

**My Reasons**  
*for not being Free*  
*to engage in*  
**Inter-Denominational**  
**Service**

*by*  
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## FOREWORD.

*THE following is the copy of an address given in Scotland in the Autumn of 1954. It is published now in deference to the repeated requests of many who heard it delivered and with an earnest desire that it may be used to provide guidance in the matter of which it treats, for the many young believers who are seeking such guidance.*

*The author has to apologise for the frequent use of the personal pronoun, but it was deemed wiser to keep it as a statement of personal convictions.*

*It is addressed to believers who have taken assembly position in obedience to what they have learned of the mind of God, and, very simply, is an appeal for behaviour consistent with the position taken.*

*If the publication of the following is used to direct the steps of some young believers into the right ways of the Lord He will be glorified and the author will be satisfied.*

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## MY REASONS FOR NOT BEING FREE TO ENGAGE IN INTER-DENOMINATIONAL SERVICE.

Read—Matt. 28. 16-20; Acts 20. 17-38; I Cor. 9. 1-23.

THE saints who have gathered here to-day to hear this statement of my reasons for not being free before the Lord to serve inter-denominationally, will believe me when I say that I have not lightly undertaken this responsibility (as I conceive it to be). As most of you know, I have been seeking to serve the Lord for nearly 30 years, and in that time I have travelled in many parts of the British Isles. I have come into contact with many assemblies and have watched their development through the course of the years. I have taken careful note of changes and have sought to analyse the causes and have become increasingly convinced that one of the main causes of the destruction of the character of many Assemblies, and the alarming inroads of worldliness and lack of spiritual growth amongst our young people generally, has been the modern spirit of inter-denominationalism. It has the appeal of the appearance of large-heartedness and charity. Indeed many of those who urge this line of things to-day, do so on the plea that love to our fellow-believers demands inter-denominational activity. A reference to 1 John 5. 2 will assure that our love to our fellow-believers can only be shown by our obedience to the commands of God. If I love my fellow-saints truly, I shall desire to influence them to walk in the ways of God, knowing that this alone will serve their richest blessing and truest happiness. But it is evident that I can influence them to so walk on as my own life is an example of obedience. To compromise the truth of God is evidence of love.

Recently I have been serving a group of assemblies whose spiritual poverty has been a great grief. It cannot be denied that that spiritual poverty is the direct result of years of inter-denominational activity. It seems to me that such poverty is inevitable, for it is manifestly impossible to work inter-denominationally, and at the same time, build an Assembly for God upon solid foundations. We have seen this demonstrated again and again.

I think it to be fundamental in every phase of spiritual experience and Christian service, to ask our hearts a question and arrive at a decision in respect of it in the Presence of God. The question is a simple one, but the whole character of our lives and service depends upon the answer. It is this:—"What is to be my guide in life?" Long ago I decided that my sole guide must be the Word of God. In his "Outlines of Christian doctrine," Dr. Moule confesses that a bishopric in the present day sense of the word has nothing in common with the bishopric of the New Testament. We therefore ask, "Where then is the authority for a bishopric in the present day sense of the word?" The answer given to that enquiry is "By the close of cent. 2 a definite bishopric in the present sense of the word appears practically everywhere in the Church." He goes on to quote, with approval, the words of St. Jerome (cent. 5), "The bishop is what he is, not by direct Divine law, but by the custom of the Church." So that it would appear that church history may legitimately set aside the authority of the inspired Scriptures. I confess that I cannot take this ground. I receive the Word of God as alone authoritative to be my guide in every step of life.

It has been urged that the manifest blessing of God upon our service is a sure and certain evidence of the approval of God. I have a friend who is convinced that this is so. She is a lady evangelist. Faced many times with the fact that the Word of God condemns the course she takes and will not allow her the place she assumes, she justifies her disobedience by the fact that a large number of men and women have been saved at her meetings. The Scriptures make clear that apparent blessing is no proof of God's approval of our ways. In illustration of this it is interesting and instructive to contrast Exo. 17 and Num. 20. In the first passage, the blessing of God was upon the obedience of Moses, when, as he had been directed, he stood upon the rock, and smote it with the rod, and the waters were given to meet the need of the people. In the second, the need of the people was the same, but the method by which God would meet the need was different. Moses was commanded to stand before the rock and speak to it and the blessing would be given. Instead of doing so, as he had been instructed, he smote the rock twice. The blessing was undantly given in spite of his disobedience, but for that act he was not allowed to enter the land. Many other passages of the Scriptures could be adduced in proof of the statement that "Apparent blessing is no proof of God's approval of our ways." It is certain that the path of obedience is the only safe way. Are we willing that the Word of God should settle every difficulty, determine every association, control every step, guide in every iota of service? The answer to these questions is fundamental to my present statement.

