

JEREMIAH BURROUGHS AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE:

"Let not violence be used to force people to things spiritual that they know not."

Let not violence be used to force people to things spiritual that they know not. . . The votes of Parliament are to be honoured, and the judgment of godly and learned men is not to be slighted; but that which must subject men's consciences, in matters concerning Christ and his worship, but be light from the word. Let not the greatness of your power be exercised upon those who do what they can to know the mind of Jesus Christ, and would fain understand and practice more, only they dare go no further than they see Christ before them.

Jeremiah Burroughs in a sermon before the House of Peers, November 26, 1645

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 1:19–21 (ESV)

A Review of Irenicum (1645, ed. 1653)
A Summary of Burroughs' Treatise
on the Liberty of Conscience
In Cases of Interpersonal Communication

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God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or not contained in it; so that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. Savoy Declaration 21.2

The author of *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646), was one of the five “dissenting brethren” at the Westminster Assembly. John Stoughton referred to Burroughs as “. . . a man of candor, modesty, and moderation—one whose devotional works breathe a spirit of enlightened and persuasive piety, and whose gentle spirit, with all the firmness that sustained it, could not bear the rough beating of the times. . . . In the Westminster Convocation . . . in the debates that were carried on, this excellent man enlightened the brethren by his clear intelligence, and disarmed, if he did not subdue, opponents by his loving spirit.”¹

Though largely outnumbered, these five and those few who voted with them, felt “bound by conscience to persuade the assembly of positions they believed were scriptural.”² The length of time spent on polity, belabored by the Independents, left the Assembly exhausted, as many had not seen their families for an entire year. There were gracious people on both sides, as there were divisive. Burroughs pleaded before the House of Peers,

*Let not violence be used to force people to things spiritual that they know not . . . The votes of Parliament are to be honored, and the judgment of the Assembly of godly and learned men is not to be slighted: but that which must subject men’s consciences in matters concerning Christ and His worship, must be light from the Word. Let not the greatness of your power be exercised upon those who do what they can to know the mind of Christ and would willingly understand and practice more, only they dare not go further than they see Christ before them. . . . To use force before they have means to teach them is to seek to beat the nail in by the hammer of authority . . . if you meet with sound wood, with hearts of oak, though the hammer and the hand that strikes it be strong, yet the nail will hardly go in; it will turn crooked or break; or at least, if it enters, it may split that wood it enters into, and if so, it will not hold long—you have not your end. Consider you have to deal with English consciences; there is no country so famous for firm strong oaks as England; you will find English consciences to be so.*³

Burroughs, himself attacked by Thomas Edwards (though treated well and honored by many), responded by interrupting his series of sermons on Hosea with a series which were collected and printed soon after, on how to most wisely and peaceably deal with disagreement and the consciences of people who do not agree. The Presbyterian Richard Baxter recommended this series addressing the divisiveness and lack of peace among God’s people, saying “I entreat those that would escape the sin of

¹ John Stoughton, *Spiritual Heroes; or Sketches of the Puritans, their character and times* (New York: W.M. Dodd, 1848): 131.

² Phillip L. Simpson, *A Life of Gospel Peace* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011): 217. Hereafter *Life*.

³ Burroughs, *Sermon Preached Before the Right Honorable House of Peeres*, November 1645.

schism, to read . . . Jeremy Burroughs's *Irenicum*.”⁴ Samuel Clark found it an authoritative source on Christian unity and Richard Baxter, addressing the character of the man said, “If all the Episcopalians had been like Archbishop Ussher, all the Presbyterians like Mr. Stephen Marshall, and all the Independents like Jeremiah Burroughs, the breaches of the church would soon have been healed.”⁵

THE PURITAN CONCEPT OF THE CONSCIENCE

The Puritans wrote a great deal about conscience, over six full treatises and countless references in almost every sermon and discourse.⁶ In so doing they were only continuing the emphasis from the beginning of the Reformation: “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right or safe,” said Luther at Worms. John Calvin references conscience almost two hundred times, describing it as “a sense of divine justice, as a witness joined to them, which does not allow man to suppress within himself what he knows, but pursues him to the point of convicting him.”⁷ Frequently from the pen of the English Puritans is some form of the definition of Aquinas: “a man’s judgment of himself, according to the judgment of God of him.”⁸ J.I. Packer summarized the Puritan view: conscience is “the mental organ in men though which God brought His Word to bear on them.”⁹

Conscience was “God’s deputy and vice-regent within us”, “God’s spy in our bosoms”, “God’s sergeant he employs to arrest the sinner,” all pictures the Puritans employed to get at how the Bible describes the conscience: a witness, declaring facts (Romans 2:15; 9:1; 2 Corinthians 1:12); a mentor, prohibiting evil (Acts 24:16; Romans 13:5), and a judge, assessing what we deserve (Romans 2:15; 1 John 3:20f). Packer has aptly pictured the Puritan view of the conscience as “a mirror to catch the light of God’s word and to concentrate its focus onto our deeds, desires, goals, and choices.”¹⁰

Disney aside, the consciences of fallen humans must be instructed by God’s Word so that Truth is that authority by which the conscience makes its judgments, not social constructs, experience, or any other human authority. God’s Word is alone our guide; the work of conscience is to bring home that Word to our hearts, that we know how we stand before God in Christ, with hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22), but also with the clear or good conscience (Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16) which we experience when our actions are in line with the gospel.

