [1 Tim 1:5] and fulfils the law [Rom 13:10], and in that is edification [1 Cor 8:1] and building, and the fruits of being passed from death to life [John 5:24]; there is love to God, brethren, and enemies, being in the seed that destroys death [1 Cor 15:26] and the power of it, the devil [Heb 2:14]. . . .

And so, the spirit of truth which gave forth the scriptures [2 Pet 1:21], is our director, guide, leader, and comforter [John 16:13], which reproveth the world for sin [John 16:8]. And this leadeth to see the end of all directories which men invent, who have not the spirit the apostles had; and when they cannot hold it up they cry to the powers of the earth to help them. And these we see are erred from the spirit [Isa 29:24] and without the spirit; with whom we cannot trust our bodies, spirits nor souls, into their hands, but have committed them to the Lord, whose they are.

And we are a people that are redeemed from the earth and world, and need none of your church-made-faith, which ye have framed and made in eleven days' time, and your other three days set apart. For Christ is the author of our faith [Heb 12:2], which is the gift of God [Eph 2:8], which is a mystery held in a pure conscience [1 Tim 3:9]. And we say, that all the priests in Scotland, London, and New England cannot make the gift of God, the mystery, which is the faith which remains, and by which men are justified and saved, neither have they power over it; which brings us to have access to God [Rom 5:2], and giveth us victory [1 Jn 5:4] over that which separated us from God. . . .

Mass for the Papists, common prayer for the Episcopal men; and the directory for the Presbyterians; church-made and framed faith for the Independents, and mixed Baptists and others. And those have had their fellowships in these for which they fought, and about which carnal weapons [2 Cor 10:4] got up since the days of the apostles. But the fellowship in the spirit [Phil 2:1] remains, and doth not change, which hath spiritual weapons [Zech 4:6], and these are known and used to fight withal about religion, in which the seed of God is known, which bruise the serpent's head [Gen 3:15] which led man from God, and made a separation betwixt man and God. And the election is known (in him who was) before the world begun [1 Th 1:4, 2 Tim 1:19]; who is the head of our church [Col 1:18], and not they that be head of the mass, head of your directory, head of the common-prayer, and head of the church-made faith, which we see all change and come to nought [Acts 5:38, 1 Cor 2:6], and God confounds [1 Cor 1:27]. And men stand in doubts and questions, and have no assurance in their religion; but that of God stands in them all bound [2 Tim 2:9]. . . .

Our faith, our church, our unity is in the spirit [Eph 4:3], and our word at which we tremble [Isa 66:5], was in the beginning [John 1:1], before the Papists' mass, and your Episcopalians' common-prayer, and the Presbyterians' directory, and Independents, Baptists, and other church-made framed faiths were; and our unity, church, and fellowship will stand when they are all ended. By which spirit we judge them all, and deny their works; in which is our unity with God, with the scriptures, and one with another. For they have been to people like so many changeable coverings, but now the spirit is taking them off; by which we are covered [Isa 30:1], and it is our weapon in this day of great battle with them. The scriptures which ye do speak, and show forth in your books, are owned, but your imaginations of them we deny; but they are all owned in themselves and places. So they are all ours, which end in Christ, who is ours, and in him we are that remaineth.

The mass is the Papists' sacrifice, that they kill about.

The common-prayer is the Episcopalians' sacrifice, that they persecute and kill about. And--

The directory is the Presbyterians' sacrifice, they persecute and kill about.

The made and framed church-faith is the Independents' and Baptists' sacrifice, which they kill and persecute about.

Which sacrifices the Lord doth not accept, neither hath he respect to [Gen 4:5], which are of them who have erred from the spirit [Isa 29:24] which the apostles were in, with which they offered spiritual sacrifice [1 Pet 2:5] to God the Father of spirits [Heb 12:9], which we are in.

