

# Extracts from Letters

W. H. Westcott.

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### Extracts from Letter dated Jan. 30th, 1932.

Many things are to be borne within the area of outward fellowship, from which one shrinks in the way of personal contact. I remember being asked if I were breaking bread with a person, did I not commit myself to all that he did? My reply was "Certainly not," and the ground of my reply is the whole teaching of the Pauline Epistles, for without touching on the question of church fellowship, and still less insisting on expulsion from it, the apostle shows up instance after instance where saints are to be rebuked sharply, corrected from error, even withdrawn from as disorderly — yet not counted for enemies, but admonished as brothers. Unruly ones are to be warned, and so on. You do not commit yourselves to these features of flesh seen in saints, yet the teaching of scripture does not point to the putting outside the pale by excommunication.

. . . In days of brokenness we may not alter God's standards, nor may we depart from God's ways.

Wm. Hy. Westcott.

November 3rd, 1925.

My Dear Brother,

Thank you for your letter. The spirit of exercise which it evinces is always a feature which turns one's heart in thankfulness to God: Once we are separated to the true Christ, the Christ of-God, we are in a position to avail ourselves of all His wisdom power, grace and love for the various troubles we are called upon to face.

It is a fallacy to suppose that any ground can be discovered or reached whereon we may avoid all difficulty, escape all trouble and exercise, or find every brother and sister intelligently and fully in accord with that position. Assembly history starts in the New Testament with the apostles; but how far from perfect were those assemblies which were gathered even under their ministry.

It would seem that at first the passage on to true Christian ground was gradual. The Jewish remnant and proselytes who were blessed at Pentecost still held public gatherings in the temple precincts; and what enraged the priests was that public teaching by the apostles went on in the very stronghold of the legal, but now effete, Jewish system. The Christians, however, were by the descent of the Holy Ghost baptised into one body, and in the confession of the Lord Jesus, bore testimony to Israel's rejection of Him, and of His exaltation BY and TO the right hand of God. And through Peter's ministry there was for a time still the offer of grace to Israel if repentant.

Even after the call of Paul, and I may say his first missionary journey with the gospel, there was still a close link with the law, and circumcision, and the temple, as Acts 15 reminds us; and as late as

Acts 21 we learn how many thousands there were that believed, in Jerusalem, who were all zealous of the law, etc., etc.

But while much was borne with, and many links at first existed with the synagogue, it seems that assembly truth as Paul administered it, first had a pure place after he had testified to the synagogue in Corinth, and then departed thence Acts 18: 7. Not but what he still presented the Gospel to the Jew first, as, for example, in verse 19, and Acts 19: 8, but at that point, IN CORINTH, he breaks with the synagogue, and IN THAT CITY, where true separation from the judged religious system of Judaism was first marked, HE LAID THE FOUNDATION OF TRUE ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY: 1 Cor. 3: 10-11. For in that passage in Corinthians it is not merely a question of a sinner receiving the gospel. Paul did not lay the gospel foundation, for souls were blessed through Christ and received the Holy Spirit before Paul was converted. But by his ministry he did in Corinth lay down the grand foundation truth of the assembly in testimony here. And, be it noted again, it was when the rejection of Christ by the Jewish religious opponents led to the step of separation from the religious system which refused Christ His place, that the truth could be both taught and practised in separation. I do not see how you could have had it otherwise. How could you have seen a local assembly in function in the synagogue? I mean according to what you get taught in the Corinthians. THERE everyone was to be subject to the leadership of Christ, and ANY brother, if led of Him and by the Holy Ghost, might so far take part. This would not have been possible, nor would it have been tolerated, in the synagogue.

So that not until you have the truth as taught in separation in Corinth could you have the assembly in function. And in his ministry there Paul laid the foundation of all true ASSEMBLY testimony.

No doubt the topstone is reached in the epistle to those at Ephesus, which looks on to the completion of the counsel of God as to the whole church. But there again we may say it was only learned in separation, for he separated the disciples, and they henceforth met in the school of one Tyrannus.