⁴ Richard Baxter, *Practical Works, Volume I* (London: Facsimile Reprint by George Virtue [1838] of the 1673 Robert White edition); 614.

⁵ Quoted in John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England, Volume I* (London: Strahan and Company, 1870): 205.

⁶ William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience*, 1596; William Ames, *Conscience, with the Power and Cases Thereof*, 1639; Willam Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glass, Lively Representing Its Estate before God: With a Treatise of Conscience*; Nathanael Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth: or, A Discourse Concerning Conscience*, 1651; John Cotton, *The Controversy Involving Liberty of Conscience in Matters of Religion*, 1646; David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra . . . The Method of Healing the Diseases of the Conscience Concerning Regeneration*, 1664.

⁷ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religions*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1960), 3.19.15. See, for example, 3.19.16; 4.10.4; 55.10.54.

⁸ William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (1643), p. 2

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990): 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 110.

This was what made conscience so critical to the Puritans. The Word of God alone can be the rule that informs the daily renewed conscience. If the conscience is forced to act against what it understands to be God's Word, the believer is opposing God's deputy. When a state church required what the Bible did not, individual believers were required to submit themselves to do what God did not require. John Owen, who mentions conscience over 400 times in his published works, writes

In his [Christ's] death was the procurement of the liberty of his disciples completely finished, as unto conscience; the *supposed* obligation of men's traditions, and the *real* obligation of Mosaical institutions, being by him (the first as a prophet in his teaching, the last as a priest in his offering) dissolved and taken away. From that day all the disciples of Christ were taken under his immediate lordship, and made free to the end of the world from all obligations in conscience unto any thing in the worship of God but what is of his own institution and command.¹¹

Owen, though invited to come to America by First Congregational church in Boston (and later to be president of Harvard), remained in London to preach to a congregation of Cromwell's officers. Yet, he wrote of those who "left their native soil, and went into a vast and howling wilderness in the utmost parts of the world, to keep their souls undefiled and chaste in their dear Lord Jesus, as to this of His worship, and institutions."¹² When left between the choice of a comfortable place, where there was not freedom of conscience to be bound by God's Word alone, and a dangerous unknown, where conscience is not bound by anything but Christ's commands, the decision was clear to the first English Protestants in America. In a demonstration of how important was freedom of conscience to Owen, when he later wrote (with nine others) to the Congregational churches in Massachusetts, he urged them to give Baptists liberty of conscience in worship.¹³ Such was the understanding of conscience that informed the writing and ministry of Jeremiah Burroughs.

IRENICUM

Burroughs' *Irenicum*, in its 1653 edition, is a 304 page densely printed publication of the series of lectures preached [according to a note on page 128] a week after a victory for the parliamentary army¹⁴ in July of 1645. Burroughs annotated his lectures for print to offer a public record of what he had preached from the pulpit. The treatise is divided into three parts:

Dividing Principles, Distempers, and Practices

Joining Principles, Graces, and Practices

Final Exhortation

The modern reader would benefit from a heavily cut abridgement. Much of the "treatise" is written in defense of the congregational way from Presbyterian accusations of "independency," much of which time-bound and not germane to my own immediate pastoral concerns in this paper. Burroughs' insightful and pastoral recommendations are, however, the meat of the pastor's every conversation with members of his flock. Further, at a time of great social experimentation and change, Burroughs'

¹¹ John Owen (n.d.). *The works of John Owen*. (W. H. Goold, Ed.) Vol. 15:4–5. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

¹² John Owen (n.d.). *The works of John Owen*. (W. H. Goold, Ed.) Vol. 2:151. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

¹³ Ryan M. McGraw. *A Heavenly Directory: Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship and a Reassessment of John Owen's Theology* (Bristol, CT:Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

remarks directly call us to a wise and gospel approach toward responding to those with whom we disagree in a manner different from our current national discussion. It is my aim not so much to critique or present arcane historical discussions, but to communicate the seminal ideas that Burroughs' pastoral heart might be heard.

His introductory text, likely taken from the interrupted sermon series, is Hosea 10:2: "Their heart is divided, now shall they be found faulty" is really little more than a jumping off point. As Burroughs surveyed the England of his day, at a time when the parliament was at war with Charles I (who was to be beheaded after Burroughs' death) and the strictures under William Laud, which led Burroughs to exile in Holland past, he saw a time of considerable freedom, even as he and his brethren were able to freely argue their disagreements at the Westminster Assembly. Even Charles I was not the worst king, any more than Hoshea had been in 2 Kings 15-17. Since Hoshea "did not evil in the sight of the Lord," rabbis wondered why God had chosen his reign during which to exile the people of God, when it seemed that things were better than they had been under many evil kings before him in Israel's history. Before now, when the people had worshipped wrongly, they had done so because they were forced to it by their evil kings. But this time of relative freedom of conscience was the very time that the people divided themselves from the Lord: *They served the Lord, AND served their idols (2 Kings 17:33). They did not fear God (2 Kings 17:34)*. Burroughs quotes Josephus vivid paraphrase of Elijah's words in 1 Kings 18:21 (*How long will you go limping between two different opinions): Why are you dismembered in your hearts and your opinions?*)¹⁵ "If we let out our hearts to anything but in subordination to God, then we divide between God and that thing sinfully," writes Burroughs¹⁶. The consequence of dividing our hearts from God is that we divide from our brothers in Christ, which could not happen if it were not for corruption in our hearts, which is used by Satan to divide the church.¹⁷

