

Mister Spurgeon on Communion¹

With notes and additions (including on Baptism) by Richard C. Schadle December 24, 2018

My dear Sir,

In the printed reports of meetings held in Mr. Spurgeon's new 'Tabernacle,' are statements of his views on communion. Those statements seem to contain contradictions; and to differ as much from the statements of most who have pleaded for open communion² as they do from the views of those who are strict in all acts of church communion. Mr. Spurgeon is, in degree, both strict and open; but as to consistency seem to me neither. He says that, according to Scripture, *membership* ought to be *strict*, the *Lord's table open*.

At the public meeting of 'London Baptist Brethren' held on April 2nd, he said:

"Here am I a Strict Baptist, and open communion in principle; some of our brethren are strict in communion, and strict in discipline; some are neither strict in discipline, nor in communion. I think I am nearest right³ of any, but you will think the same of yourselves, and '*May God defend the right.*'"

In this last prayer who will not join? and join too in the wish that God will answer it speedily. For the subject is of great importance. Each *new view* of communion⁴, is, to some extent, *a new breach* of communion. It tends to pull down what others build up. It rends and divides those who else would be one. An instance of this has just happened at Staines, Middlesex. A young man had preached for some months. A few members tried to open the Lord's supper⁵. The church with firmness refused. Had the table been opened to all, then the strict members must, of course, have left. The attempt, in effect, was to take from them chapel and membership. But even success in resisting the effort did not prevent division and weakness. Most of those who made the attempt withdrew from the church. The preacher left with them, and opened another place of meeting close

¹ From the Gospel Herald: or Poor Christians Magazine, Volume 26, February 1858 Page 134ff

² As most modern readers will be unfamiliar with the major terms used in this article, I will give some brief definitions here: **Open Communion** - Both Open and closed Communion concern salvation. An Open Communion church like Spurgeon's invite and allow any **professed** believer from any background or church to participate in the celebration on the Lord's supper. **Closed Communion** - Church members in good standing are the only ones who are allowed to participate in Communion. Sometimes members from closely associated churches are allowed but no one outside that group. **Strict Baptist / Strict in Discipline** - In the context of this article alone and Spurgeon's use of the term here alone - The meaning here, I believe, is relative to who can join the church, who can enter into membership. This has nothing whatsoever to do with attending that particular church. It relates to the qualifications needed to become a member in good standing of that church. Strict means that you must be a baptized believer.

³ In other words, he thinks his view is the most correct, scriptural view.

⁴ At the time this was written Spurgeon's position was a novelty. The writer correctly saw the future harm Spurgeon's teaching would cause. A very important rule in the study of the Bible is to always consider the mindset of the people at the time it was written. The same is true when reading articles like this. These matters are of vital importance to the health of the church. At the time this was written they were far more aware of this than we are today.

⁵ The church had been a closed communion assembly now some wanted to change this to an open one.

by. Thus, instead of there being an effort, united and cordial, to spread Christ's kingdom, there was discord, division, and efforts of conflict resulting.

At a meeting of Mr. Spurgeon's own church, held April 8th, he said:

Another of their peculiarities was, that they were Baptists *holding open communion*, and yet having *none but persons who had been baptized in the membership* of the church⁶. He was prepared to maintain this position against the attacks both of the Strict communion and the Open Membership man, both of whose principles he believed to be *unscriptural*. He would rather give up his pastorate than admit any man to the church who was not obedient to his Lord's command⁷; and such a course would certainly promote the downfall of any church that practiced it. *The mixed Baptist churches were eating out the very heart ("vitals" in the original text) of the denomination*; and though they were its chief strength; in numbers, he believed them to be its real weakness.

But however strict they (the church) were in discipline, *communion was a thing over which they had no control*. Every man who became a member of *a recognized*

⁶ In other word **Strict** as defined above.

