

2 John - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Ecclesiastical 4, Indifference to Christ, or Bethesdaism (1:11)

As to indifferentism, take a case: Socinian blasphemies against Christ are concerned. If you insist on walking in communion, helping others to go there, though not holding Socinian views and believing them to be a denial of Christ, you thereby maintain constant regular communion with them, not for yourself only but for all Christians; for, as it is no personal right, there must be equal liberty for all with yourself. Thus general communion with Socinians as a body should be an allowed path in the church of God. It is no question of opinion or way of dealing with the evil, but of the existence and standing of the church of God, which is nothing, or the pillar and ground of the truth as to Christ. The question is as to the church's path: is it to acquiesce in principle in all her members having communion with the deniers of the Lord and her too? This is indifferentism as to Christ.

When one asks for scripture for not being allowed to walk if he please—it is his opinion—in communion with those who deny the Lord, insensibility to Christ's glory is there, unable as I may be to convince you of it, I am clear enough to act on it before the Lord. We are so entirely opposed in first principles as to what Christ is, that further inquiry is needless. I have no thought of walking with those who think the church means communion with blasphemies against Christ. If the application of the principle to Bethesda, because they are Christians, is challenged, let it be noted that the other principle (namely, that it is a question of an opinion as to a line of conduct) is false as a general one. It is a question of the ground the church of God stands on: only it is urged that we have no right to apply to Bethesda, the true principle that the church of God ought not to allow universal communion with blasphemy. The question then is, whether in this particular case the principle is rightly applied; not whether individuals are saints, but the public walk of the church.

Now the public conduct of Bethesda has been indifference to blasphemies against Christ as the ground of communion, voted by the whole body and signed by the laboring brethren. They recite some of the blasphemies, so that they knew them to be such, receive persons who came from, and declare they are and will continue to be in communion with, the bodies where these blasphemies are taught and were formed by and for the teacher and defender of them. I will not inquire of them whether they hold them or not. In point of fact some, if not all, did hold them and were active in propagating them. Their teachers declare that, if these principles are not accepted, they will not minister any more, and the body vote them right. They do this in spite of remonstrance on every side, where the blasphemies were confessed and known, defended by their author, and confessed by those delivered.

The real question then is: Is the church of God to accept communion with blasphemers of Christ as a principle, and whether individuals are to be allowed to impose on the church their judgment and walk, which affirm it should do so? Bethesda has as a body declared that her principles are that, when she knows blasphemies are in question, she will in spite of all Christians receive those involved in them. You choose in your private opinion to justify, that is, to identify yourself with her, and dare the church to reject you. My answer is, you are in the worst kind of sin—worse than any act of sin when you do it deliberately, as you avow. Do you require scripture to show the church should not receive blasphemers of Christ's Person? Bethesda has done so deliberately and in principle. You think right to identify yourself with Bethesda; that is, you will sin, you claim the liberty to sin if you have not done it, and require the church to admit you with this claim (that is, to put her sanction upon your sin by receiving you knowingly into her communion). The church is guilty of it if she does, and ceases to be a church at all, for the church of God is not the deliberate sanction of sin. It is true that many had become so lax, that common action was in certain cases impracticable, and individual faithfulness was called for and the reproach that always accompanies it incurred.

If scripture be soberly required to prove that saints should not be indifferent to blasphemies in their public walk, "Cease to do evil," would be enough; "From such turn away," "Him that bringeth not this doctrine, receive not into your house." Can I in spirit more effectually sustain and help such doctrines than by receiving into communion those who are in them and support them, and actively in spite of remonstrance on all sides? Bethesda has done this.

Mr. M. declared that Mr. J.L.H. had done a work of darkness, and maintained to the full their letter which justified their reception when he well knew what the doctrine was. All I did was to write and visit them till he refused to receive me as a brother. J.E.B. and R.C. went in vain. They preferred thirty or forty brethren leaving them to breaking with these blasphemers when they knew them. Now no brother has a right to force God's church, for that is the real matter, to acquiesce in such a course. We had broken with these persons as blasphemers: do you need scripture to prove that right? Bethesda receives them, thereby saying, you shall be in communion with them. I say, No, I shall not, and I will not go to you more than to Compton Street. You shall not force me to communion with sin because you choose to receive it into your bosom. You deliberately say, I am one with Bethesda, and you will force the church to be in communion with them; for if I receive you I receive all; and if so, why not go there and put my name and vote to their act? I refuse to acquiesce.

