

# Letter: 7e 19 J L Harris, Limerick, Rec'd August 19th, 1833

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith over philosophy, the role of the Spirit of God in detecting heresy, and the need for walking in love and separation from false teachings.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 6:11, 1 John 4:1

**Topics:** "Discernment", "Unity in the Spirit"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby addresses J.L. Harris in a heartfelt letter, expressing his struggles against heresy that has subtly infiltrated the church, causing confusion among believers. He emphasizes the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit and scripture to discern truth from error, highlighting that human reasoning alone cannot grasp divine truth. Darby reflects on the trials faced by the church and the necessity of maintaining a state of grace to combat the influence of false teachings. He encourages unity and love among believers, recognizing the refreshing power of God's word amidst challenges. Ultimately, he expresses hope for the future of the church and the work of the Lord in the midst of trials.

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## Transcript

p19 VERY DEAR BROTHER [J L Harris], - You might think I was a very unfaithful fulfiller of my purpose of writing, but indeed it was much very anxious trouble that came upon me in service, besides my ordinary labour, that precluded me a good deal from carrying my intention into effect, in which I would I had you with me, though I do not know whether any but my hard heart would have set itself against it, as I felt was the only way. Heresy was infecting many places round, by a very subtle, clever person, who, though he had driven many away by his bitterness, had acquired great influence over the minds of those whom he had not - of the worst character when it had avowed itself without fear, but assuming so subtle a form when attacked, that the poor people could scarce tell what it was about, while it went on in secret in his hands, infecting their minds, though not spoken of to them that had understanding. This was a great trial, for it looked often to others as if I was trying to prove the man wrong, when he was not holding anything particular, and his plausibility was extreme. Save as looking to the Lord the Spirit to secure His own, and walking therein in bounden faithfulness to Christ, I do not know what I should have done, but the Lord kept me through it. The extreme disingenuousness which was apparent to those who had interviews with the person and understood the matter, strengthened one's hand in the consciousness that it could not be of the Lord in its liability to bewilder the poor people. However, it was a great trial, but the Lord has turned it

to good as I believe, though some are resting a little, as it were, under the effects of it, as he yet seeks to maintain a party; but it will do good to the others, I can see, and I thank God for all. It was a great mercy it was discovered: it was entirely through the Lord's hand, for he never openly preached it, though he disseminated it everywhere he could.

It is remarkable how the reasoning of man fails and comes to nothing in the pursuit of divine truth, but I have felt this a great trial to my spirit, that instead of drawing lovingly from the fresh springs that are in Christ, in whom all fulness dwells, one was discussing whether we were so or so. Now, except as recipients through the grace that is in Christ, we are utterly incompetent to deal with man, or to have anything to say to God, and the tendency of such service, though kept by grace, is to make God the subject - which is impossible - instead of us. This is the real difference between philosophy and religion, and which makes the one all false and the other all true. God cannot be God in discussion. He has lost His essentiality in our minds. He has ceased to be God to us. Hence there is no real philosophy but faith - the realisation of what God is. I recollect being struck with this long ago, when I was a poor dark creature, reading the Offices, I think, at the expression, *Subjecta veritas quasi materia*. It makes the mind of God, which it is not, and God subject to its judgment, which is the worst lie about Him that can be told: in fact there is then no God: it is worse than Adam's, "Ye shall be as gods." It is destruction to the mind. Faith understands a great many things about God, but it sees God in them, and it has truth. Philosophy may talk, even with the same names, but there is no God in it, and hence, what it has is false. If I judge that God ought to love everybody by mere human feeling, I am not vindicating love, but denying supremacy, and its operation in detail, as the potter over the clay, to do all things after the counsel of His own will. The natural man may see no difference, but there is all moral difference if I am or am not associated with God, and this is the grand aim of Satan in all heresy, to take the mind off its state of recipiency into a state of judging of mere propositions; its strength is gone, and being incompetent to speak but from grace so as to confound error, the opportunity of falsehood, from which no grace can be drawn, is introduced; and while the sheep of Christ are starved, those who are not come in in apparent belief - [cannot]\* be hindered - the devil's children joining in a falsehood.

The state of recipient grace from the truth of God is the only guard against it, because the mind is conscious then of the communion that it has with God in the thing which it defends. The scripture is the guard against any delusion in this, which if [used] under the teaching of God's Spirit will answer everything; and it is alone to be relied on. It is God's representation of those things in which is the source of grace - Christ the key to all. I have felt great occasion to guard against this latterly . . . though it has strengthened me in all established truths, and the rather enabled me to see what they meant, when one would have thought of nothing wrong. This person would tell all the truths in scripture, passing by the one point, in which error, fatal error, ran: and hence the difficulty unless the power of God's Spirit was so upon the souls of all, as to make them practically feel the value and power of this; otherwise it seemed refuting one who held all the fundamentals of truth for the sake of some inaccuracy. I feel that the presence of God's Spirit can alone so bring out the bright value and lustre of the truth, as to detect heresy, and then that grace is not in the matter, and discover the flesh in it. There is the subtlety, and where Satan gets in. You never can wield the flesh against the flesh to any good, and the mere reasonings of our mind are nothing, and no stronger, but the same as the heresy. But the Spirit of God detects that there is no grace in it, and thus the saint is preserved.