With that matter settled for me personally, here are the terms of the commission from the Lord, and no servant of Christ has any other. I ask you to note the occurrence of the word "All."

#### 1. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF OUR MASTER.

"All authority is given unto me." Rejected, slain by man, He is now enthroned at God's right hand and made "both Lord and Christ," invested with absolute authority in every sphere. How will He use that authority? He will use it in sovereign grace for the blessing of the nations. Therefore He gathered His servants around Him and gave them their marking orders.

#### 2. THE SCOPE OF OUR MINISTRY.

"Make disciples of all the nations." His grace, because it is sovereign, leaps over narrow confines of Israel, and the message of His blessing for man is carried to nations and broadcast among the Gentiles. With what object in view? That men might be saved from Hell? Emphatically yes; yet that is not what the Lord says. "Make disciples" is His word. He has in mind, and, by the terms of their mission His servants also must have in mind as they carry the Gospel to the nations, that all who receive the message are thus brought to His feet, to be taught Him, to imbibe His doctrine, to own Him Lord of their lives and to obey His will whatever where it leads or what it costs. The true servant of Christ, as he preaches the Gospel, must have nothing less than that before him as his object. Anything less will not fulfil the terms of his commission.

#### THE SUBJECT OF OUR MESSAGE.

Baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." First place was given to baptism in the commission, and every Testament servant of Christ acted upon these instructions, so that, in the New

Testament, it is not supposed that any believer would not be baptized. For, in the act of obedience, there is, on the part of disciples of the Lord Jesus, the severance of every moral tie that bound them to the world life, the sin life and the self life, and a solemn surrender of themselves to the absolute authority of the sovereign Lord and Master henceforth, to live for His pleasure and, if needs be, to die in His cause. As they rise out of the baptismal waters, the path that stretch out before them through life, is one in which they are prepared to "observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

So far we have been thinking of the attitude of the disciple, made that by the preaching of the Gospel. But we must remember that this is a responsibility placed upon the shoulders of the servant. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." That necessarily includes all that the Lord afterwards commanded in the progress of Divine revelation until the Word of God was filled up. So that Paul says, "If anyone think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (1 Cor. 14. 36-37).

That consideration brings me to the second passage we read together. Paul brought before us as our pattern in service. He is our own apostle in a very real sense—Apostle to the Gentiles—"Minister of the Gospel"—"Minister of the Church." Again and again he appeals to us to imitate him, and he is "The Master-builder" of assemblies of God. He tells us that, commissioned by the Lord Jesus, whose steward he was, with heart aglow with a consuming passion for the souls of men, he went forth "testifying the Gospel of the Grace of God," "preaching the Kingdom of God," "declaring all the Counsel of God," and thus building "Churches of God."

"The Gospel of the Grace of God" tells out all the bounty of God in lavish blessing upon all who believe. There many a modern evangelist finishes his work. But not so Paul. Inherent in the work of "Testifying the Gospel of the Grace of God" is the setting up of "The Kingdom of God" in the hearts of those who believe. Responsive affection gladly surrenders to the Rule of God and welcomes the Throne of the King to the citadel of life. Henceforth life will be held at the disposal of the loving Lord and lived within the limits of the Will of God. Immediately "All the Counsel of God" becomes a vital necessity. "The Kingdom of God" is the setting up of the Throne of the King in human hearts and lives. That is done by the preaching of "The Gospel of the Grace of God." "All the Counsel of God" is the will of the King made known, in obedience to which His loyal subjects gladly order their steps; and by that means and in that way "Churches of God" are built. Paul would not lead souls to Christ for salvation and deliberately leave them to find their way as best they might. Far less would he consent beforehand to limit himself to the Gospel and let his converts do what they pleased afterwards, fearful lest he alienate from himself the sympathy of men. Paul never built anything but Churches of God, and he sought always to leave behind him, as the result of his Gospel labours, a Church of God witness to all the truth of God.