You speak of your opinion and mine. Am I, is the church, to be in deliberate communion with the denial of Christ? If unable to convince others of sin, I will not walk in it, but cast myself on the Lord without fear, and take a fresh start in the principles I always held and acted on, that Christ and blasphemies against Christ were never meant to be together, and the church. It is an opinion I must act upon. I suppose nothing. It is or at least was deliberately decided at Bethesda, that blasphemies should be admitted. I call this indifferentism to Christ. What other name could I call it? Some weighty reason is needed for such a separation, and it is but fair dealing to say what it is. You identify yourself with this avowedly; for communion is identification with the ground of the meeting. Hence you are guilty of the same sin. You talk of rejecting the doctrine; but if there is any difference, this makes the matter worse, because you know the evil of it, and help it on by receiving it into communion. You can hardly require scripture to prove that church communion does not mean that Christ and blasphemy of Him should be together in principle, even if the people be Christians. But this is the deliberate conduct and status of Bethesda. You will say they deny it: I do not ask them, because they have signed, voted, and acted on it.

I have no doubt that in Thyatira is the Spirit's picture of popery. Do you think people should continue in that? I do not enter into the Seven Churches, because adducing such passages of obscure interpretation to judge the path of plain separation from plain iniquity, is at once condemnation of those who do so, but as you do, I ask you this: do you think you should remain in Laodicea to be spued out of Christ's mouth? It proves too much and therefore nothing. You must not be surprised if others decline principles which lead to such a course.

Bethesda has received blasphemers and laid it down as a principle; and they are according to scripture partakers of their evil deeds, as are others who boast themselves clear. It is, I think, the grossest indifference to the honor of Christ I ever met with. That is no light word. It is the pith and gravamen of the whole matter. You would force me into acting on your principle and Bethesda's. I see too clearly what the meaning and effect of my act would be to hesitate a moment, however I may grieve. I may walk alone, I am not the first. I began alone, but will not join in what I believe and see is slighting the Lord. It is the principle of indifference to the doctrine of Christ that such blasphemies are to be uninquied into, so that communion with them is legitimate; that is, that the church of God is not the pillar and ground of your truth. Once accept that (and accepting you is accepting it), and the whole standing of the church is gone.

Let the question be fairly put and inquired into: Has or has not Christ been blasphemed, and the blasphemy deliberately smothered up, and thus Christ slighted and dishonored? If the answer be, Yes, do you mean to say that I ought to go on in communion with this?

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Expository 7, 2 John, Notes on: 2 John (1:1)

What specially characterizes the Epistle is the connection of the truth with the manifestation of love. Both the second and third Epistles are occupied with the receiving of these who are going about preaching. The third Epistle commends those who went forth for Christ's sake, to the love of the faithful, who in receiving such, became fellow-helpers to the truth.

Here John warns this lady against receiving certain persons that did not bring the truth. He had pressed extremely the walking in love in the first Epistle. And so here too he says, " I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." Then he takes these two guards of true charity: one is the truth and the other is obedience—just what Christ was when He was in the world. He was love come into the world, the witness and testimony of love, and He was the truth, and He was the obedient man. His love to His Father was shown in His obeying Him in all things. He was the truth in showing out everything just as it was. Besides, He came down to do the will of Him who sent Him.

John takes up these three great principles here. Love—divine charity—is insisted on, but it is always the truth, because it is Christ; and if it is not in the truth, it is denying Christ: it is saying there can be love in nature. The third thing is this obedience to the commandments of Christ. Such is the business of a Christian obeying Christ, with truth in the heart, and love as the spring of all. And that is just Christ. You cannot separate them. The flesh may put on the appearance of a thing; it may put on a great show of love; but it is not truth and obedience, it is not Christ.