Before we enter Burroughs' principle discussion, it must be observed that his illustrations are direct, homely and simple, and dredged from the history of the church. He quotes Irenaeus' letter to Victor of Rome on the divisions in the day of Polycarp who, as a disciple of the apostle John, should have been able to authoritatively command compliance with his own views. Yet, "although Polycarp had what he did from John, the disciple of our Lord, with whom he conversed, yet could he not persuade, they communicated lovingly and parted in a brotherly way." Therefore, writes Burroughs, "Cannot men walk peaceably in a broad way, though they do not tread exactly in one another's steps?" Throughout the treatise, we see not only valuable object lessons from history, but some of the character developed in this man who, because he felt his conscience (like that of Luther before him) bound to God's Word, had been deprived of his preaching position, been forced to escape to Holland and then, upon returning to England, found himself again forced to defend his trust in the primacy of God's Word.

Burroughs begins with "dividing principles," those settled ways of thinking that result in division between brothers; they "come down from our heads to our heart." Unless we deal with the head, it is

¹⁵ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Irenicum* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997):2-4, 9, 11. Hereafter cited as *Irenicum*. This edition will be hereafter cited. Several online editions of the original publication in the original typesetting are available, if not always easily deciphered. A Logos Software edition of seven volumes of Burroughs' works published in the 1650's has been under development for some time with no indication as to when it will be available.

¹⁶ *Irenicum*: 12.

¹⁷ *Irenicum*: 15.

useless to “meddle with the heart . . . It is to little purpose to purge or apply any medicine to the lower parts when the disease comes from distillations from the head.”¹⁸

What to Do When a Person Pleads Conscience

Giving way to a person with a weak conscience risks a church being held captive to one person’s uninstructed conscience. Burroughs knew that sometimes a man has not a weak conscience, but the devil who has taken up residence in the conscience, “hoping to escape better there than” some other “room of the soul.”¹⁹ How, in all the church cases to which Burroughs had been called to adjudicate, do you determine if a person is genuinely holding his view from a clean conscience or is hiding from giving an account for why he thinks and acts as he does.

As Burroughs begins to lay out his own procedure, he cites Titus 3:10-11 to demonstrate that we are indeed able to discern by observation; you *can* see it.²⁰ What do you look for after you ask him to give an account for his reasons? Ask yourself these questions: *Does the person stand to benefit from his view? Does the looseness of his life show that he is only “living under conscience” when it is convenient and coincidental? Are his reasons reasonable? How does he carry himself? Proudly? Scornfully? Turbulent? Condemning those with whom he disagrees? OR is he humble, meek, self-denying? Does he want to learn, does he allow others to try his opinions or inform his judgments? Would he rather deny his principles than admit he is wrong?* But, even if the answers to these questions would show that the devil is indeed in the man’s conscience, Burroughs says that, although then we may *at least* suspect it is so, we are still to deal tenderly and patiently in several ways to show him his error.

It may be that a man for awhile may be so overpowered that he is not able to render a rational account of his ways, but wait awhile and deal with him tenderly in love. Consider his personal disabilities and his temptations; give him all the allowance you can. If one means prevails not to show him his error, try another. If at one time you do no good upon him, see what may be done at another. Consider that it is possible that even such weak things may appear to the conscience of a man who has so many weaknesses, and lies under so many temptations, to be for the present such ground as he cannot without sin deny. And, if so, you need to deal tenderly with such a man unless the grossness of the evil requires severity.²¹

For steps one and two, the apostle tells us to admonish twice. Third, the person must be told of his error. Fourth, he must be told, in the name of God, to deal plainly and sincerely. If this fails to have a result, he must be cast out of the society of the saints (“have nothing to do with him,” Titus 3:10b). If the error is so destructive to the state and he cannot be reclaimed, the state must cause him to bear the consequences for what he has done.²² A man may be brought under the sword of the state even for blasphemy and idolatry.

¹⁸ *Irenicum*: 19.

¹⁹ *Irenicum*: 43. Burroughs suggests that the devil may also influence the room of the “will” instead of the conscience.

²⁰ Titus 3:10–11 (ESV) — ¹⁰ *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.* Writes Burroughs (*Irenicum*:48), “But by this Scripture in Titus 3 it is clear that a man’s conscience may be so far seen into as there may be a judgment passed upon a man that he is a self-condemned man. To what other purpose serves this Scripture?”

²¹ *Irenicum*: 45.

²² *Irenicum*: 48, 49.

Though the sun is down, if you allow your servant a candle to work ordinary work by, and he puts it out, he cannot plead he could not work because it is dark. Man at first had sunlight to work by, but our sun is down; yet we have the candle of the light of nature. If we sin against that, our darkness can be no plea for us, and if he is a professed Christian and sins against the common light of Christianity, which he cannot but see unless he shuts his eyes, he is to be dealt with as a man who sins against the light of nature.²³

What if the evil in the conscience does not hurt another? Let our response be reasonable and proportionate, counsels Burroughs: "If a man is asleep at a sermon, his friend may pull his hand; yea, he will not be offended though he gives him a pinch, perhaps. But if he should strike him with a staff on the head so as to make the blood come, or cut his flesh with his knife, this would not be tolerated."²⁴

Having addressed those who are being examined, Burroughs turns his magnifying glass on the examiner. It may be that the person who is being examined has a weak conscience. However, is it possible that the examiner's own heart has become hardened? The examined may be overly sensitive, but at least they are listening to conscience. "That fearfulness of theirs to offend Christ, though in the particular they may be mistaken, shall be accepted when your boldness and venturousness in taking your own liberty shall appear to be your folly."²⁵ The examiner *must* realize how grievous is the oppression of the conscience and not add to the suffering of the examined by his own harshness of examination.

