

# THREE LETTERS

ON

## PRESENT MATTERS.

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### I.

MY DEAR ———,

One thing that you relate gave me much to think of, as indeed it has been a subject of thought pretty often for a long while, nor am I sure that I have the Lord's mind clear upon it. I think evangelizing the greatest privilege of any in respect to gifts, though I am not an evangelist, only, when I can, doing the work of one as well as I can. This is not my difficulty, but what you say, that the evangelization has enfeebled the teaching the saints. The gifts are clearly distinct; but I do not see that one should enfeeble the other. Paul assuredly evangelized, and as surely taught, and taught in evangelizing. Witness the Thessalonians; and if he did not look for, he certainly found, present fruit. He distinguished being a minister of the gospel, and a minister of the church, to fulfil [complete] the word of God. This is not in the Thessalonians: all is personal, not corporate. We must be with God for each, as called of Him to it; and then I do not see why power should not be for both.

But a certain salvationism, instead of Christianity, I think, has to say to it which God may bless, but which carries its effect with it. Few carry

in their mind, "I endure all things for the elect's sake." It is a general idea that God is love, and would have all men to be saved, which is blessedly true; but thus it ends in being saved—man's safety. There is no purpose of God in it—no glory of Christ—all called upon to bow to and own Him. Hence, as to the preacher's state of mind, when he has got the person saved, and this confessed, he is content, going no farther. God's interest in His own is lost, which leads on to building up. If we were with God about them, the heart would soon be drawn out in testimony to them.

There is another thing—glory to Christ in His church. This, I confess, greatly absorbs my spirit, though I be a poor hand for this work too. But this leads us to prayer for saints, so also to testimony to them. The evil is not earnest devotedness to evangelizing, which is itself the way of blessing to an assembly, or rather God working in one by His presence builds up the other; it is being absorbed by it. But this affects the evangelizing itself; there is less of Christ in it, more of man's importance, and when pursued in a revival way, more of delusive work; it never gives a solid foundation to build upon.

I should be most loath to weaken evangelization; I believe God is blessing it, especially for gathering out in these last days; and it is healthful for an assembly that their hearts are engaged in it. At the very beginning it characterized Brethren, and I trust still does, though it be more common now on all hands. The love exercised in it binds also saints together; but God is in a great professing body, awakening them to their state, and this has its importance also. The cry that awoke the virgins was not the gospel, ordinarily so called. Finally, the hand cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee. I do not reject the joy of counting converts, but we must not lean upon it. "When ye have done all things, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done

that which was our duty to do." The bond of service to Christ is kept up, and this is of great importance. It is not referring the effect to our work, but our work and heart to Him. I am sure, if we were near Christ, we should do both well, assuming of course that Christ has called us to do it. Do not be content to put one in place of the other, but see what Christ means by it. Be with Christ about the saints when you have to say to them. Be with Christ as to both, and then see what is the result. The question in general has long pressed upon me in connection with the spiritual activities of the day. I have never been allowed to see much fruit, and have been more blessed in bringing to peace than awakening. There is One, I thank God, who is above all, and does all: let us look to Him. The Lord be abundantly with you, and guide you both in heart and work, and keep you in much enjoyment of Him, as well as for Him.

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## II.

We must be more than content, if the Lord says "He hath done what he could." We, at least I, cannot say it, though I seek to serve Him. It is a comfort that He says to Philadelphia, I know thy works—without saying more—and thou hast a little strength, so as we are kept faithful, not denying His name, and keeping the word of His patience. How very gracious of the Lord! It changes nothing, it is true, but we should notice these ways of the Lord; He is gracious on the way as He is at the end, and it is always Himself. I think it is striking, the Lord letting Moody's and Pearsall Smith's work run over the world as it does. In Switzerland they are full of the latter, at least in Basle. I do not fear it: it is wakening up, as all these revival works. God graciously allows the work to go on, that there may be this, and people called out; for it has a

popularity most useful to it as service (but which it would soon lose—perhaps would never have—if they were faithful), which I certainly do not covet. The establishment missions wrought of old somewhat similarly, and I doubt not there were many conversions, and rejoice with all my heart in it; but all beyond is worldly, and lowers the standard of Christianity. *If the brethren keep up their testimony*, it will have its full place, besides the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God; and may it be with renewed energy! Church and remnant work, and the Christian's place, of which they know nothing, remains where it was. A full plain gospel I have to work through with all of them—the perfectionists, as Moody's people. They teach what ignores and denies it; but then we have only to add this, and make it plain, not oppose. For this I have a full opening both at New York and here. I learn they are getting on nicely at New York. Kindest love to the brethren. In general we have cause for thankfulness here, but I should, as man, like to see things go faster, but you have to bring in a full gospel everywhere. No one has an idea of what God's children get as their teaching. But I must close.

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### III.

