

Letter: 2e 4 Plymouth, Granard, Ireland, October 15th, 1832

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's letter reflects on the work of the Holy Spirit, the importance of unity in the church, and the ongoing missionary efforts in Ireland.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:24

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "The Work of the Holy Spirit"

Description

John Nelson Darby shares his heartfelt reflections on his recent visit to Plymouth, expressing gratitude for the unity and spiritual growth among the brethren there. He emphasizes the importance of maintaining a large-hearted love within the church to prevent bitterness and division, urging the community to support one another in faith. Darby notes the significant work of the Holy Spirit during his meetings, which has led to a deeper understanding of scripture and a renewed commitment to missionary efforts in Ireland. He encourages the church to remain vigilant against the influences of sin and to foster an environment of love and good works. His letter concludes with a plea for continued prayer and support for the brethren in Plymouth.

Transcript

p4 [to Plymouth from Ireland] Dear - , I saw so little of you, from various circumstances, while I was at Plymouth, that I the rather take occasion to write to you, though I steal twenty minutes from the toil of one of our day's meetings. I am anxious, too, to say a few words about my most dear brethren at Plymouth, and to express my love to them. The Lord has been, I think very graciously with us here, not more gracious than He would ever be (but more than our hearts draw Him down, through our stupidity), for His presence is always blessing; but He has restrained, brought out unanimity, and shewn also a power of His Spirit, in bringing out our minds long apparently hedged in, which is to me quite marvellous. In fact, those things which I have been labouring for in sorrow (partly, I dare say, through my own fault) these years, are now bursting forth in this country, so that I would think that six years had passed since I was last here, so as to meet many from different parts. Though everything is comparatively to be done, it is turning perforce into a missionary country; the character of its state is quite different from in England.

It will be impossible to give you any sketch of the matter here,* from the immense quantity - not compared with scripture, for it indeed proved our ignorance, but with our individual thoughts: very much of most

important matter as to the man of sin, his deceivableness and power, and the power and working of Satan, and of the Spirit, and the opposition of the two, and the Lord's judgments, and as associated with our present prospects, was drawn with the greatest profit. At least, I so felt it; this to me was the most interesting part, but what interested me was the way it was mixed with faith. There was also marked and universal (I may say almost) reference to the Spirit; it characterised in a peculiar way, I think, what was set forth, so as to shew the Lord's hand. We had (a few of us brethren, more immediately known and together) prayer together, morning and afternoon, which helped us much, at least, ourselves; and doubtless, the Lord accepted us; and I found it a great blessing to my own soul in the matter. God's presence and Spirit has, I think, been very graciously with us. I think also, light was thrown (not perhaps quite so bright, but I think there was) on Daniel and the Apocalypse, and other books of scripture. I do pray the Lord may be yet with us, and keep the flesh down. I wish you had been with us; I am sure you would have enjoyed it.

The Lord has been most abundantly gracious to you at Plymouth. I pray God to keep you from everything which will not stand the large, all-embracing love, and purity of His coming. I do feel exceedingly anxious as to this: I trust dear H. may be the means of keeping you, for I know it is near his heart, in all largeness of heart; and you, dear brother, as the rest, ought to know, with all that join and visit amongst you, and are in the habit of sitting down with you all, that no root of bitterness spring up among you, and that none in any wise fail of the grace of God. This is the true secret of a church well ordered, perfect largeness of heart, as large as Christ's even at His coming, and full consideration of one another to provoke to love and to good works, and that Satan get no entrance or defilement. I beseech you all to watch for this with all the love in which I mention it, that it may be so; surely it is your blessing and privilege. I do trust the young ones of the flock are going on well, and are cheered by every considerateness of their state, that nothing should stumble them (would the Lord own you all as a faithful and wise steward?), and that they in meekness and love are anxious and prompt to learn and to receive of the Lord what He may give. And, dear brother, are you working and watching after the poor souls in K. Street? I do feel very anxious about them, and walking in love with one another.

There were some questions in Miss - 's letter which I anxiously looked concerning, but the Lord gave me no answer to give, and I thought I saw why: He was teaching in another way what I could not. The Lord sent us a blessing, and disposed the hearts of the saints much towards us at Bristol, and many also to hear. We preached in both chapels. The Lord is doing a very marked work there, in which I hope our dear brothers M. and C. may be abundantly blessed, but I should wish a little more principle of largeness of communion. I dread narrowness of heart more than anything for the church of Christ, especially now.