The heart attitude and prayer of the examined *or examiner* ought to be one that Burroughs must have prayed and felt often:

O Lord, Thou who knowest the secrets of all hearts, Thou knowest the desires of my soul in uprightness to know Thy will. I can freely and comfortably appeal to Thee. Thou knowest what a sad affliction it is to me that my judgment should be different from by brethren's, whose parts and graces I prize far beyond my own. Thou knowest also there is no means for further reformation but I have been willing to make use of it as I was able, and whatever other help Thou shalt make known to me, I am ready to make use of it so that I may not be led aside into error. And if Thou wilt be pleased to reveal Thy mind further to me, I am ready to submit to it. I should account it a greater happiness than all the comforts in the world can afford to know what Thy mind is in such and such things. But, Lord, as yet I cannot do this thing unless I should sin against Thee, Thou knowest it. Yet Thou knowest also that I desire to walk humbly and peaceably with my brethren, and in all meekness, submission, and quietness of spirit, together with all diligence. I will wait till Thou shalt further reveal Thy mind to me. But, Lord, in the meantime I find rigid dealing from my brethren. Their spirits are embittered; their speeches are hard; their ways towards me are harsh. Yea, Lord, there is violence in them. Lord, Thou knowest my spirit is not such as to need any such carriage of my brethren towards me. I am not conscious in myself (no, not when I set myself solemnly in Thy presence) of stiffness and willfulness in my way. The least beam of light from Thee would presently turn my spirit what way Thou would have it go.²⁶

²³ *Irenicum*: 50.

²⁴ *Irenicum*: 53.

²⁵ *Irenicum*: 56.

²⁶ *Irenicum*: 57.

To those who plead conscience, Burroughs cautions them to be willing to examine their reasons, to be careful to keep their consciences clean and pure (since their consciences are so often involved in their relationship with God)²⁷, and to not rebel against conscience. “If you will have none to command your conscience,” he sagely concludes, “let conscience then command you.”

DIVIDING PRINCIPLES

Burroughs next turns to “dividing principles,” those settled ways of thinking that result in division between brothers; they “come down from our heads to our heart.” Unless we deal with the head, it is useless to “meddle with the heart . . . It is to little purpose to purge or apply any medicine to the lower parts when the disease comes from distillations from the head.”²⁸

How do you stop a person’s conscientiously held opinion from hurting others in the congregation? Burroughs is recommending an openness of spirit toward fellow believers which, at the same time, does not allow for evil to be tolerated for the sake of a person’s conscience. There must be a balance between either too quickly or too slowly dividing from others. He quotes from the writings of an Anglican bishop to make his point: “The bonds of the brotherly communion of Christian churches ought not to be dissolved upon every difference of opinion, but only for denying or opposing fundamentals.”²⁹

Congregationalists risked their reputations through their involvement with Baptists at a time when the pamphlet rhetoric from both credo- and paedobaptists was especially harsh. In 1644, Henry Jessey, a pastor, became convinced of the credobaptist view. Burroughs was among the Congregational pastors called to adjudicate the struggle in this church which had members holding to both views. Burroughs, along with Thomas Goodwin, Praisegod Barebone, Sydrach Simpson, and William Erbury counseled the paedobaptists that the position taken by the Baptists was held not out of “obstinacy but tender conscience and holiness,” that the Baptists should be treated as members in good standing, and that the paedobaptists should “pray [for] and love them, and to desire conversing together so far as their principles permit them,” at least “until either they returned or grew ‘giddy and scandalous.’”³⁰

Burroughs found warrant in this sort of approach when he looked to the actions of the apostles. Here were men who *could* authoritatively speak and who did so speak on the fundamentals, yet Burroughs saw them as deferring to conscience, instead of speaking authoritatively on secondary matters. The apostle Paul was satisfied to say to the Church at Philippi, “If any should be otherwise minded than I or the other Apostles, God will reveal it in due time, we will not force him, only let us walk up to what we have attained.”³¹ In Acts 15, the apostles would lay no other burden on the believers than

²⁷ *Irenicum*: 58. He adds a picture from everyday life anyone would have understood: “Doves love white houses, and the Holy Ghost loves a pure conscience.”

²⁸ *Irenicum*: 19.

²⁹ *Irenicum*: 81. John Davenant, *An exhortation to the restoring of brotherly communion betwixt the Protestant churches founded in this, that they do not differ in any fundamentall article of the Catholique faith*. (London: Printed by R.B. for Richard Badger and John Williams, 1641).

³⁰ As quoted from several sources by Simpson in *A Life*: 225.

³¹ Philippians 3:15–16 (ESV) — ¹⁵ *Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.* ¹⁶ *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

“these necessary things.”³² In Romans 14, one of the parties was in error. “To not eat flesh out of conscience when the thing was not forbidden certainly was a sin.”³³ Yet, neither party was heretical.³⁴ The apostles who infallibly wrote as they were carried along by the Spirit *could have spoken but did not*. Instead, they counseled that “each man should be convinced in his own mind” about what he does.³⁵ And then the astounding: “The faith that you have, *keep between yourself and God*.” To force someone to do what their conscience doubts is right, even though the conscience is wrong, causes them to sin, because “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”³⁶ Rather than command, we ought to persuade, debate, think, pray, and talk about the Word of God, unafraid and generous, peaceably with open hearts toward our brothers, even though we fear the heat of controversy. For, though we fear controversy, the consequence of charitably studying the Word of God together brings light.