Now these things may help us to see that in so far as we mix with a religious system which is marked for the judgment of God, we put ourselves in a position where it is impossible to keep in the full truth of the assembly now revealed. How anyone who has once tasted the liberty and preciousness of a circle where Christ alone is acknowledged, and His fulness has been tasted and enjoyed, can afterwards go to and settle in "the establishment" or any of the so-called "nonconformist bodies" one does not understand. Yet evidently the epistle to the Hebrews was written because there was danger that those who had been drawn out of the old and decaying system should be tempted back to it.

But even when separated to Christ there is every danger that saints should be tempted to admit and shelter in their midst the principles and practices of the world out of which grace has brought them, or of the religious system from which truth has delivered them. Of the former, Corinthians itself gives us a clear example; where instead of living under the sway of the holy Lord, using the resources they had in Christ, and walking according to the truth of the House of God, the Body of Christ, and liberty of the Spirit, and — we may add — of man in Christ, they allowed the use of man after the flesh with his resources, and alas, his luxuries and pleasures, his looseness, and his ready allowance of the first man. Even SIN seemed to be allowed, gross and almost unnameable sin, under the plea of liberty. but liberty for the first man whom God has condemned should rather be called licentiousness.

Of the latter, Colossians and Hebrews are evident examples. Here it is not the bad side of man after the flesh which saints were in danger of allowing With the Colossians it seems to have been largely the mentality of the first man, his philosophy, his mental training, his reasoning powers, and

especially in religious forms. It is a particularly subtle form of weakness, and in truth the denial of Christianity, to suppose that a man who is highly educated and trained in the world's schools, and has examined all the various systems of thought, ancient and modern, and has been theologically trained, and who has studied logic, mathematics, and science of all kinds, whether physical or metaphysical, will necessarily be the most useful or the most reliable of Christians. On the contrary, HE is likely to be the most useful, who having had all these "advantages" as the world calls them, renounces faith in all the subtle reasonings and conclusions of men, and in the-spirit of a little child, receives with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. Saul of Tarsus, the great helper of the saints in the Gentile world, says "what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, he had done with man after the flesh, and was not only content to be in contact with the fulness in Christ, but learned that that fulness was so complete that there WAS no fulness elsewhere. No one can describe the magnificence of the position into which the feeblest Christian is introduced, where — in Christ — he has every resource, and is independent of the whole system of operation, the whole "modus operandi" of the world, and of the man whose world it is. That world, that man, wants his music, his sentimentality, his eloquence, his religious atmosphere, his architecture to aid "the religious sense," his organisation, his rubrics, his fasts, his feasts, his rules, his ordinances, and a hundred and one accessories, which, even in the case of a Christian, would smother his faith and quench the Spirit. How amazing the deliverance, how fascinating the liberty, where a poor once-imprisoned Christian emerges out of such an \*Aruwimi forest of religiousness into God's light of day, where Christ is all in all.

\*\* An African river, tributary to the Congo. The forests in this region are very dense.

With the Hebrews, it was more the allurements of a past religious system, which had had its place in God's ways while Israel was being tested. It had an antiquity of some 1500 years' duration; it had a thrilling history, was headed up in an earthly centre, and in its high priest always had an earthly head. It could boast of its central temple, of its grand ritual, of its law, its great festivals; and while its roots lay in the fact of its Divine inauguration, truly commanded the reverence and homage of every Hebrew all over the world. But it was not finality, for by its means, so imposing and material, God was foreshadowing all that was in his heart — to be established in Christ. And now Christ HAS COME in Whom is finality. Hence, though of divine inauguration, the best religious system that the world has ever known, AND THE ONLY DIVINE ONE, has gone down, and is by God Himself set aside in favour of Christ alone.

Where, then, is the religious system, be it old or new, Catholic or Protestant, national or sectarian, where is the religious system that God can acknowledge now that CHRIST has come? The saint who goes down to any system acknowledges what God does not acknowledge.

What shall I say more? We find that God in mercy, and our Lord Jesus Christ as having the key of David, has set before us an open door in these closing days. We find that through grace any Christian who is exercised about these things can get out to Christ from all the entanglements of man's systems, and find in true separation to Christ every fulness and resource. There is for him there the possibility of learning (without human trammels), the love of the Father's heart, the counsels of God, the glories, grace and love of Christ, and the whole range of God's good pleasure in the Man of His right hand, the second Man, and last Adam, the Son of His love. There, too, he may find in company with other Christians set free, the blessed liberty of the Spirit, and ministry from the Head in heaven for the members on earth, and enjoy the inestimable privilege of identification with the rejection of Christ, while in spirit he can be led into the holiest of all in the sense of the blessedness of the God to whom

Christ has brought him, and in the enjoyment of the Father's love who is the source of it all. Moreover, in the power of the Spirit he can come out face to face with men, to be here descriptive of Christ, in witness for Him in His absence, waiting for His return, and competent to face all the power of Satan, and the opposition of the world, and even all the storms and troubles of earth, in the grace of Christ.