⁷ He is referring here to Believers Baptism. Spurgeon's position on believer's baptism is beyond question. As an example, there is a sermon titled "Baptism Essential to Obedience" which was intended for reading on Sunday December 17th 1893 (near the end of his ministry). This sermon backs up the statements given in this article. It was (apparently) no exaggeration to state that he would rather give up his preaching than admit any person to the church who was not baptized. This was his public stance throughout his ministry. This a first glance seems commendable. However, as is very typical with Spurgeon he was totally inconsistent. Here we have his stance that Believers Baptism is of vast importance to the very heart and soul of the church. When we turn to another department, viz. preachers, their ministry and training we find a total willingness to set aside this truth to gain a specific objective. Again, as is often the case with Spurgeon you have to look below the surface to spot the dirt that was swept under the carpet. The following quotation is by Michael Kenneth Nicholls, who was vice principal of Spurgeon's College in London. This is of course basically the same institution. It is originally published in Christian History magazine Issue #29, 1991. He states "Although Spurgeon wanted his students to be alert, relevant, and lively in the context of late nineteenth-century life, **he wanted them to be committed to Calvinistic orthodoxy** and to be in the vanguard of the fight against modernism. **To ensure this, all college tutors were required to be committed to the doctrines of grace and to teach them with dogmatism, enthusiasm, and clarity. (Although Spurgeon and George Rogers, his principal, differed on the manner of baptism, they held unity on central doctrines.)**" (emphasis is mine) The utter duplicity of placing Rodgers as head of his own college is highlighted by the opening remarks in one of John Piper's addresses. Piper of course sees this in a totally positive light when in actual fact it is a hideous betrayal of the truth as it is in Jesus. In his address titled "The Life and Ministry of Charles Spurgeon" given at Orlando, Florida April 10th 2013 Piper states: "Charles Spurgeon was **the kind of Calvinist** who would have celebrated the founding of the Nicole Institute of Baptist Studies at this **non-Baptist** Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando. **One of the reasons we can know this is that Spurgeon appointed George Rogers to be the first principal of his Pastors' College. Rogers was a Congregationalist and a paedobaptist. He could not even have been a member of Spurgeon's own church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle.**" (emphasis is mine) Piper even gives a reference to the very words of Spurgeon quoted in our text above. To sum up: To Spurgeon Believers Baptism, **in spite of what he clearly stated, was NOT** a central doctrine. It could be set aside at the drop of a hat (**and indeed was set aside**) to gain some other end. Sadly, this is but one example among many of the weakness of Spurgeon's "beliefs". His ideas on communion as shown in the above article are another.

church of Christ,⁸ had a perfect *right* to Christian ordinances, he had a right to baptism and the Lords supper, and the fact of a man's being unbaptized was no reason why he should not have extended to him *the fullest Christian fellowship*. 'He wished the Baptist churches both of England and America would soon give up their *open membership*, and hold the same position in this respect which his church occupied. Strict discipline, unlimited fellowship with *all the church of God*.'

'Another peculiarity was that they (the church) had *a perfect uniformity of Scriptural doctrine*⁹. The Southampton church (of which his brother had been pastor) had no doctrines, no creed; they claimed the glorious liberty of believing anything they liked. He (Mr. Spurgeon) denied that there could be a church without doctrines. Those who did not insist on Christ's truth were not a church at all.'

Mr. Spurgeon seems to think that *open membership* churches exist in America. I had thought that there were none or scarcely any there, unless churches with pedo-Baptist pastors were so called. And as to the increasing number in England, they seem, according to what the chief writers for open communion have ever advanced, to be the *only churches which practice it consistently*¹⁰. If Mr. Spurgeon should enter the lists with them, he may find, beyond what he thinks of at present, that both his practice itself, and the arguments used to defend it, are, in their different parts, contradictory and untenable¹¹.

Even his use of terms tends, I think, to confusion and error¹². The word 'discipline' is not the same as 'membership' and the words 'fellowship' and 'communion' are neither in Scripture, nor when used correctly, are confined to communion in the Lord's supper, but used as applicable to anything which Christians or church members are said to share. 'The right hand of fellowship,' (Galatians 2: 9), and 'fellowship in the gospel,' (Philippians 1:5) do not refer merely to the Lord's supper; and, as Mister Hall, says of the word 'communion,' (James 1:6) it is never applied in the New

⁸ (emphasis is mine) What a sweeping generalization! What an open door for the devil to enter! What does this statement actually mean? Is it Mister Spurgeon who decides which are a "recognized Church of Christ"? As is clearly shown in the many references to Spurgeon's 'extending fellowship' almost any one and anything was permissible as long as the somewhat arbitrary 'central' or 'core' beliefs like the divinity of Christ were give a place.

