

Letter: 42e 84 W Kelly, Plymouth, November 12th, 1845

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's letter discusses the serious concerns leading to his withdrawal from communion and his hope for restoration within the gathering.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:6

Topics: "Spiritual Integrity", "Church Discipline"

Description

John Nelson Darby addresses a beloved brother regarding his decision to withdraw from communion due to the presence of unconfessed evil and a lack of spiritual integrity within the gathering. He emphasizes that his actions were not hasty but rather a response to serious issues that had been ignored, including the subversion of principles and the refusal to reinstate a meeting essential for moral discipline. Darby expresses his grief over the situation but feels a sense of peace and divine approval for his decision, believing it has awakened the consciences of many. He hopes for restoration and healing within the community, while maintaining his commitment to truth and righteousness. His letter reflects a deep concern for the spiritual well-being of the saints and a desire for unity in Christ.

Transcript

p84 [W Kelly] BELOVED BROTHER, - I answer, of course, your letter without delay. You probably do not know that Mr. Harris has declined further ministry here (though he has not left communion) and proposes to leave the place, and this on two points out of three on which I have acted; he is ignorant of the third. This, of course, modifies naturally the surprise which my step might occasion, though it is neither reason nor justification; but it is so far a proof that there was nothing hasty, and that there were serious grounds for it.

I now proceed to tell you why I did so. I felt that God was practically displaced, and so I told them, and then stated the three following points: the subverting the principles on which we meet - this, I think I may say, is not denied now by any (unless the doers of it on principle); at least, it is admitted that brethren (teachers) were intentionally kept away, and Soltau urges Mr. Harris to stay and resume his place, in order to help him to resist. Some say that they were only tendencies, and not a purpose, but the fact is not denied.

I cannot here enter into all the facts, but I am perfectly convinced there were purpose, doctrine, and fact; and you have no idea of the extent to which it had gone. It was, to my mind, as bad as bad could be in other aspects. Secondly, there was actual evil and unrighteousness unconfessed and unjudged: this Harris does not enter upon. And that thirdly, a meeting which has worked in the guidance of the details of the body and service of the saints, has been not only set aside, but refused to be reinstated.

This last was what finally decided Harris before his return here to decline further ministry. I had proposed publicly, as he had laboured in private (and I had also spoken of it) at the re-establishment of this meeting; and the rejection of it occasioned a stay of all moral discipline, unless on the summary judgment of two or three who took it on themselves. This deprived of remedy, for the existence of evil would not in itself be a reason for leaving, but evil unjudged and really sanctioned would, when it could not be remedied.

I have only to add, that I have felt the unclouded approbation of God since I have done it. I had not before an idea of the mass of evil, and how many knew it. Yet I believe the great body wholly ignorant of it, and so I stated when I announced my withdrawal. But they almost all felt that there was something which had destroyed spirituality and love. In my judgment it was very bad indeed. I waited eight or nine months before I did this, and till every step was taken to remedy the evil; and I should have felt the Lord against me had I waited longer.

I believe it has done very much good; the conscience of a vast number has been awakened, evil acknowledged by some who were immersed in it fast, I believe, with evil intention, and I hope more blessing may thus come from above. When I say it, I believe the withdrawal of Harris from ministering had as much, and perhaps more effect, than my withdrawal from communion, from his having been much more here latterly, and the only one who visited, and whom the poor really knew and loved.

All the poor, I think I may say, have felt the evil. I told them that I did it with unmingled grief and sorrow, and only wished it might be remedied, that I loved all and valued many very much, that I believed the great body quite innocent of it, but that there was one Table and one bread, and they were all responsible, and that my feeling was that - as evil was not remedied - I could not identify myself with evil that I knew.

It seemed to me you acted quite wisely, having no information as to the sister coming here. I trust the Lord may restore you all, and it is all I desire for this gathering too. I thank you dear brother, very much for your prayers, and feel that I need them, as I trust you may be enabled to continue them. It has been, I need not say, a time of great trial to me. Still, I have felt the Lord with me, and have been with Him, however feeble; and I am quite in peace since I left the gathering. Already many have separated between good and evil, and graciously; up to this, people had gone away, or held their tongues hopeless.

Kind love to all the saints. Very affectionately yours, dear brother, and praying God that light and peace and strength may be with you and all His beloved ones.

I have no desire but that all should be restored in peace here, and it would be much greater joy to return than even to have cleared my conscience in leaving; I wait upon the Lord, and in the enjoyment of the light of His countenance about it. I have avoided everything which would have the appearance of party or lead to it. I do not believe even that the enemy has ventured to charge me with it. I have no feeling of the kind - God forbid I should. You are not aware that many brethren elsewhere feel as strongly, or more so than I do about it. I do not pretend to say they would therefore necessarily [have] taken the same method, but of that I have no regret. I may just add, that I have refrained from breaking bread apart, though many have stayed away, hoping they may come through grace to set all right.

Plymouth, November 12th, 1845.

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