We may say that about a century has passed since the exodus began from human and national systems that saints might meet on the ground of the Assembly of God alone, according to the Scriptures, under the Headship and Lordship of Christ, and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. It is a marvellous conception, and it showed a path which instructed, exercised, devoted Christians felt and do feel to be of God. It seemed to be the realization of the Lord's own word, "I have set before thee an open door?" But it is so pre-eminently a spiritual thing, stripped of all vestige of man's methods of co-ordination and co-operation, so entirely dependent upon the giving Christ His place, and walking in the Spirit, that it could the more easily be damaged the moment any individual allowed the flesh and his own will to act.

But all the true power of Christianity is seen only when saints are separated to Christ, and are loyal to that separation. Bring in the ways of the world, admit the thoughts and methods of man, and you have weakened everything. Israel, who had Jehovah for their King, wanted to be like the nations and to have a king of their own. Saints who are nominally separated to Christ ask for an organ for their work, a leader in their prayer meetings, a chairman for their conventions, a banner for their parades, the advertisement of their services, magic lanterns or lantern processions, and a dozen other things, which are truly only "like the nations." And even the young people's meetings may easily degenerate into "socials" where hymn singing and jocular remarks and recitations are the fare on which they are nourished, to sustain them, forsooth, in a hostile world, where all of Christ is to be inwrought and expressed, and where the whole power of the devil is to be encountered. How the devil must at times "laugh in his sleeve."

The more we see of the true power and glory of Christianity, the more sensitive we become to anything that contravenes it, the more trivial do things appear which constitute the stock-in-trade of some. But — may one say it humbly — if they only knew the truth as God has shown it to us, the more readily would they drop these defiling substitutes for the power of the Holy Ghost and the glories of Christ.

One has truly said, "The principles of God may be deserted by easy gradations. They may first be RELAXED), then FORGOTTEN, then DESPISED. They may pass from a FIRM hand into an EASY one, from thence to an INDIFFERENT one, and find themselves at last flung away be a REBELLIOUS one. Many have at first stood for God's principles in face of difficulties — then merely grieved over the loss of them — then been careless about their loss or maintainance — and at last, with a high hand, broken."

(J. G. Bellett.)

But you ask how far can we go, and give the right hand of fellowship in such things. I say, NOT AT ALL. "have no company with him" in 2 Thess. 3: 14 is not ecclesiastical; it is moral. But it places within our reach a refusal to company with a man who, though outwardly in the Christian company is behaving in a way inconsistent with the truth of Christ. It has long been clear to me that I cannot associate in service with one whose modes of service are prejudicial to the truth of God. Whether it is in open air work, Sunday School work, gospel work at home, or missionary work abroad, whether speaking or writing, one finds that one cannot company with a man whose course is "disorderly and not according to the tradition which" says Paul "ye received of us."

And further, even as a great servant like Paul or Apollos might have difficulty and objection about going to Corinth at a given time when looseness was so shamefully practised (see 1 Cor. 16, 12; 2 Cor. 1: 23), so may a little and insignificant servant refuse to visit a gathering which is characterised by looseness, at a given time. But I humbly submit that he should, as Paul did, GIVE HIS REASON FOR SO DOING. If servants were only faithful, much more exercise might be produced than is produced. Usually if one knows of hearts that are grieving over the laxity, one goes to encourage them; but always making it clear that the laxity allowed by some is in one's judgment utterly contrary to the Word of God and the truth of Christ.