And all my dear hearts, all know the fellowship of the seed in its sufferings, and to be made conformable to his death; that ye in the suffering through it may know the power of the resurrection of the just seed [Phil 3:10]. And this is it which kills all bad spirits that will talk, but not do [Mat 23:3]; such may crucify Christ in

themselves afresh [Heb 6:6]. Therefore mind the daily suffering which the seed had, and have unity with that; so ye may rise with that, which destroyeth that which causeth it to suffer. . . .

Are not ye all ashamed? And show ye are naked, out of the power and life the apostles were in; and from their weapons naked? The outward power neither upheld nor separated them from the love of God [Rom 8:38f], which they had in Christ, the end of the law [Rom 10:4]. . . .

Forgive us, as we forgive them, cry Papists, cry Episcopal, cry Presbyterians, and Baptists, and Independents; these cry and say the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our debts and trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us [Mat 6:12];' and like a company of senseless men, without understanding, fall a fighting one with another about their trespasses and debts, and never mind what they prayed, as though they never looked for forgiveness, and to receive the things they prayed for. That pray, 'Forgive us Lord, as we forgive them,' and fall a persecuting and imprisoning one another, and taking their brethren and fellow servants by the throat about religion, which in their prayers they said, 'Forgive us, as we forgive them,' and will not forgive, but say their prayers, as the Pharisees did the scriptures, and did not [Mat 23:3]: this is he, that must be cast into prison, until he pay the utmost farthing [Mat 5:25f], and must not come out. And this hath been their work since the apostles' days, and is not here law? The apostles and Christ did not bid, that any should kill about their words, but that they should love enemies [Mat 5:44]; but ye will kill about their words who were killed for speaking them forth. And so all Friends, dwell in the seed of God, which is heir of the power of the world which is without end; in that dwell and keep your meetings, that ye may all be possessors.

All religions will fight about religions and worships, and kill like the heathen about their gods; Jews, Gentiles, Papists, Protestants of all sects, which are out of the power of the Lord, and the spirit that the apostles were in. And so, they are all out of the royal spirit, that hath the royal, spiritual weapons, and out of the royal seed, which saith, 'love enemies,' which is the royal command to the royal priesthood [1 Pet 2:9]. And they confess, they have not the same power and spirit of the apostles; so then it is true for them to say, we are not the spiritual men, we have not spiritual weapons to fight withal; if ye do not help us, higher powers [Rom 13:1], we fall. For we hold our traditions, and that which we have is by tradition, is by the earthly powers. For we are not made ministers, as the apostles were, by the immediate spirit and power, and gifts; therefore the higher powers must help us, and to them go we with our packet of letters, as Saul did [Acts 9:2]; for we are not spiritual weaponed men, as Paul was. For in all these things are the priests guilty.

The Papists, Common-prayer-men, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, persecute one another about their inventions, (which they have invented,) their mass, their common-prayer, their directory, church-faith, (which they have made and framed,) their inventions and handiworks, and not for the truth. For they know not what spirit they are of [Luke 9:55], that persecute, and would have men's lives destroyed about their church, worship, and religion; for Christ said, 'he came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. [Luke 9:56]' Now they that know not what spirit they are of, that will persecute and destroy men's lives, and not save them, we cannot trust our bodies, souls, nor spirits into their hands, that know not what spirit they are of themselves; they are not like to be trusted with others, that would destroy by a law, which the disciples would have done by prayer, to command fire to come down from heaven to destroy them that would not receive Christ [Luke 9:54]. Which sort Christ rebuked, and told them, that they did not know what spirit they were of. And now, if they did not know what spirit they were of; do these which have persecuted about church and religion, since the apostles' days, who would compel men's bodies, goods, lives, souls, and estates into their hands by a law, or else make them suffer? These are not the ministers of Christ, (the

saviour,) that destroy men's lives, and they know not what spirit they are of; and the lives, bodies, and souls are not to be trusted in their hand. And ye that persecute, shall have no resurrection to life, except ye repent. But they that know what spirit they are of themselves, they are in the unrebukable zeal, and by the spirit of God they offer up their spirits, their souls, and bodies to the Lord, which are his; whose they are, to keep them.

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