You cannot beat out a place for a window to let in light without enduring some trouble. Children will think the house is falling down when the window is being knocked out, but the father knows the benefit will come by it. He complains not that the dust and rubbish lie up and down in the house for a while; the light let in by it will recompense all. The trouble in the discussions of things by brethren of different judgments may seem to be great, but either you or your posterity hereafter may see cause to bless God for that light which has been, or may be let into the churches by this means.³⁷

Professing or Not Professing the Truth

We have a great temptation in our speaking to be, or at least to be thought of by others as, right. “Nothing is more contrary to a man’s nature than to acknowledge himself to be mistaken in his understanding.”³⁸ With this temptation, how do we know when must we speak the truth and when ought we to keep silent?

First, we must profess the truth when those truths are necessary to salvation and if our failing to speak of them would endanger the hearer’s salvation.

Second, even if it might be a lesser truth, if not speaking would be seen as a denial of truth, we must speak. When Daniel continues to pray three times a day, with his windows opened toward

³² Acts 15:10 (ESV) — ¹⁰ *Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?* Acts 15:28 (ESV) — ²⁸ *For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements . . .*

³³ *Irenicum*: 87.

³⁴ At the 2013 Bolton Conference, Carl Trueman described the difference in this way: “An error is a position that can be consistently held by a Christian person but which does not ultimately jeopardize the credibility of their profession of faith. Thabiti [Anyabwile] and I disagree on baptism. One of us has to be in error. My view can’t be right and his view can’t be right at the same time. But, I don’t think either of us wants to accuse the other of being heretical. We would say we differ and it is a difference that can exist between Christian brothers who love and respect one another.”

³⁵ Romans 14:5.

³⁶ Romans 14:23.

³⁷ *Irenicum*: 89.

³⁸ *Irenicum*: 108.

Jerusalem as public evidence, against the king's command, he risked his life "rather than deny that honor he knew was due to God."³⁹

Third, we must profess the truth when others would be scandalized to the point of being weakened in their faith when they see us not professing the truth.⁴⁰

Fourth, we must profess the truth if we are called to give an account of our faith, when seriously asked.⁴¹

Fifth, we speak "so far as those whom God has committed to our charge for instruction are capable of receiving it."⁴²

The unseen prayer of the heart behind all of these cases is "Lord, if Thou shalt make known to me now, or any other time, that Thy Name may have any glory by my profession of any truth of Thine, whatsoever becomes of my outward peace, ease, or content, I am ready to do it for Thy Name's sake."⁴³

Even when we *are* called to speak, it still remains for us to determine *how much* we are to speak. Burroughs summarizes with the words of Hugo Grotius: "There is a time when nothing is to be spoken, a time when something is to be spoken, but there is no time when all things are to be spoken."⁴⁴

When, then, is "nothing to be spoken?"

First, we are *not* bound to profess the truth, when the purpose of the questioner is to scorn or ensnare us. This is to cast pearls before swine. But neither are we bound to profess the truth when, second, people are unable, out of weakness, to comprehend the truth until they have understood other fundamental truths. Jesus does the same with his disciples: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."⁴⁵ Third, neither are we bound to profess the truth when those listening would abuse those truths, because their hearts are so corrupt that the profession would result in their using the professed truth to strengthen them in their lusts. "There are precious truths that many ministers cannot speak of before people without trembling hearts; and were it not that they believed they were the portion of some souls in the congregation, they dare not mention them."⁴⁶

³⁹ Daniel 6:10-13.

⁴⁰ After Burroughs' death, his brothers in ministry would face the return of Charles II and the Act of Uniformity, requiring all pastors to agree to the practices of the Anglican Church and its prayer book. Baxter and his friends had no objection to a liturgy (so long as it was biblical) or episcopal polity. Yet, the Act required "unfeigned assent and consent," which they could not, in good conscience, do. "The eyes of their own flocks—indeed of all Englishmen—were upon them, and that they could not even appear to compromise principles for which they had stood in the past without discrediting both themselves, their calling, and their previous teaching." A contemporary wrote, "had the ministers conformed, people would have thought there was nothing in religion." J. I. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990): 121.

⁴¹ 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) . . . ¹⁵ *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you . . .*

⁴² *Irenicum*: 111.

⁴³ *Irenicums*: 112.

⁴⁴ *Irenicum*: 112.

⁴⁵ John 16:12

⁴⁶ *Irenicum*: 113.

Fourth, we are bound to speak the truth if our speaking a truth would lead the hearer away from concerns that are more necessary for him. Our hearer needs to be established in the essentials. If he is not, if he is “weak in faith, welcome him, *but not to quarrel over opinions.*”⁴⁷ Our weak hearer might be fascinated by the disputations, but that unhealthy curiosity might lead him away from the important matters of the kingdom of God: righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

Fifth we may not be bound to speak the truth *at this time*, as in Proverbs 29:11: “A fool uttereth his mind, but he that is wise keeps it in till afterwards.”⁴⁹

Sixth, if our speaking would lead to a public disturbance that would injure the godly, we are not bound to speak.⁵⁰ “We should wait till God will in some other way, or at some other time, have that prevail in the hearts and consciences of His people which we conceive to be the truth, and which they are now so much offended at . . . When you apprehend a thing to be a truth, do not think that you are bound at all times, upon all occasions, to the utmost profession, practice, and promotion of that truth without any consideration of others.”⁵¹ He warns, as does Ecclesiastes 7:16⁵², of the danger of speaking “too much.” You may be speaking truly and there may be love for Christ and His truth in your heart, “yet there may be a mixture of your own spirit also. You may stretch beyond the rule.”⁵³

If Bound to Speak, How Do We Speak that We Don't Cause Ungodly Division?