I know that some say you are identified with everything that occurs in the assembly. This I utterly repudiate, when once saints are on Divine ground. Paul was NOT identified with the man in 1 Cor. 5. He was NOT identified with the disorderly ones at Thessalonica. On the contrary he ministered and prayed and pleaded, and used the resources that he knew to be in the Lord, to correct the errors. And if there were faithful servants who would do this thing, and seek by ministry and pastoral care to correct (while refusing to identify themselves with) the blunders we see to-day, there would be less of division and less of secession than we have seen. Where a meeting becomes thoroughly and entirely identified with an inconsistency, one could not commend to nor receive from it, for in such case it seems clear that "a little leaven" has "leavened the whole lump." It has degenerated from the true ground of the assembly to that of "a house public," if I may use the term. It is a place where liberty is allowed for the will of man, and that the assembly is not. Wherever "a little leaven" is at work we have to look and look and look again to the Lord to check its action; to pray, and minister, and present the truth of Christ so that consciences may be exercised and if possible the brothers or sisters who have tended to lead saints away may themselves be recovered. At times, I believe, the Lord may permit prolonged waiting upon Him, when relief from the exercise and pressure does not come at once; and He may even permit that an individual or some individuals who have been wilful may go to a length where they finally quit the meetings they cannot carry with them. Just how the Lord will intervene for the deliverance of the exercised saints who can upon Him one cannot say; but He cannot be untrue to Himself. I am deeply delighted, and take comfort in the thought, that we can call upon the Lord in every difficulty of this kind. Of course, if a trouble takes on a character which plainly requires excommunication, there can be no question whatever, and there ought to be no delay, for the Lord's glory. But in these things that so distress us, the presence and ways of those who are inconsistent with the truth of the assembly and Christ's place in it, and who bring in man's ways to the church of God, the same Lord who is over all is rich to all that call upon Him; and whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. It was so in salvation at the first; it is so in assembly history all along. (1 Cor. 1, 2).

Then also there is great encouragement in the thought that where things tend surely to departure God greatly honours the faith of an individual. As in the days of the judges, so to-day; a single man of faith and faithfulness may be used to steady things for his day and generation. We do happily find in many of the meetings men who have learned something of the truth, and stand in it. There has to be withstanding in times of attack, and standing when our own forces seem to be melting away. Of the two perhaps the latter is the more difficult.

As to a gathering receiving the ministry of a brother who is not on assembly ground, I would, I think, first ascertain if it were inadvertently, supposing him to be all right. But if wilfully, in defiance of the obligations of fellowship in the truth, it would close that door for me. I should not feel free to go to them until they came to own that that kind of independency savours not of brokenness of spirit, nor of the faithfulness which suits the Holy One and the True, in these days of confusion. Independency and free-lanceism suits an unbroken will.

No — we are called by God to the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. All diverse from that is out of court. May God graciously be with us, and support our feeble faith, and even yet give us to see His hand in great deliverance. "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." (Zephaniah 3: 12). The conies are a feeble folk yet they make their houses in the ROCK.

Warm love, dear brother,

The Lord cheer you, and indeed may you encourage YOURSELF in the Lord your God.

Affy. in Him, Wm. Hy. Westcott.

## Fellowship

A Letter by, Wm. Hy. Westcott.

May 3rd, 1922.

Beloved Mr

Yours of the 1st is before me, with its record of exercise before God. Would that I could help you more fully than I really am able.

Our fellowship as Christians is not what educated men can draw up, nor what a few saints agree upon, nor, certainly, is it a heterogeneous mixture of everything that may like to present itself for incorporation. It is expressed for us in the language of Holy Scripture.

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1: 3.

"God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son." 1 Cor. 1: 9.

Fellowship with God must, as to its definition, be a fellowship at God's own level. The fellowship of saints is often lowered to what saints, certain saints, are agreed upon, or what they see, in their feebleness, of the meaning of Scripture. But in that case, and whilst we can usually give every credit for sincerity, the fellowship of saints is short, very short, of fellowship with God.

God has recovered much for us in the last three or four generations of what Christianity is, set forth in all its richness and fulness in the Risen Man Christ Jesus, the Son of the Father in truth and love.