My experience is that those who to-day work inter-denominationally have never had the exercise to do pioneer work with the object of bringing assemblies of God into being. If they had done so, they would have realized the impossibility of building assemblies and, at the same time, work inter-denominationally.

With all that in mind, I must face another question. It is this:—"If I consent to work inter-denominationally, can I fulfil the terms of my Master's commission?" My considered answer is "NO." And I have to give you my reasons for that answer.

In my service for God during these 30 years, I have found that one of the greatest stumbling blocks before the unsaved, is the great multitude of parties in Christendom. The assembly, with which all of us here to-day are publicly associated, each in our own locality, is but another party in addition to the many already existing, the same constitutionally and essentially as all the rest, we have no right to exist. There are far too many sects already. Let us cease to exist and identify ourselves each with the denomination of our own choice. The only justification of the existence of assemblies is that they are fundamentally, constitutionally and essentially different from everything that exists in Christendom. But if that be so, the existence of assemblies according to the teaching of the New Testament, is the condemnation, being unscripturally constituted, of every religious community. If that be not true, we had no right ever to leave sectarian bodies. If it be true, no child of God has any right given by Scripture to be a member of a sectarian body.

Let me take one illustration of what is involved. Human ordination in ministry is a necessity in every sect of Christendom. I have a friend who was a Baptist Minister in charge of one of the largest churches in his country. He became deeply exercised before God about his position, as he read and studied the Scriptures. At last he was convinced that denominationalism is unscriptural and a great evil, and that his own position as belonging to a system of clerisy was condemned by the Word of God, he severed his connection with it, at tremendous cost, and he is now serving the Lord happily among the saints in assemblies, and being greatly used of God. Was he right or wrong? I hold that he was right. But if clerisy was a very wrong system for him, it is equally wrong, equally condemned by Scripture, for every child of God. "For any man or body of men to claim the right to licence and so authorize a preacher of the Gospel, is, on their part, an intrusion upon the sovereign rights of Christ the only Head of the Church." The fact of the matter is, that nothing other than the Church of God has a right in Scripture to exist. No child of God has Scripture authority to be associated with anything else. A human system has no Scriptural authority for its existence, and it is certain that, if it has no Scriptural right to exist, it has no right at all.

That brings me directly to what I want to say:—"I cannot fulfil the terms of my commission as given me by my Master, and as illustrated in Paul's service, in any nomination."

A young lady came to us one evening in a town in which we were having tent services. She said, "Will you be happy to baptize me? I have learned from my reading of the Scriptures that I ought to be baptized. I cannot do that in the nomination to which I belong. But I have no intention of ever leaving my church. Under these conditions, will you baptize me?" We said, "Yes, right gladly." And she did. She was a Sunday School teacher, and some of the girls in her class were God. Then she realized that she was made responsible by the terms of the commission, to teach them what she had learned of the Lord's will concerning baptism. It came to the Minister's ears, and he came to her. "Iris, is it correct that you are teaching baptism by immersion to your girls?" "Yes," said Iris. "Well, you know you cannot teach that here," said the Minister. "Not teach that here? Why not? It is clearly taught in the New Testament as the will of the Lord for every believer" said Iris. "That is not the point at all" replied the Minister. "You must not teach here what is contrary to our articles of association." Said Iris, "Well, then, if there is no place here for God's Word, there cannot be a place here for me." Cases like that I could multiply again and again. But in this case notice two things:—



(a) In order to obey what she had learned of the Lord's will, she had to step outside of her denomination within the limits of which she had no liberty to obey the will of the Lord. For in that system there was no place for the authority of the Word of God. (b) She found it a practical impossibility to fulfil the terms of the Lord's commission within the limits of her denomination. And that is always true. Which fact leads me to say two things :—(a) *I have no moral right to go into any denomination and preach what I know to be the truth of God, if what I preach is contrary to their articles of association.*