I think that Brethren are entering into a new phase of existence, which increases danger to them, and brings greater, or at any rate more manifest, responsibility. It does not arise merely from that justification or excessive praise like ——'s, which good taste would let drop, though flattery be dangerous to any heart, but [it arises] from the now generally spread feeling (whatever effect it produces, for it is very diverse) that Brethren have something which other Christians have not got. This is often refuted, hated, opposed, may be

often a matter of curiosity, sometimes (and may it be increased!) of true inquiry; but it is felt. The world feels it and would use it to shew the inconsistency of public profession. In many cases they would be sought and courted from their knowledge of scripture; their books read to have the truth without acting on it. Others, who still cling to the professing church with partial apprehensions of truth and much error, make their boast that it can be had without leaving the systems around us—nay, sometimes openly arguing continuance in them; but it is felt that they have what others have not. I believe they have. But what is important is, not “the Brethren,” but the truth they have. I could state it definitely, and have ere now done it; but it is not my object here. God could set them aside, and spread His truth by others—would, I believe, though full of gracious patience, if they be not faithful. Their place is to remain in obscurity and devotedness, not to think of Brethren (it is always wrong to think of ourselves), but of souls, in Christ’s name and love, and of His glory and truth only, not to press Brethrenism, but to deal with each soul according to its need for Christ’s sake.

But if attention is drawn—and it is—to the truth they possess through grace, their responsibility is greatly increased. If more general and personal devotedness is not found in them, they would be a stumbling-block against the truth. Unworldliness, nonconformity to the world, self-denial, abnegation in love to others, is what is called for, for love is the end of the charge . . . . out of a pure heart. Let them walk in love in the truth, humble, lowly, unworldly, and all for Christ, as little and content to be little as when they began, and God will bless them. If not, their candlestick may go (and, oh, what sorrow and confusion of face it would be after such grace!) as that of others.

Let there be no mixing with the church-world—what are they if they do?—but shew grace toward it, that

early beacon-light, to win the precious from the vile, and they will be as God's mouth. I repeat, let them in no wise mix with the mixture of church and world. The meaning of their existence is a testimony against this, with that earnest gospel energy to souls that Christ may have His own, but the fullest testimony of God's free love, for this God would have and delights in, or it would be as though faithfulness chilled it; doing the work of evangelists, making full proof of their ministry, humble, lowly, devoted, and simple, because devoted in heart and separated to Christ.

As regards all the activity outside them, it is one of the signs of the time, and they should rejoice in it. If Christ were preached of contention, they should rejoice, save where they have given occasion to it by failure in themselves, which is possible: but it does not give their testimony at all. God is sovereign, and can work in love where and how He pleases, and we should rejoice in it; but there is no separation from evil, but the contrary in general. It is, as to this, just the mixture out of which God is bringing. For a year or two, at the beginning, I preached everywhere they let me, and others have done it, but it was, after all, another thing; though the trumpet gave an uncertain sound, it resulted in bringing out some, if the gospel only were fully preached. Now the question is fully raised, and the testimony has to be clear, yet the fullest preaching of the gospel and of the assurance of salvation.

I do not believe attacks on anything to be our path, but to be superior, and for the truth, in grace. Peter never attacked the chief priests, but went on his own way. It is a descent from the high ground of the truth we have, from the christian position. That, and a full gospel used in grace, should distinguish us: the testimony against evil should be in our own walk and ways. Be assured, when real, it is fully felt. Occasions may arise where truth is in question; self-defence is every

way to be avoided. The Lord will answer for us if we do His will.

Union is sought now by indifference to truth, in this country [America] avowedly so, as exchanging pulpits with infidels, and indeed openly everywhere: I say avowedly. Patiently waiting, where in present darkness it is only ignorance or error, is most necessary; but truth and holiness, love in the truth and for the truth's sake, characterize Christ's revelation of Himself, and His influence in the last days. God has no need of *us*, but He has need of a people who walk in the truth in love and holiness. I find in the Old Testament, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of Jehovah;" and I find the same spirit in Jude, who speaks of the mixture which would bring on judgment: "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The gospel we may, and must, rejoice in, yet it only makes the testimony of Brethren outside the camp more necessary than ever; but it must be real. May they indeed be waiting for the Lord, and as men that wait for the Lord! His love is not wanting. May we, in earnest love to Him, be waiting for Him, because we do so love Him, and be found watching!

I thought of writing to you, dear brother, not having heard for a long while, and my thoughts flowed on, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Now I cannot doubt the work—at least the testimony—is going on. The way it is telling, though only as a sowing time, and what I hear and know of Europe, have partly led me to this train of thought, for it presses just now on my mind. May the beloved brethren be found of Him in peace, and watching; devotedness maintained and increased; their whole body, soul, and spirit, be pre-

served blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

At Boston I have just published another tract on Perfectionism. Error, from Germany, is largely mixed up with active religious minds here: I have written on it, but I do not know what I shall do with it; but the subject calls for watchfulness. The brethren are getting on happily here, and with blessing, and I hope roused up and cheered, with some nice persons added in Boston. There has been blessing outside too. If Brethren fall in with the current Christianity inside the camp, they would be just another sect with certain truths.

J. N. D.

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*One Halfpenny.*