I was arrested in my progress, and now write from the end of Westmeath, being on an important preaching tour, in which we are seeking to bring missionary truth, and I hope more, to bear on a large surface of this country. It is important as introducing lay-preaching, and turning the country into a missionary country; indeed, the importance of watching this country is daily more pressed upon me, that the required service of the Lord, so far as may be, may be fulfilled. I lean upon the freeness and power of the Spirit of God. I shall be detained some time in this country I see, but I hope I shall be able to prove to you when I return to Plymouth, that I have not been idle.

My present tour embraces Meath, Enniskillen, Armagh, Trim (if you can find them), having two or three places per diem, to investigate or preach in, in the space of a fortnight. There are, of course, difficulties in the way, and I do not know that I have the onwardness of manner suited to it, but I shall be able to report for them who may follow. On the whole, I have reason to be thankful in this country.

I find it good for Plymouth, I should be a little from it, but I am anxious for every blessing about it. I shall not be happy at being away if I do not hear of Plymouth, I trust fully.

I beg my most affectionate love to all the dear brethren; they would not believe how much my heart is bound up in their prosperity before God. But God is their strength, and will be their strength.

Pray let me hear soon, and never mind hearing from me. Direct to Limerick. Remember me very kindly to all the brethren.

Ever, dear brother,

Yours affectionately in the Lord.

[Finished at] Granard, October 15th, 1832.

{*It may be of interest to insert here the following account of the second meeting, for the consideration of subjects connected with Prophecy, held at Powerscourt House, from September 24th to 28th, 1832, at which this letter was commenced, with a list of the subjects. A comparison with the brief notice in the letter itself, suggests that it was from Mr. Darby's pen. It was addressed to the Editor of the Christian Herald, in which there is a Review of the Rev. W. Burgh's Lectures on the Second Advent, by Mr. Darby. (See Collected Writings, vol. 33, p. 1.) (The first Powerscourt meeting was held on October 4th to 7th, 1831.)

To the Editor of the Christian Herald.

Dear Sir, - If done with the delicacy due to a private house, the importance of the subject, and its association with that which so intimately affects the church, may justify some notice of the meeting held on the subject of Prophecy, and the truths connected with it, at Powerscourt. I shall venture, therefore, to send you some account of it, praying the Lord's blessing upon it; as, for my part, I feel very strongly its importance.

It would be, of course, impossible to go at large into the several subjects which were handled there; I shall endeavour merely to convey to you some character of the meeting. There were a number of Clergy, and several of the Laity, whose minds had been exercised on these subjects; and the Rev. Robert Daly, Rector of Powerscourt, as on a former occasion, unless casually absent, presided. The subjects you will be enabled to state below, should you feel it an object to your readers. The solemnity which characterised the meeting was broken only in a single instance, which needs only to be mentioned for the sake of truth. There was, besides at the opening and closing of each morning and evening assembly, much prayer made elsewhere for the meeting, and this even in England; and the remarkable recognition of the Spirit, I mean practically, was very striking; and, it appears to the writer, met by a restraint on the thoughts and feelings of man, which, considering the variety of the subjects, was very remarkable - more so even than the elucidation of scripture which was afforded. It appeared to the writer that the progress in knowledge and exposition of scripture was decided, but the practical apprehension of the subjects treated, yet more so. There was, of course, variety of view in so large an assemblage, but scarce anything which did not positively add to the information of all - subject, of course, to the correction which interchange of views ever brings, where there is unity in the general scope. There was but one individual who introduced anything which could have given pain to any on these subjects; and that was a reference to the reception of "the gifts" and the principles connected with it. Little, however, was said upon it; and while the principles were calmly inquired into by a few, it did not, I think, affect the meeting, otherwise than to direct the

earnest desires and prayers of many, for the more abundant presence of that Holy Ghost, by which alone, error can be brought to light, and the believer guided into all truth. On the whole, this part of the meeting was, perhaps, the most practically profitable, from the elucidation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit casually drawn out by it; and the presiding presence of the Holy Spirit most marked, by a careful observer; and several defective and erroneous views prevalent (to the writer's knowledge) in England, met by what appeared to be scriptural light.