Dear brother, I have just re-read your note on the Kingdom of Heaven, and I assure you it refreshed me. It drew me back to the pleasant scenes in which I, with you and other brethren, I mean, have fed together on

the refreshing pastures of God's life-giving and heart-satisfying word. And, indeed, while I rejoice before God at the thought of your all walking in love, if you would strengthen me in many trials, and I know you would a poor weak brother, it is just by the love in which, as I trust, you are all walking together. I know, as you know, the trials and comparative difficulties that are amongst you: I feel in your weaknesses as bearing part of them, yet I do see a comfort of love and a blessing from it, which while I taste the Lord's goodness in many places, I do not find elsewhere, though I see much christian kindness. And it is not merely the happiness that is in it, but I see plainly that it is in this that the refreshings of God's grace and truth come, and are to be found. The Spirit can plant and water there. And while I know all our weakness, and mourn over it before God, as a part of the desolate, the poor - as it were, as to her own state deserted - church (yet not of God for blessing and inheritance), yet I find the joy of the Spirit and the comfort of the Spirit's teaching among you as my joy; and so I trust I may find you. It makes me feel what may be elsewhere - what fruit the principles bear. Dear Lady P. frightened me by the commendation she gave you, but I know you all better than she did. But I quite fell in with your exposition, and, as I said, feel refreshed by it.

My view of Matthew 13 (of which we may speak more, please God, when we meet - I do not know exactly when that will be - though it is in my hope), was of the results [or] of the principles on which those results were founded; and I feel it a very interesting connecting link of the two systems - "things new and old." I say this, because Christ, who will sit on His own throne, sits now on His Father's throne, and therefore does not exercise that discriminating power in the world which He will when He assumes it, distributing in power, what we ought to be witnesses of, and of which the Spirit is witness in the church, righteousness - but righteousness to suffering, for the truth of the moral glory is to give it the glory. "O righteous Father" - and He went into the Father's glory. I speak of Him exalted as a Man, because He had borne witness of it faithfully on earth - we into His, because we (oh, how weakly) have suffered first on earth, and get into the Father's house and kingdom because we have known it and done it as sons, for we could not be His disciples unless we glorified the Father; but our share in righteousness is to have the glory, "seeing it is a righteous thing with God." What we are witnesses of we shall be partakers of, so that we may be unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Hardman, a dear brother in the Lord, a clergyman, was here lately, and he was speaking at large on the Seven Churches. I was not here, but this ground I hear he took. Sardis, the Reformation, on which, "if therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know," etc. Philadelphia, the separation of little bodies of believers with a little strength (there is comfort in that), but the Lord on their side, "I will keep them from," etc. "Behold I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast," etc. And then the church left in its Laodicean state, its state generally now, at which He stands at the door and knocks - there being still some remaining perhaps amongst them, but He is at the door. What do you say to this? The result to the Laodicean church is to be spued out of His mouth. It is an important consideration in the present state of things. It commends itself morally to one's mind.

The trial - met with, and the poor husband, is most grievous; as regards every human feeling, I do not know what I should have done had I been he, unless in deepest instruction the Lord had taught me to bow to His hand. The Lord is always good and righteous, specially to them that know Him.

What is poor - doing at Oxford? I love that man, much erred as I think he has. Oh, how little have we of the Spirit, to baffle the plans and devices and snares of Satan! The church ought to be not only in possession of truth, but so possessed with the Spirit as, though tried, to baffle all his snares. This is what so humbles

me; it is not that I am not ascertained of what is right as regards conscience, or that I and others are not seeking it in sincerity of heart and simplicity of purpose in God's sight, but no strength or adequate power to keep every saint by the presence of His Spirit out of his power. But the positive work of the enemy I do think most manifest at Irving's, but where was the energy to keep it out? But I must close, dear brother.

I am pressed here beyond my strength; a few like-minded now I find, of those who ought to follow out the Lord fully, though owning it in their own spirit. The Lord is very gracious, and is, in spite of our foolishness, working widely in the country. The clergy are in a position, I think, of great, very great guilt; but there is sufficient grace among them individually - many of them - to make many hold by them, though those that have it see plainly, and can testify of the breaking up of all around them. They are, I think, very guilty. But the Lord is working in another way. There is not enough energy of the Spirit outside them to absorb everything to itself, though there is a very extensive breaking loose; but there is a craving for scripture knowledge, and desire for communion, which they cannot meet in their present state; and by scripture-reading meetings, and by the clergy themselves in many instances making churches, not with communion, but admitting all Christians, and many little bodies springing up, things are assuming a new shape, though unformed, and there will be an entirely new state of things in a year or two. This country will, I doubt not, be practically separated from England, probably entirely. The attempt is making to reorganise the church, and with considerable present influence amongst the clergy who have risen, one may say, against the present state of things. The subordinate, or, as I should say, the insubordinate, clergy, are trying to get the matter into their own hands. I do not see righteousness in this. I am sure it will restrict them. They exclude laymen from the mission now, and, of course, I do not go on there. The principle of communion in which you meet in Plymouth seems to rejoice the hearts of those engaged in it wherever it has been practised, so that the Lord is manifestly working. He will surely draw substantially His saints together before the end come, though there may be some left in, like Lot. In the meantime, one has only to work on. Adieu, dear brother. My love, very deep and affectionate love, to all the brethren and sisters. Grace, mercy and peace be with you all. I assure you I have much comfort in you all in the midst of many trials. I hope, please God, to see you ere long. I wish I had some of you over here at Limerick, for instance, for a while, where there is much and nice work.

Ever, dear brother,

Yours most affectionately in the Lord.

I shall be rejoiced to stay awhile with you, when it pleases God to bring me back to Plymouth. I should probably go by London.

Limerick [received], August 19th, 1833.

{\*Copy defective.}

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