Burroughs set five rules to guard our speaking of the truth which are especially suited to the new convert. First, before we move onto speculative truths, we should be grounded in the fundamental truths. The new convert fascinated with controversies will likely find that the centrality of these sort of doctrines will fade in the sun of the “absolutely necessary things of eternal life.”⁵⁴ Second, many times what appears to be a delight in the truth is really the desire to have the latest news or the newest teaching. Later these turn out to be the same old truths under the clothing of novelty. Third, if the new believer finds themselves disagreeing with the elder “godly, abler” believer, he ought to first question his own apprehension of the truth and be careful of speaking “any such things rawly or undigestly, lest we wrong the truth of God. If the thing is true today, it will be true tomorrow.”⁵⁵

Fourth, it is not only the content of our speaking the truth, it is the manner in which we speak it. The apostle Peter tells us to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us, but to give it with “gentleness and respect.”⁵⁶ Here is the conduct of speech that Burroughs so notably modeled:

⁴⁷ Romans 14:1

⁴⁸ Romans 14:17, *Irenicum*: 113.

⁴⁹ This is one possible meaning of the text, though other translations don't as apparently support Burroughs' point. Nevertheless, the fool is the slave of his impulses and the moment. The wise person judges what is the necessary truth which the Lord is calling him to profess in the specific context and moment.

⁵⁰ The deception by the midwives in Exodus 1:15-16 or Corrie ten Boom's dilemma when the Nazi soldiers demanded to know where her family were hiding the Jews in their home might be examples of Burroughs' point.

⁵¹ *Irenicum*: 114f.

⁵² Ecclesiastes 7:16 (ESV) *Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?*

⁵³ *Irenicum*: 115.

⁵⁴ *Irenicum*: 118.

⁵⁵ *Irenicum*: 119.

⁵⁶ 1 Peter 3:15

We must not do it in a passionate, forward, way, not after a contentious manner, as if we desired victory rather than truth, but with quietness and composedness of spirit . . . not . . . in a conceited way, not in a high, arrogant way, with foolish confidence in ourselves and in our own apprehensions and abilities, but with fear, manifesting our sensibleness of our own weakness, vanity, and nothingness . . . in respect of those before whom the profession is made. . . . Grace teaches no man to be unmannerly, rude, scornful, or foolish.

Finally, if you are going to contend for an opinion, don't take as your audience any but those who are going to be to have the capacity to ably argue and show you where you are mistaken. Don't settle for "paper tiger" arguments that are rarely views held by those with whom you disagree, and are easily knocked over. The person who, by inexperience, is easily swayed by your argument may leave you feeling satisfied but not better. Writes Burroughs,

If a physician should come to a man and see his disease is hot, and should therefore presently cool him by giving him water, the man may like it for the present. Why, is it not better to be cool than so burning hot? But thus the physician discovers his folly, and the patient loses his life. A physician, in prescribing some medicine, needs have forty considerations in his head at once: how one part stands in relation to the other, how old the man is, of what complexion, how long the disease has been upon him, what was last done to him, etc.⁵⁷

When we speak with that "godly, abler" believer, we are to give respect to their learning and godliness. Before you disagree with him, prepare yourself in a time of prayer and humiliation. Burroughs quotes Luther, who is speaking to ministers in Nuremberg who are disagreeing with one another: "He who will separate himself from his brethren needs to consider many things even to anxiety. He needs to break his sleep many nights, and seek God with many tears for the demonstration of the truth."⁵⁸ Burroughs is helping us to see that, sometimes, bearing the burden of another brother means that, if your conscience will not allow you to agree, "you are to take it as **your** affliction," for the benefit of your brother. "You are to take it as your affliction, and to account that the way you are in to lack a great luster and a most desirable encouragement, in that so many learned and godly men's judgments and practices are against it."⁵⁹ We may not, in honoring them, dishonor Christ, yet our aim ought to be to "carry a loving respect to those who differ from [us]."⁶⁰

Though others may disagree with us, still they may be rightly obeying their consciences. They may be able to do with a good conscience that which you may not. If our brother's actions are not evidently sinful, we need to honor our brother above ourselves. We should know enough to judge the evils of our own hearts (which we know) than the evils of hearts we do not know. Even if we know that we are certainly right, our focus should be more on our thankfulness that God in His kindness has given us light that He has denied them. At the same time, the Lord has enabled them to see what we do not see. We want to be able to extend to them the same measure of forbearance which we would want them to extend to us.

⁵⁷ *Irenicum*: 125.

⁵⁸ *Irenicum*: 129.

⁵⁹ *Irenicum*: 130.

⁶⁰ *Irenicum*: 131.

DIVIDING PRACTICES

Dividing principles are those settled ways of thinking that result in division between brothers; they “come down from our heads to our heart.” Dividing distempers (like lust, for example) go up from our hearts to our heads. Dividing practices come from head AND heart. These actions stir us up and increase both dividing principles and distempers.