The belief in the coming of a personal Antichrist was common, and that amongst many who, at a former meeting, had not received it at all; in this there was a very distinct and avowed change of opinion on the part of some. The discussion of the subject of Antichrist led to an extensive development of scripture, and to much very profitable detection of the spirit by which he might work in the nations; though no definite conclusion was come to upon this; while the recognition of his actings amongst the Jews, in Jerusalem, was more definitely recognised by those more conversant with the subject.

On Daniel a good deal of light was thrown, and though there was some, I think not so much, perhaps, upon the Revelation; though particular parts of it were discussed with considerable accession of knowledge. There was some very interesting inquiry as to the quotation of the Old Testament in the New; particularly on the point, whether there was any "accommodation," or whether they were quoted according to the mind of the Spirit in the Old; this gave occasion to some very interesting development of scripture. The progress of the Antichristian powers was very fully discussed.

This will give you, after all, but a very imperfect idea of the meeting. Even as to the extent of scriptural information brought forward, while it left the additional impression of how much yet remained to be understood of blessing and of truth, and left upon the minds of many a highly increased degree of value for the privilege of the word of God, many, I am sure, were humbled, and many refreshed; while light was afforded also to many, on points which are exercising the christian world so universally at the present day.

That all was perfect there, Sir, I suppose none there would be disposed to think; but this certainly struck the writer, how remarkably, as he has stated, the Spirit restrained, while it left the strengthened consciousness of all the imperfection and weakness which exists among us; and I think those in the church, who are really in earnest, must most deeply feel, on the whole, that, spread as that assembly will be over the country, the meeting was one of deep interest to the church of God at large. In the discussion on so many subjects, and many relating so much to the practical position in which Christians are, it cannot be doubted that the views advanced by some may have given pain to a few; but the effect, on the whole, was to knit, in the deepest interests of the church of Christ, the affections of many believers, and to unite them in the surest tie with each other; while the sense of the difficulties in which the church is now placed, would lead them individually (under God) to more earnest seeking the guidance and presence of God's Spirit, and that blessing upon the church, and presence of God's power with it, by which alone it can be brought, in the honour of Christ, through the perilous times in which it is now placed.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully, X.

Subjects for Consideration at the Meeting above referred to.

Monday Evening, Six o'clock, September 24th, 1832. - An examination into the quotations given in the New Testament from the Old, with their connections and explanations, viz.: - Matt. 1:23, Is. 7:14; Matt.

2:15, Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:18, Jer. 31:15; Matt. 11:10, 14, Mal. 3:1, 4:5; Matt. 21:16, Heb. 2:6, Ps. 8:2; Matt. 24:15, Dan. 9:27; Matt. 27:9, Zech. 11:12, 13; Eph. 4:8, Ps. 68:18; Heb. 2:13, Isa. 8:18; Heb. 8:8, Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:16, Jer. 31:33; Luke 1:73, Gen. 22:16; John 10:34, Ps. 82:6; John 19:37, Zech. 12:10; Acts 2:17, Isa. 44:3, Joel 2:25; Acts 15:16, Amos 9:11, 12; Rom. 9:25, Hosea 2:23, 1:10; Rom. 10:5, 6, Lev. 18:5, Deut. 30:13; 1 Cor. 9:9, 1 Tim. 5:18, Deut. 25:4; 1 Cor. 15:55, Hosea 13:14; Gal. 4:27, Isa. 54:1; 2 Pet. 3:13, Isa. 65:17, 66:22.

Tuesday. - The Prophetic character of each book in the Bible; including the three great feasts of the Jews, the blessings pronounced on Jacob's sons, the Parables in the Gospel, and the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Revelation.

Wednesday. - Should we expect a personal Antichrist? If so, to whom will he be revealed? Are there to be one or two great evil powers in the world at that time? Is there any uniform sense for the word Saint in the Prophetic, or New Testament scripture? By what covenant did the Jews, and shall the Jews, hold the land?

Thursday. - An inquiry into, and a connection between Daniel and the Apocalypse.

Friday. - What light does scripture throw on present events, and their moral character? What is next to be looked for and expected? Is there a prospect of a revival of Apostolic churches before the coming of Christ? What the duties arising out of present events? To what time, and to what class of persons do 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3; Jude; Matt. 24:23, 24; and 2 Peter 3 refer?}

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