⁹ This is another very ambiguous statement, open to a very wide variety of interpretation. Spurgeon, himself, from a very early period in his ministry held to a fairly ridged set of doctrinal beliefs. This is not the place or time for any detailed analysis but one thing should be noted. Spurgeon had little or no regard for coherency. In plain language he delighted in contradictions! One could say he gloried in them, they are a hallmark of his ministry. This is in complete contrast to James Wells and his system of belief. In today's 'modern' world one of the expressions used to define and justify this type of belief is the word "antinomy". Following Spurgeon and others J. I. Packer is a prominent exponent of this false view of Gods truth; especially as it relates to Divine and Human responsibly. **For our instruction here all kinds of haphazard, disjointed doctrines and beliefs made up what Spurgeon calls "a perfect uniformity of Scriptural doctrine"**

¹⁰ In other words, at this time (1858) it was the churches like the Church of England, the Dutch Reformed, the Presbyterian and other infant Baptist churches that held to open membership. This was not true of the Baptist denomination.

¹¹ I believe our writer is saying in effect, Baptist belief and principles are inherently opposed to open membership. If Mister Spurgeon desires to join with them he is opening himself up to even more contradiction and trouble.

¹² What Mister Norton says here is very important and I would urge the reader to pay close attention to this section.

Testament *exclusively* to the Lord's supper. Even when it is used in connection with that rite, it is employed, not to denote the fellowship of Christians, but the spiritual participation of the body and blood of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:6.) The words 'fellowship' and 'communion' ought not, therefore, to be used as if they of themselves denoted communion in the Lord's supper, and denoted that only.

Mr. Spurgeon appeals to Scripture. He opposes open *membership* on the one hand and *strict communion in the Lords supper*, on the other, as both 'unscriptural.' He maintains that Scripture requires in church members 'uniformity,' both as to 'baptism,' and 'scriptural doctrine'; and he feels the duty of maintaining this uniformity so strongly, that he would rather resign his pastorate than admit a person to membership unbaptized. His earlier predecessors felt the **same** obligation **not** to admit the unbaptized to the Lord's supper.¹³

On what ground, then, does Mr. Spurgeon make so great a difference between admission to membership and to the Lord's supper? He says that over communion in the Lord's supper they, the church, had no control. But does this agree with fact? Does not that church, when it admits and excludes members, admit them to and exclude them from the Lord's supper? Does he mean that the Lord's supper does not belong exclusively to the members of a church composed wholly of baptized believers?¹⁴ It seems so, and he speaks of every man who becomes a member of a

¹³ One person who Norton refers to is, the justly famous, John Gill. In his "A Body of Doctrinal & Practical Divinity" Book 3, Chapter 2 he deals with the subject of the Lords Supper. The chapter is titled "Of the Lord's Supper". His opening remarks are most telling. I quote: "After the ordinance of baptism follows the ordinance of the Lord's Supper; the one is preparatory to the other; **and he that has a right to the one has a right to the other; and none but such who have submitted to the former, ought to be admitted to the latter.** Baptism is to be administered but once, when we first make a profession of Christ, and of faith in him; but the ordinance of the supper is to be frequently administered, and continued throughout the stage of life, it being our spiritual food, for the support and maintenance of our spiritual life." For Gill then only Believers can be baptized and only believers can feast at the Lords table. **Gill was a prime example of what Spurgeon opposed – Strict in Discipline and closed communion in the local church.**