Here is a group of people. They subscribe a sum of money to erect a building in which to perpetuate a Methodist cause. They pay for heating and lighting. They have all the organization of Methodism. They invite me to occupy their pulpit instead of their usual Minister. Under their auspices I go; at their invitation I preach. They have not invited me to preach in order to smash their constitution and if they had known that I intended preaching what, if believed, would smash their constitution they never would have invited me. I say that I have no moral right to go to them at their invitation and under their auspices, to use the building their money has provided, the lighting and heating their money is paying for, and the congregation their industry has assembled, in order to teach truth that would smash what they are seeking to build. The Minister who invited me to occupy his pulpit, is a gentleman, and he thinks that I am also a gentleman, and he has a right to expect me to behave as a gentleman. If I accept his invitation, the only honest thing to do is to draw a line beyond which I must not go in my ministry. But this is unfaithfulness to my Lord and to my hearers and to the terms of my commission. A friend of mine is quite free to preach in any denomination to which he may be invited. We were talking together about it, and I said to him, "If you were invited to preach to the Methodists next Lord's Day, you would spend this week in doing exercise before God for your message. Let us suppose that God laid on your heart the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. You would do what the evangelist did on that occasion and preach "Jesus" unto them. When you came to where the eunuch said, 'See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?' what would you do?" I waited to hear his answer. He thought about it carefully and then very honestly said, "Under the circumstances I would have to stop before I came to that." Exactly so; for we have no moral right to preach there what is contrary to their articles of association, though we know it to be the truth of God. But to deliberately resolve to limit ourselves in our ministry and withhold God's truth, is unfaithfulness to the Lord, and only proves my contention, that we cannot fulfil the terms of our commission in these places. Every honest servant of Christ will confess that it is so. (b) *Then again, I question if I have the legal right to teach in any denomination what is contrary to their articles of association.*

This hall in which we are gathered to-day, is governed by a Deed of Trust in the hands of Trustees, who are legally responsible to see to it that the hall is used only for the purposes for which it is intended. It would be illegal for a Christadelphian to preach his doctrine here, because it would be clearly contrary to the Deed of Trust. I take it that the same is true of the buildings owned by the denominational unions. So that, if my teaching of "All the counsel of God" in one of these systems became a matter of law, I would find myself in the wrong.

Therefore, (a) I have no moral right to preach in a denomination much that I know to be the truth of God. (b) I have probably no legal right to preach there much that I know to be the truth of God. (c) *Therefore I cannot preach there and fulfil the terms of My master's commission.* (d) *Therefore I cannot preach there at all.*

That seems to me to be clear and logical, and these considerations have made my choice of service plain. But on one occasion a brother invited me to have lunch with him. I did not know at the time he was simply seeking the opportunity to have a talk with me about this matter, to upbraid me concerning my attitude of mind toward the Gospel but also to teach believers there; but after being faced with what he has now told you, he said, "I can now understand that you cannot go into these places to teach, but you ought to go to preach the Gospel, simply as an evangelist," that loses sight of my responsibility to any who would be saved as the result of preaching, as well as my responsibility towards my fellow-believers who are in these places. Let me take the second of these first. [We have no monopoly of the truth of God. The truth that God has graciously given us, belongs to all our precious fellow-saints. And we have a definite responsibility to communicate it to all of them. I cannot do that by preaching in their denominations. Then I have a very special responsibility to those whom I lead to the Saviour. But that I cannot discharge within the limits of the denomination. Here is another case that will serve to illustrate this. We have with us a young brother, full of activity and spiritual initiative. He was, before the war, in an assembly which was very dull and apathetic. The conditions of war took him away from home, and put him into touch with some live, energetic assemblies. Then the war ended and circumstances required that he should return home. He found it impossible to settle down again to the same old lethargy and deadness in the home assembly, and he wondered what he ought to do. Then he heard of a group of Christian men of all denominations in the town, who were preaching the Gospel inter-denominationally and getting blessing. So, knowing that he might be able to do something useful, he joined with them. In one of his meetings in which he took part, some souls professed to be saved. Immediately thereafter that he was responsible to teach them further. But when he did so, the harmony of the band of workers, was destroyed. Then he realized that he must make a choice. Either he should work with the band inter-denominationally and restrict himself to Gospel preaching, or else he must break with the band and be faithful to the terms of the commission. He made the decision, and returning to the assembly, he began to pour his life into it. And since these days, the assembly has been greatly blessed of God, many have been saved and saints have been led on in the ways of God.

Against all this, it has been urged that Paul went into the synagogues, and therefore ought to go into denominations to preach.