Men have been permitted to see how great the privilege is of the Christian family and of the Christian Assembly, the liberty of the Father's presence, of the presence of God, the power which the Holy Spirit exercises when the restrictions of man's mind and hand are withdrawn, the unfoldings of the resources which are in Christ, and of His love and care for His Assembly with all the great designs which are to be effectuated in and by means of that Assembly

Fellowship, to be in the truth, must allow for the full expression of the truth. You cannot say that every saint must be at the full height of the Christian calling before he enters upon fellowship, because that would be exclusivism with a vengeance: and neither you nor I nor any saint living could be in it. But no saint, nor company of saints, can devise, construct or propose a fellowship which is SYSTEMATICALLY and AVOWEDLY committed to doctrines and practices short of the truth without becoming in principle a sect. And while this is done by every so-called sect, or denomination, it becomes more subtle and subversive of truth in proportion as it is nearer in its outward form to those forms which truth produces.

We have been shown by God's mercy, a path outside of what we call "system," a path where we can be in consonance with the Headship and Lordship of Christ, and where we can set before our hearts and minds the twin objectives of Holiness and Truth answering to Him who is THE HOLY and THE TRUE. Rev. 3: 7. You will remark that when you progress in the prophetic outline of the churches from Philadelphia to Laodicea, the One who is certainly Holy and True speaks of Himself as the Faithful and True. This does not mean that He ceases to be holy, or that our practical holiness in correspondence with Him can be waived. But it implies that in closing days just preceding the rapture of the whole Church there will be need for emphatic faithfulness to answer to Christ, who never surrenders His witness for God. Rev. 3: 14.

If we were in denominations that had sunk below their own recognised standard, we should, I suppose, be exercised to get back to those primitive methods with which our denominations started.

But God has called us into the full light of Christ, and the only fellowship we can now take account of is that divine fellowship to which I referred in the beginning of this letter. As to its nature, and character and intimacies, it is fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. As to its expression whether in one locality or in every place alike (1 Cor. 1: 2), it is by God's calling, the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. There is to be, (in the way of material, function, ways, administration, and spiritual aim), a counterpart in local assemblies — and that the same everywhere — of all that His Son Jesus Christ our Lord is in His exalted but hidden position.

It is a uniformity of exercise produced, not because we belong to a "circle of meetings," but, by our being uniformly consistent with the truth of Christ. The same Christ presents Himself everywhere, and while giving room for variety in the different members of His body, and in the differing gifts, He will never become the author of inconsistencies with Himself.

If, then, you find an individual saint who habitually acts in disregard of the Lord's will; if you find a company of saints adopting and avowing a principle of action which you see, according to Scripture, and which you know, in communion with Christ by the Holy Spirit, is neither holiness nor truth if you find a collection or circle of meetings where the acknowledged and defended ways are not those which you learn to be Christ's ways in the Assembly, you cannot recognise either the individual or the circle as answering to Him. You do not unchristianise them, you do not abuse them, but in faithfulness and in truth you find your course to be clear of them; while, no doubt, the Lord who loves them will rebuke and chasten them as seems good to Him. Your path is, however, to hear His voice, and to open the door to Him, and He will sup with you, and you with Him.

The principles of "Open Brethren" are very fairly dealt with by Mr (Hamilton Smith?) in his recent booklet. Their fellowship, as such, is not Christian fellowship according to faithfulness and truth, though the outward form of it approximates to the truth. They have baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer meetings, Bible readings, Gospel preaching, and missionary work. Many who seek piety and earnestness are attracted by these features, and well they may be, so far as they go, but for all that (and all the more alluring and seductive because of it), they offer a substitute for the truth in that they leave out faithfulness to the truth.

The avowed principles of the "Open" Communion of the independency of each gathering of every other one is, we know, contrary to the One Lordship, of Christ — to the truth that He is Head, to the fact that there is one SPIRIT, to the consideration that the instructions given in the Word of God to one gathering are in view of and for the guidance of all gatherings in Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 1: 2; 1 Cor. 4: 17; 1 Cor. 7: 17; 1 Cor. 14: 33. Rev. 2, 7; Rev. 2: 17, 29; Rev. 3: 6; Rev. 13: 22).

It is inconsistent with the "partnership" (fellowship) to which all Christians in every place are

called (1 Corinthians 1: 9), and with the Truth that there is one body, energized by the one, "Ego," Christ.

These truths recovered to us by the grace of God, are distinctly challenged in these days by the principles of independency affirmed by "Open" brethren as such, and are rendered more alluring and deceptive to the ordinary Christian by the undeniably evangelical activities of those who profess them.