Here it is a question of conscience with anyone. It is not an ecclesiastical question, but of a woman if so called on. It is a matter of personal conscience with every saint, the question of the individual receiving Christ in His members and of refusing whatsoever denies Christ. And this is the means of judging of it: " For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us forever." The apostle loved the lady and her children, but it was for the truth's sake. Where there was not that, there could be no divine love.

In the next verse, again, we have " from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." " I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." Now he brings in the obedience it is a commandment from the Father. He will have the Son honored, even as Himself.

" And now I beseech you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments." Just as Christ walked after the commandments of God because He loved Him. As He said (John 14:31), " That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." So it is with those that follow Him. " This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."

Then he adds, " Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." If this divine love came down in a man, what was it to deny that? Christ came as a man. It could not be a mere man come in the flesh. This could not be said of a mere human being. If a man say, I am come in the flesh, I should ask, What else could you come in? That is what you are: you are a mere man. But whosoever shall " confess not Jesus Christ come in the flesh, this is a deceiver and an antichrist." Perfect Man, He is infinitely more.

" Look to yourselves." If they had all departed away, his work would have been burnt with fire. And therefore he says, " Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." The reward of labor in that sense is for the work that he has done in the souls of others. As it is said of the Lord Jesus, " he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied "; so we in our little measure receive it.

Now we have a little more. After having spoken about these deceivers, he adds, " Whosoever goeth forward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." If you have not got the true Christ, you have not God at all. That is the first great broad principle. All through John, when he is speaking of relationship, it is the Son; but if of nature, it is God, not the Father. In John 8 it is God; and Jesus takes that place—" Before Abraham was, I am." There may be the rejection of the truth, and then I have not God in any; I am outside the whole scene in which this grace is displayed. I have not the doctrine of Christ, that is, the truth as to Christ; I have not got God at all. " He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." He gets the whole unfolding of this unspeakable grace. It is the perfect revelation of God in its own blessedness within itself, not outside, but you have God inside; and you have got here all blessedness, in which the Father loves the Son and has given the Son for us; you have got both the Father and the Son. " Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his

Son Jesus Christ."... " If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth." He has not communion with God, because God's nature is light.

You have, firstly, the great fact of not having God at all; a man is absolutely without God if he has not Christ. Then, secondly, when he unfolds the truth, it is the Father and the Son. He urges decision upon these saints. " If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." To do so would be encouraging and helping him; it is to tamper with my own conscience, because I am allowing something to be Christ which is a false one, and the deepest dishonor to God. If I show this appearance of love where the truth is not, it is not Christ at all; it is denying Him, and saying that what is false is as good as what is true. It is helping the Antichrist and not the Christ. " Him that biddeth him God speed " (that is, literally salutes him on going away), " is partaker of his evil deeds." It was a sign of recognition and companionship.

" Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink; but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." I get there another thing, that is, the kind of affection which should reign among the saints. It was not a sort of mere abstract love; but there was gladness in seeing them, real comfort in it, and rejoicing to see them doing well. The Holy Ghost always encourages this activity of love, however strong He may be for the truth. Christ has come into the world: the one point round which souls can rally and find God in grace. When anything unsettles that, there is no resource at all. If Satan cannot do anything by persecution, he tries to unsettle souls about the truth in Christ. He is a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour that is persecution. But he is not always a roaring lion. When he comes in as a serpent (that is, when he steals along, and does not roar at all), it is a great deal more dangerous. A person is tried by violence and rage; but it is far more serious when we have to withstand the wiles of the devil. Still, wherever Christ is held to simply, all is simple. Here it is the case of a lady. It is personal faith that clings to Christ for His own sake. The person may not be wise enough to set the world right, but there is something that faith clings to. I must have Christ. The secret of all is the individual personal faith that holds fast to Christ and His truth. It is a wonderful mercy to have that which is a test of everything, and a proof of Christ's love. To have a clear and distinct object this carries' me through, according to God's mind, this is what Christ walked in; and if we hold fast to Christ, it is always true.

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