¹⁴ We gain some detailed information on what Spurgeon believed on this heading from sermon number 2872 titled "The Lord's Supper" It was preached shortly after our article in the Autumn of 1861 so it is very pertinent. In the course of this sermon Spurgeon states the following: "**Not being born of God, and having no right whatever to this ordinance,** they ate and drank unworthily, and so ate and drank condemnation to themselves. If any of you have imagined that this ordinance can save your souls, let me correct that error at once; it may ruin them, but it cannot save them. You must get right away to Christ, right away from this ordinance. **It is not as unrenewed sinners, but as saints, as Christ's disciples, as his saved ones, that you are to partake of this feast.** You must come to Christ first, as a sinner, just as you are. I have read, or heard, sermons which proved that the minister was not at all clear which was Christ, the bread upon the communion table or the Savior upon the cross. There is a sermon upon this text: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest;" **in which the preacher invites his hearers to come to the Lord's table. That is the very worst place to which they could come. They must first come to Christ; and then, after they have found acceptance in him, they may come to his table. But they must not be invited to his table until they have come to himself, and trusted in his atoning sacrifice.** The Lord's supper is a curse, not a blessing, to unbelievers; so, let none of us think of feeding upon Christ in the sign until we have Christ in reality in our hearts." (emphasis is mine) Without question be believed that the Lords table was for believes only. Yet any member of a very wide variety of churches, including many that practiced infant baptism instead of believer's baptism, were openly invited to share the table at his very own church. Again, it is a certainty that some, if not many, perhaps even most of these invited guests were not saved at all. This was the practice that he wished all would follow. His common practice then was to encourage the very practice he

recognized church of Christ, as having, though unbaptized, a right to the Lord's supper. Mr. Spurgeon recognizes, then, two classes of scriptural churches; one class, the members of which, according to scripture, must all be baptized; and another class, the members of which, according to Scripture, need not to be baptized. It is here that he seems to lose himself in hopeless contradiction and confusion. In the pages from which the last extracts are taken, it is said that he celebrated the Lord's supper in his tabernacle with a large number of believers of *all denominations.*' Did he *recognize* all the churches of which they were members as scriptural churches? If so, where in Scripture does he find these different classes of churches, and of church members separately described? The Lord's supper cannot be administered to all the elect church. Mr. Spurgeon cannot hold unlimited fellowship with all the church of God in that sense; for he cannot know all its members now on earth, and if he could, some of them are still unregenerate, and quite unfit as yet, to celebrate the Lord's supper. Mister Spurgeon has, therefore, the difficult task of proving, from God's word, that it requires the members of every church to be baptized persons, and yet that it does not require them to be so. That it gives no right to membership and the Lord's supper, when observed by right of membership, to any but baptized believers; but nevertheless, that it gives that right to unbaptized members of recognized churches not wholly composed of baptized members. When may we expect a solution of this difficulty?¹⁵

There is too much reason to admit the accuracy of Mr. Spurgeon's belief that the mixed churches are eating out the hearts (vitals of the denomination to which they professedly belong. But if that be true, his own practice of open communion must, to the extent to which it is carried, have precisely the same effect; and as he wishes to turn other churches to his views, his agencies will cause new division and conflict.

The twelve or eleven disciples who first received the supper, were all *baptized members* of Christ's church as it existed before his death. Those who continued in breaking bread on and after the day of Pentecost were baptized members who had been added to that church unaltered in its constitution. The disciples who came together to break bread at Troas cannot be supposed, much less be proved, to have been other than baptized church members. And it was when the baptized disciples at Corinth (1 Corinthians 10:2) came together in the church, that they observed the Lord's supper. (1 Corinthians 11:18.) These are the only passages, I believe, which declare what is *scriptural* as to admission to the Lord's supper; and if so, Mr. Spurgeon has to point out, not merely how he can reconcile his own statements, but how he can prove that any believer who has not been obedient to his Lord's command, ought, according to Scripture, to partake of the Lord's supper.

I am, dear sir, yours sincerely, W. NORTON.

condemns in his sermon. Allowing, on the flimsiest premise (church membership) anyone to partake of Christ's Body and Blood.

¹⁵ To my knowledge, which I admit is not complete, this question was not answered by Spurgeon or anyone else that I am aware of. If the reader is mindful of such an answer please respond through the <http://www.surreytabernaclepulpit.com/contact/contact.html> and I will note these replies.