We would acknowledge that which is of God in any Christian, and thankfully do so; yet if Christians justify principles destructive of the Testimony of the Lord; we cannot accept this as the true way of the Church according to scripture.

Apart from the historical origin of Open Brethren, their refusal, at that time, to concede the Divine principle of defilement by association with evil, has given birth to the whole method on which most of their meetings are based; for anyone claiming to be a Christian may demand to be received, and, in general, would be invited to break bread; and each meeting is independent of each other meeting, since no corporate responsibility is owned. It is an easy come and go method of congregationalism; and those with them fail altogether of giving any expression to the truth of the One Body, and indeed, of the Headship and Lordship of JESUS, the Christ, in a collective sense. For obviously, if the latter be held in any practical sense, the judgment to which He leads in one locality, would be confirmed and upheld wherever He is so acknowledged.

But our present difficulty goes further than that. There is in your neighbourhood a meeting which has a peculiar history, and which, while it professes to disavow Open Brethren as such, yet adopts a hyphenated method of come and go with them. One or two able brothers among them put their defence in an exceedingly plausible form, as I know from correspondence with them; but while their arguments are specious, and very likely difficult to meet by simple souls, the upshot of the whole matter is that brethren in that meeting do come and go at will amongst Open Brethren, and are in principle and in fact — in spite of specious argument — on open ground.

Further, so weak have we become, so little versed in the true character of Christian fellowship at its full height, that many amongst us have candidly demanded that we lower the standard of fellowship so as to allow of these hyphenated associations, to admit of them as a recognised principle of action; so that though we know of men who do go to Open Meetings (and who esteem it a right and proper thing, defending their actions in various degrees), yet we have little or no power to discipline them in the Lord's Name. My grief is that the whole standard of truth has been so lowered amongst us, as the Laodicean spirit asserts itself. that there is disappearing the priestly power to discriminate between clean and unclean in relation to the testimony of the Lord.

This is not confined to one company of brethren alone. You might find one kind very particular about exclusion, who are exclusive as the Papacy, where the fear of men, and of one another, is a very large if not dominant feature. This, while it may be like in outward form to what truth produces, lacks the sweetness of grace. The system as such stands self-condemned, for the One to whose fellowship we are called was full of grace and truth. There is separation of a kind, but it is produced by decrees, so that as I have known personally among them, souls are held in bondage because they know their fellowship is maintained by the dread of man, and shuts out many without cause.

But our own danger is largely the other way. Laodicea is that state of the assembly in which position is claimed, accompanied by a laxity and self-sufficiency wholly foreign to the position; an entire rejection of exercise before the Lord as to what suits Him as the Faithful and the True Witness, the Amen, the beginning of the creation of God. There is failure to recognise finality in Christ, and there is the tolerance of that unsubdued will which was the ruin of the old creation. Along with the

spirit of amalgamation which is abroad in the world there is a kindred movement in the professing churches, the effort to discover some formula which will result in all being able to meet on a common platform. In the world it is heading up in the idea of unity, or association, or federation, of which, alas! Christ is not the Head. In the churches it is not proposed on the ground of the Headship of Christ so much as upon common agreement among professed believers. It amounts to this that as long as we are all Christians nothing matters. The call of God back from the captivity, the revival of the House, the re-discovery of the Divine Centre, these things are nothing to those who would have us break down all barriers. If you come back to Jerusalem to the House, you must respect the laws of the House, and what is due to the name and glory of Jehovah. If one had hitherto — though an Israelite — been dwelling in Babylon, and had acquired the ways of Babylon, he may desire to go up to Jerusalem and worship in the Lord's House, but to do so according to God he must abandon his Babylonish ways, and associations, and purify himself according to the purification of the Sanctuary. The conflict in Ezra's and Nehemiah's days was incessant. Oh! how the enemy sought by every sort of artifice to break down the spirituality of the movement. What letter-writing there was. What alliances were formed. What influences had to be countered, in order to preserve that which God restored. You will not fail to notice that Ezra is followed by Nehemiah, and that once you have the House in order the City follows. A decree was issued for the one by Cyrus, but a second decree was issued for the other by Darius, equally important in its place. The House is the first thing, of course; the wall is the second. Many seem to want the House and its forms, but without the wall.