These two things are not at all parallel, and therefore, on the basis that Paul entered synagogues to preach, we cannot argue that we should enter denominations. Temple synagogues were connected with the only religion God ever gave to men. When Jesus was about to reveal Himself as He has now done, in the full revelation of the Christian faith, Judaism was set aside by God, morally in the death of Christ, and finally in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and publicly in the destruction of Jerusalem. The Acts of the Apostles covers the transitional period between the two administrations, and during that period the Gospel was "To the Jew first" and then to the Gentile. In obedience to this, Paul went to the synagogue, until in Acts 19 a point of time was reached. "He went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way of the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing

daily in the school of one Tyrannus; and this continued by the space of two years. The word translated 'Separated' is a strong one which means that "He placed them apart and built fences about them." (*Strong's Conc.*). And from that day Paul never entered a synagogue again, as far as we are told in the Scriptures.

But Christendom, in the multitude of its parties and sects, exists to-day, as the result of apostasy from the Word and Ways of God, as is clearly proved by the letters preserved for us in Rev 2 and 3. And its future is foretold in Rev. 17.

Therefore the cases are not at all parallel, and we cannot justify inter-denominational service on the basis that, at one time, Paul entered synagogues to preach.

The passage in 1 Cor. 9. 19-23, in which the apostle says that "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some," has been pressed into service by some in a way that is a libel upon the character of that faithful, devoted servant of Christ, and almost an accusation that he was prepared to compromise the truth of God, in the interests of the Gospel. So far from that being the case, in that very passage the Apostle guards himself against every such accusation, by saying "But under law to Christ," or, as another has translated his words, "In lawful subjection to Christ." As to any privilege of his own, he could give it up in the interest of souls and the Gospel. He could not give up that in which he was bound in duty to God. He had no liberty in that which belonged to another, but with regard to anything which was simply his own right, he could and did, give it up, that by all means he might save men. To use the passage as it has been used by some, is a cruel slander of Paul, and is in itself proof of what I have contended, that inter-denominational service makes necessary a compromise of the truth of God. So much so, that you cannot share in inter-denominational activity without being willing to compromise. But those to whom the Master has entrusted His goods, the precious deposit of truth, must be faithful to their trust. Truth is not their's to compromise. "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

On one occasion the disciples came to the Lord Jesus and John said, "Master, we saw one casting out demons in Thy Name, and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us." And Jesus said unto him, "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us, is for us." Do not let us get the matter wrong. It was not that John aspired to leadership of a party, as has been so very quaintly suggested. John's difficulty was that the man who was being so used was not personally following the Lord Brethren, we must not speak against those who seem to be getting blessing. Let us rejoice unfeignedly that Christ is preached, and let us pray that the Gospel preached will be blessed of God to the salvation of many and that the saved ones will be led on in the ways of God.

But when we have done that, can we link up with inter-denominational movement of which there are so many?

Let me try to tell you what it will mean, if you do so.

In a recent inter-denominational Gospel Campaign, more than 40% of the workers in the inquiry rooms, and many members of the council, were from the assemblies. They voluntarily associated themselves with women publicly testifying; with taking money from the unsaved in public collections; and many other things which they knew to be contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, and they consented to be bound by the sacred promise of the Campaign leader to direct all his converts to the existing denominations of their own choice.

Brethren, that is more than we dare do, unless we are prepared to give up all that we have learned of the truth of God, in what we suppose to be the interests of the Gospel.

*What will the result be ?*

Encourage the saints to link up with these things, in inter-denominational interests, and you will not be able to teach again the evils of sectarianism and of clerisy, and you will sacrifice your moral right to teach the truth of the New Testament concerning the assembly of God. Along that road lies the permanent loss of all that we have treasured as the truth committed to us of God, and we shall rear amongst a generation of believers who do not know, and cannot see, any difference between the assembly and a denomination. When the time comes for the burden of the responsibility of the assembly testimony to rest upon their shoulders, the character of the assembly will have been destroyed, and what was once an "assembly of God" will have become nothing more than "A Gospel Hall."

Who can deny, if they have eyes to see the trend of the present conditions, the truth of this? These are words of solemn warning and should be heeded by all. We today have a responsibility to the future generation, to hold inviolate all the precious truth of God, and to pass it on to them, complete. Our only safety lies in being content to be guided by the Scriptures, satisfied to live within the limits of the revealed Will of God, whatever the consequences. The judgment seat of Christ is before us, when "Every man's work shall be made manifest," and "The fire shall try every man's work of which sort it is," and "in that day," it will be faithfulness, gotten of devotion to Christ, that will count, and it will be sweet to hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."