

**THE REASON GIVEN BY AN
EARLY CONSTITUTION FRIEND
FOR HIS SCRIPTURAL VIEW
OF WORSHIP AND DISCIPLINE**

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The Reason Given by an Early Constitution Friend for His Scriptural View of worship and discipline by William L. Bellows

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WILLIAM L. BELLOWS

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THE REASON GIVEN,

ETC.

SEWEL, in his "History of the People called Quakers," says, "That name was given them in scorn . . . but the name whereby they call one another is that of Friends. And herein they have the example of primitive Christians, as may be seen Acts xxvii. 3, where it is said that Julius the centurion courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto the Friends (for so the Greek hath it) to refresh himself; and 3 Epist. John 14 we read* 'The Friends salute thee;' and 'Greet the Friends by name.'" [Vol. 2, p. 589, 5th ed.]

As there are many sorts of people who now call themselves Friends, some additional title is necessary to prevent confusion. The one chosen shows that those adopting it prefer the early constitution of the Society of Friends to

* Not our Friends as it is rendered, but "the" Friends.

the present plan of Birthright Membership. In 1733, Thomas Story, speaking of the early Friends, says, "They bore a three-fold testimony in the world. 1st. To the sufficiency of the Spirit of Christ, as an Instructor in the things of God and eternal life. 2ndly. To a holy and innocent life, as the necessary consequences of such teaching. 3rdly. Against an anti-Christian ministry, subsisting by Tithes and other corrupt means." We quite agree with Thomas Story herein.

Suppose, then, an individual to be attracted towards this people, and that we trace his progress from his first coming among them. He went to their meetings for worship, and finding refreshment of soul, the love of Christ induced him to continue to attend. After a time, being desirous of becoming a member, he made application. Two Friends were appointed to confer with him thereupon. They told him of their Scriptural method,* namely, that every one joining them has to declare, either personally or in writing, thus: "I profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God." These words he wrote and signed. They took charge of the document, which they afterwards

*Acts viii. 37. "And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

handed to the Clerk of the next Monthly Meeting. They informed this meeting of their having had a satisfactory opportunity with A. B., and that they know not of anything to prevent his being received into membership. The meeting, after solid deliberation, feeling unity therewith, the same Friends were appointed to tell him so, and to invite him to attend the Meetings for Discipline. Thus he became a Member. And here it may be noted, that this mode of admission necessarily excludes infants from membership. They cannot so profess, either by speech or in writing.

A recent writer* has well observed, "There can be no objection to consider children, when they have sufficient faith in Christ to strive to 'do the things that He says,' as unquestionably belonging to the Church universal. But what has this to do with the question of Birthright Membership, even if the text 'all your children are holy' (1 Cor. vii. 14) should be taken to mean all your children are members of the Church universal and are regenerate persons? Our objection to considering them as members of a particular Church is, that they are not fit to perform the duties of such a Society. They

* R. Barclay on Membership in the Society of Friends—
p. 51. [London, Harris, 1873.]

may be able to perform certain functions of the Church universal; but until they are able to understand their duties as members of a particular church, and can exercise them rightly, the responsibility does not attach to them. Children are not exhorted in the New Testament to obey *the officers* of the Church, but to obey their *parents*; while adult Christians are exhorted to obey their Church Officers. There is not a *single text* in the New Testament which implies in the remotest degree that infants, or young children, were considered as belonging to the Church, in the sense in which it can be considered as an objective outward society to advance the interests of Christianity."

Thus it will be seen that the ground of receiving a Member is a credible profession of faith in Christ, shown clearly by his daily life and conduct being in accordance therewith.

The duty of Religious Worship appears, whether we refer to the Old Testament or to the New. (Job i. 6) "The sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD." (Heb. x. 25) "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting" [to it. *Purver*]. We find also, in Acts xiii. 15, 16, the rulers of the synagogue saying, "Men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Then Paul stood up," and preached to them, as is recorded in the same chapter.

Consider also 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25: "If all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."

With regard to Meetings for Discipline, the words of the Lord Jesus Himself show they are essential to a Christian Church. (Matt. xviii. 17): "If he shall neglect to hear them" [the brethren who have laboured privately with him], "tell it unto the Church: but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." [That is to say, If he cannot be reclaimed, exclude him from membership.] It is not said, Go to the rulers of this world for help. O no! Christ is king in his own kingdom. He endues his own children with his own Spirit; for He adds these words (verse 18), "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [Does not the last clause show that the object of Church Discipline is to heal if possible the wound that it was constrained to inflict? that

is to say, If it be needful to bind the offending brother, to restrain him from acting among you, and he should afterwards repent, loose him again, receive him afresh. This also will be ratified in heaven; for it is not ye that act, but the Spirit of your Father that acteth in you.]

The Apostle Paul, in 2 Cor. viii. 19, speaks of a brother who was "chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace" (margin, gift) [the gift for relieving the poor saints]. This brother, it is generally supposed, was Luke, who was well known to the Macedonian churches. Paul adds, "And we have sent with them [Titus and Luke] our brother ["probably Apollos"] whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things." On Paul's prudent conduct a good man comments thus: "*Avoiding this, taking care of this, that no man should blame us, charge me with any undue partial dealing, or as being unfaithful in this abundance, this large collection, the management of which is entrusted with us. Providing for honest, or honourable, things, not only in the sight of the Lord, to whom it is and ought to be our first and chief care to approve ourselves, but also in the sight of men, from whose minds I wish to remove every suspicion which might hinder my usefulness.*"*

* Joseph Benson *in loc.*