This is a large subject, but I conceive it to be at the bottom of the local trouble I have referred to. There is no wail of separation between the ground that God has recovered for us and that which is more decidedly and distinctly under the enemy's hand. In the rebuilt city there are gates, but gates are to admit those who are to be admitted IN THE ORDERED WAY. All is to be according to Divine order. There is no laxity, no playing fast and loose. Every one who comes into the circle where Jehovah is owned must submit to the responsibilities of that position. There was no compulsion to come into Jerusalem, but the idea that those who did so were to have no regard to that administration which was recognised there and appointed of God would be treachery and infidelity to Jehovah.

I feel that no one but the Lord Himself can guide us in our exercises just now, but my whole soul revolts from the thought of those hyphenated associations. They will work evil; of that I am certain. Those who practise them will discover any plausible excuse possible, but of the effect on meetings and on the testimony of the Lord generally I have not the slightest doubt. The good Lord deliver us.

Always affectionately your brother,

Wm. Hy. Westcott.

### **Extracts from letters dated 1923 and 1928.**

Your letter of the 8th is before me with all its reminder of the difficulties of today. Fain would we give ourselves undistractedly to the pursuit of Christ in God's presence — His joy, and the Man of His pleasure. fain would we study without cessation all that the Spirit brings before us in the Word, of God's thoughts in connection with Him, and be in all the liberty, the beauty, the power of the new order of man of which He is the Head. We can appreciate the position of Jude when he says, "I have been obliged to write to you, exhorting you to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." In the pursuit of ministry, it is at times necessary to face evil, as well as to teach or learn the good.

There is nothing so heart-breaking as facing the state of things in the Church to-day. We humbly

bear our share in the failure in its widest aspect; the corruption and ever-accelerating apostasy, the trend Rome-ward (in principle) of pious minds, and the leaning to Modern Thought in its great variety of forms, on the part of nearly all the rest.

But particularly, one could spend his time sighing and crying in the spirit of Jeremiah, over the terrible collapse of those who have claimed to be delivered from these palpable and general failures, and have contented themselves with the name of "brethren," so plainly God's name for all Christians (John 20, Acts 12, 1 Thess. 5).

Here, where human machinery no longer exists to maintain outward unity (though that outward unity be ecclesiastical agreement and not the unity of the Spirit), nothing could have kept us together but the faith of the Son of God and walking in the Spirit (Gal. 2: 20; Gal. 5: 16). The first keeps us right objectively, the second right subjectively. This is primarily individual; but — we can never — be prepared for collective exercise, unless right individually. All the practical use of the truth unfolded in Ephesians, Colossians, or Corinthians; in Timothy, Peter, or Jude; requires that the individual be in the light of Christ in glory, the risen Son of God, and that he be by the Spirit, responsive to that light.

Referring to your postscript of a week ago in which you ask as to The possibility of quoting scripture to justify our refusal of doubtful associations, it seems to me that ignorance of Scripture on the one hand, and lack of consistency with what Scripture brings before us on the other, accounts for much of present failures.

Apparently you find that in quoting J. N. D. you are met by the sort of slogan cry "tradition," and you ask "how far do you consider OUR judgment permissible?" As a simple answer I should say "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Rom. 1: 14, 23, and "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," ver. 5.

In the light of scripture; I can only pity the Christian who instead of getting to God and His Word, only cries, — parrot-like — Tradition.

It may be pointed out that an exercised conscience responds to the Word of God even as clay to the seal. Consequently the moral exercise of one brother may be comparatively scanty if he knows little of God and His Word, while the moral exercise of another who knows more of God and His Word may be very acute.

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It is not a question of what J. N. D. says, nor of what Spurgeon did, nor of what St. Augustine wrote, but of our being formed in moral exercise by the Word of God bringing all before us that is true in Christ, 1 John 2: 8. If I find that in a certain matter Augustine or Spurgeon followed the Lord it is joy to me to think of it, and I imitate their faith, but not because they did it. faith led them to do a certain thing which is according to Christ and Christianity, and I do it because I see it to be of Christ. The apostle says, "be ye followers (imitators) of me, EVEN AS I AM ALSO OF CHRIST." That is our rule. If we think of those later than the apostles we have "Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you THE WORD OF GOD), whose faith follow," Heb. 13: 7. In so far as they spoke THE WORD OF GOD to you remember them; in so far as they themselves obeyed that word in faith, imitate them. It is not a blind attachment to a leader, not doing things because a leader does them or says them, but only so far as they had the Word of God in all its undiluted purity as the basis of their life and ways.

