

On Alleged Neutrality and Real Sectarianism

May 15, 1882.

Dear Brother in Christ,

I presume the difficulty our sister felt is that the form in which you meet the call of Ventnor, or of others who subscribe the Park Street decision, is said to be neutrality. But Phil. 3: 15, 16, or Rom. 14 would be open to the same sort of charge from the violent brothers in the apostle's day. Neutrality where *Christ's person* is concerned, as in the Bethesda question, is great sin. The sin of Park St. and its followers is in making such a question as that of Ramsgate — an ecclesiastical difference — to be a test for assemblies, and even individuals, as I know is being done. Godly men might honestly stand in doubt of either A. H. or G. H. or both. To make a test of Ramsgate, therefore, is to split up assemblies, or to demoralise, them by inducing many to accept for fellowship what they doubt about really. Quite apart from the merits of the question at Ramsgate, I believe it to be a departure from our fundamental principles, for Park Street, or any other meeting, to take up such a dispute as this, and make it a question to divide the saints. The sin of division rests on those who seek so. to force consciences. All but partisans would have agreed to leave G. H. and A. H. in the Lord's hands, and those of the assemblies where no vital question was it stake. I understand you to judge as such do, and as all brethren of weight and spiritual intelligence did, till this agitation made manifest a party bent on division, who were long felt to be desiring it secretly. For the person of Christ, or any like foundation truth, one would feel bound to reject, as we are commanded, those who bring not His doctrine. But to treat an assembly rupture as *equivalent* is to quit Scripture for tradition, which ever tends to put the church in Christ's place to God's dishonour. Those who do so are, in my judgment, a sect, and not to be owned as on God's ground — though one might receive saints from them for Christ's sake. Such is the way in which I regard all assemblies which accept the new test. Are you aware, is our sister aware, that we separated from Ebrington Street (Plymouth), chiefly on ecclesiastical grounds, in 1845, two years before the heterodoxy of B. W. N. as to Christ became known and judged? During those two years saints going on with Mr. N. were allowed to break bread, if they wished it, at the Lord's table with us; but after the proof of that terrible heterodoxy it was no longer allowed — they were utterly refused if they did not break with Mr. N. And this was what gave occasion to the guilty neutrality of Bethesda; which received those who did not bring the doctrine of Christ, and so became a partaker of their evil deeds. To call our position and yours Bethesdaism is, therefore, lack of knowledge and righteousness, of truth and charity. We abhor all neutrality where Christ is concerned, and own our own responsibility to judge every evil thing, as I trust you do at Newport.- Believe me, dear brother, to be yours faithfully in the Lord, W. K.

{N and B.W.N. refer to B W Newton, A.H. is Abbott's Hill, Ramsgate, G.H. is Guildford Hall, Ramsgate.}