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Your exercise is to learn all you can of Christ and the present purpose of God as to Christ and the Church. With your whole heart, and in true affection for Him and His interests, you concentrate on that which you believe and know to be God's mind for the moment in the light of His Word, no more committing yourself to any support of man's RELIGIOUS systems than you would to his POLITICAL and SOCIAL aims. It is unfortunate that saints whom you love are entangled, but you know that you will not help them by getting entangled yourself: The more separate you are, and the more you are consistently and continually separate, with meekness and firmness, the more power you will have to really help them. Naturally if they see that you can on occasion go into the system, so as outwardly to appear as part of it, they feel that you are not wholly sincere in your objection to it. Nor could you do so if you deeply realised Christ's place in the Church, or the Holy Spirit's condemnation of all man's institutions for its regulation and control. Clerisy and lawlessness are equally foreign to the constitution of the assembly of God, and inimical to the true prosperity of those who glory in the Lord, 1 Cor. 1: 31. It is only by the Spirit that the things of God are known or made effective.

To profess to be separated to Christ — and this is the only consistent cause of our being where we are — and yet dabble on every occasion possible in every or any system from which TRUTH demands separation, is not RIGHTEOUSNESS. And further, as another has said — to seek to escape reproach by taking a wider path, with its numbers and popularity, and the approval of the religious world, is not FAITH. To take a path that only brings sorrow and confusion among those in the outside place, and bolsters up our fellow-believers in false systems that do not give Christ His place as the "One Lord" nor the Holy Spirit His place in the Assembly, is surely a heartless disregard of LOVE. To deliberately pursue a course that ignores the consciences of the Lord's people, and leads to further scattering and division, cannot be the way of PEACE.

To sum up then, I see that to mix with denominations, missions, and the principles that have given "Open" Brethren their birth and history, is disloyalty to Christ, damaging to my own soul, and tends to scatter the faithful ones instead of strengthening the things that remain I see that to follow saints who idolise certain gifts, and chase after certain lines of ministry, so as to make their fellowship sectarian in principle, is to adopt a course which makes ourselves sectarian, and takes us off the ground of the assembly of God, leading us to despise others who do not concentrate on our particular line. I see also that there are many dear brethren who are now separated from us by historical division, who never ought to have separated or have been driven to separate, and with whom one can have the fullest individual sympathy and prayerful intercourse, and while admitting the difficulties that surround the question of coming together in unrestrained communion — and refusing to go BEFORE the Lord — can look to Him that He may dispose our hearts one and all to listen for His voice. To ignore His hand upon us in permitting these breaks would be fatal to sacrifice any part of the truth for the sake of being together would be fatal, and would deny the true Christ and the full Christ, who is the Centre of gathering. But where He leads to our mutual humbling before Him, and unmistakably leads the way so as to command the recognition and confidence of those who "fear the Lord and think upon His Name," it would be wrong to refuse His leading. Only where there is this humbling would one even consider the matter of "association" of which you have spoken.

Underlying much of the looseness which has been our bane at all times (I remember nearly 50 years of the tendency), there is often much of secret pride and self-importance. "MY gift" "an open door for me". often leads a man astray from Christ. To go to ready made audiences in chapels and missions is an easier road than the rugged path of door to door work, and the feeling of the shame and reproach attaching to those who are utterly separated to Christ. If the Lord calls a man out to His Name who is distinctly gifted for service He will use the gift He has given in ways consistent with His Name,

and not lead, surely, into compromise. I see no reason why a separated soul should not be a missionary, or an open-air preacher, a tract distributor or a doer of good works, while refusing every association other than the assembly which He has formed, and in the truth of which we seek to walk. Where the use of the gift is pleaded to take us into circles where the truth of Christ and His assembly is perverted, it unquestionably appears to me to be a perversion of the gift, and I do not think the Lord ever intended it to be so.

With warm love in the Lord, Affectionately yours in the truth,

Wm. Hy. WESTCOTT.