Evil Tongues

The cartoon in a Christian magazine from the 1980’s shows a mouth with teeth standing as soldiers guarding a tongue which rises behind them as a venomous snake,⁶¹ much as Burroughs describes the tongue in the 1650’s or much as a philosopher in the conversation he described between two people in Tertullian’s day: “By this speech the asp takes in poison from the viper.”⁶² Aware of the deadly poison of gossip, Burroughs recommends that the proverb Augustine had written over his table ought to be written over “some of yours”:

To speak ill of the absent forbear,
Or else sit not at table here.⁶³

This poison enters into the hearer and leads you to lose the sweetness of your love for your friend, and wounds you to the heart and separates you from friends. “The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.”⁶⁴ The work of a gossip spreads and destroys like a great forest fire.⁶⁵ So is the tongue that censures another or the raging tongue, which Burroughs sees as the cause of unnecessary disputes.⁶⁶

Again, in the use of our tongues, Burroughs calls us to be principally concerned with what edifies. “To ask and discourse about the great things that concern your soul, your eternal estate, how you may live further to the honor of God, is good when you meet together; to confer one with another about what God has done for your souls, to tell each other the experiences of your own hearts, God’s dealings with you, what temptations you meet with, and how God helps you against them—such things as these would edify.”⁶⁷ When the owner of a raging tongue sees light breaking out, his tongue acts immediately to distract from that truth with questions about less important concerns. Such a person is always talking about the truth, but in reality, says the Holy Spirit, they are empty of truth.⁶⁸ The great question is

⁶¹ See Appendix 2.

⁶² *Irenicum*: 210.

⁶³ *Irenicum*: 211.

⁶⁴ Proverbs 18:8; Proverbs 16:28 (ESV) *A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.*

⁶⁵ Proverbs 26:20 (ESV) *For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.*

James 3:5 (ESV) *So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*

⁶⁶ *Irenicum*: 214.

⁶⁷ *Irenicum*: 216. Burroughs gives the sense of 1 Timothy 1:4b: “which minister questions rather than edifying.”

⁶⁸ 1 Timothy 6:4–5 (ESV) ⁴ *he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.* 2 Timothy 2:22–23 (ESV) ²² *So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* ²³ *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.* Titus 3:8–9 (ESV) ⁸ *The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these*

whether man is justified by the law or by free grace, this is a great question, not these other quarrels about the law. This marks the difference between the error of the members of the Corinthian Church who imperfectly lived out their accurate understanding of grace (and with whom Paul reasons as believers) and the bewitched Galatians, who have cut against the very grain of the gospel.

Meddling (Not keeping within the bounds God has set for you)

It's not surprising that Jeremiah Burroughs would spend so much time on the subject of authorities who over reach. When William Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, he commanded strict compliance with the Book of Common Prayer which was enforced by the Court of High Commission and the Star Chamber. Legal action was taken when people objected to the Book of Common Prayer, when they participated in private gatherings for prayer or reading the Bible, and when they refused to kneel for receiving the elements of the Lord's Supper. Pastors, like Burroughs, who "non-conformed" would be deprived of their pay for their pastoral work or imprisoned. Now, back from Rotterdam among the congregational churches sanctioned and subsidized by the Dutch authorities, Burroughs found the same overreach among the majority Presbyterian party at the Westminster Assembly:

Whether the fiery trial of contention, or of persecution be greater, is hard to determine; God hath wrought to free us from the one, we have brought upon ourselves the other. Every man is angry that others are not of his mind; we have been so divided, that it is the infinite mercy of God that our enemies have not come in at our breaches, and divided all among themselves, before this time. Were our divisions only between the good and bad, they were not so grievous . . . But our divisions have been and still are between good men. Even God's Diamonds [sic] do cut one another.⁶⁹

Not keeping within the bounds God has set for you is "meddling." "Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs," writes the apostle.⁷⁰ One way of meddling is what King Charles I practiced; he did not consider that it was God who raised him up to rule justly, within in the bounds of power permitted by the British state. Burroughs spends some time carefully arguing about the injustice of the current monarch (who was, though in battle with the military forces of parliament, still king), but his principle pleading is to those who exercise authority in the Church. The Lord has indeed appointed them to rule, but that rule was never meant to be tyranny.⁷¹

Running through church history, he reminds us of Cyprian, who "determined to do nothing without the counsel of the elders and the consent of the people."⁷² As Cyprian reflects on the actions of the apostle Paul in 1 and 2 Corinthians, it seems clear that it is the whole church, and not only the

things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

⁶⁹ I have found this quote in many sources attributed to Burroughs, but cannot find the source in his writings, though individual sentences appear scattered throughout the *Irenicum*.

⁷⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:11.

⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 12:28 (ESV) *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.* Romans 12:6 (ESV) *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them . . .* 1 Peter 5:3 (ESV) . . . *not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

⁷² *Irenicum*: 225.

leadership that is to admit into membership **and** to cast out from membership. That the apostle would not excommunicate “by his authority alone” seems conclusive to Burroughs as he considers Cyprian’s comments.⁷³

The Scottish Covenanters had preceded Burroughs. When King Charles had in the 1630’s as “protector of the church” visited Scotland, he found them not compliant with the practices of the Anglican Church and wrote to the Scottish bishops requiring conformity. The Scots replied with rioting. In 1638, the bishops responded with the Scottish Covenant, a document defending religious liberty.⁷⁴ For a ruler to command the Church to do that which is contrary to God’s word, is to exceed his authority: “When princes went beyond these limits and bounds, they took upon themselves to judge and command more than God has put within the compass of their power.”⁷⁵ So, too, in the Church, the Scottish response was to urge Paul’s words from Colossians about the dangers that flow from taking away the liberty of conscience: “When the authority of the churches’ constitution is obtruded to bind and restrain the practice of Christians in things indifferent, they are deprived of their liberty just as if an opinion of necessity were born on their consciences.”⁷⁶

Discrediting the Reputation Godly Believers

Another use of the tongue is to defame the work of those whom God has called. Zwingli was thought by his friends to be “almost a god,” but his enemies wondered why the ground didn’t open and swallow him up.⁷⁷ Burroughs saw the same thing in Numbers 12 when the people of God complained about Moses’ Ethiopian wife whom he had married years before.⁷⁸ People will always find ways to complain about those God has called and is using for His kingdom. Burroughs warns those complained of to be careful not to return that evil in their own agreeing with and taking pleasure in slander said about any whom “God accounts faithful.” He has a word of consolation for those who, like himself, have been so treated: “As for God’s servants, they commit their names and ways to God, knowing that the Lord takes care of their names as well as their souls. If dirt is cast upon a mud wall it sticks, but if cast upon marble it soon washes or crumbles away.”⁷⁹

Name Calling

Just as “Independent” was intended as a slur and “you’re a schismatic” was used of Congregationalists, we should be slow to referring to others with words that are inciting and unjust.⁸⁰

Guilt by Association

Here, the offender uses the error of any member of a group with which to tarnish any who hold to that view. All who were opposed to the Anglican system (the Antinomians, the Unitarians, and the radical Separatists) were lumped together with the Congregationalists, much in the same way that the

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *A Life*: 68.

⁷⁵ *Irenicum*: 229

⁷⁶ Colossians 2:20-22 (ESV) ²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” . . . according to human precepts and teaching? . . . ²² [These] are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

⁷⁷ *Irenicum*: 244.

⁷⁸ Numbers 12.

⁷⁹ *Irenicum*: 247.

⁸⁰ *Irenicum*: 254.

action of any confused person who professes to be a Christian in America is assigned to us. “See what happens to the people who believe like this?” they say. In Jeremiah 29:26, Shemaiah argues that, in the same way that Matthan, an idolatrous priest, should be treated, so should Jeremiah. Shemaiah’s argument to Zephaniah to do to Jeremiah as Jehoida had done to Matthan was essentially, “This Jeremiah was a priest, and so was Matthan; such kind of men must be looked to; they are all alike.”⁸¹

Honoring Some to Detract from Others

Just as some were of Paul and some were of Apollos, so today some are of Vickers, others are of Wanamaker, and others of Hall. It is not wrong to honor a godly teacher, but it is wrong to so honor one that due honor is denied to others. Pastors, and all in public positions, must not “seek for or rejoice in, any honor or respect given to them which they see detracts from that esteem and countenance that is due others.”⁸² As Lactantius said in the third century, “Those cease to be Christians who take upon them the names of men, and are not called by the name of Christ.”⁸³

All or Nothing

Still others, if they cannot join with their brothers in every single doctrinal issue, will join in nothing. They leave angry, determined never to return. Here Burroughs shows his liberality: he believes that many Church of England ministers were truly called of God to their positions, even though their practice of added ceremonies is not required by Scripture. For a person to withdraw from genuinely godly men like these would be like a beggar who refused to accept alms from a deacon because he did not think him correctly called. “Yet, if I am in want, and know that both he and those who have given him money to dispose of may and ought to distribute to those who are in need . . .” Can I still not receive a gift from him? Many men are gifted by God and, even if you question something of their calling or ministry, you still can benefit in your receiving many “truths of God to your soul.”⁸⁴

The Kitchen Sink

While a person may hold a wrong view in a given area, that does not mean that all the consequences which might be thought to flow from this error might be realized in his or her life. Rather than keep from another because of what might be the consequences of something wrong in their thinking, it is best to seek fellowship dependent upon their actual behavior. Martin Bucer: “It is our part not to look at what may follow from an opinion, but at what follows in the consciences of those who hold it.”⁸⁵

Getting Even instead of Above

Burroughs’ last dividing practice is getting revenge. He begins his discussion with the direct and simple statement, “When any provoke you, you say you will be even with him. There is a way whereby you may not be even with him, but above him: that is, forgive him.”⁸⁶ Basil similarly says, “Do not make your adversary your master; do not imitate him whom you hate. Be not his looking-glass, to present his

⁸¹ *Irenicum*: 261.

⁸² I know of a pastor of a large city church who also teaches at seminary, yet at every academic convocation, while he is present (and not drawing attention to himself), he will not wear the academic finery in procession for just this reason.

⁸³ *Irenicum*: 263.

⁸⁴ *Irenicum*: 267.

⁸⁵ *Irenicum*: 268.

⁸⁶ *Irenicum*: 270.

form and fashion in yourself.” The Lord says that the right to avenge is His own property. To take revenge is to sit in God’s seat and do His work. This God will never allow.⁸⁷

THE ROTTEN FRUIT OF DIVIDING PRINCIPLES, DISTEMPTERS, AND PRACTICES

Burroughs had experienced much of the rotten fruit of division in his own life during the reign of King Charles 1 and then during these last battles at the Westminster Assembly. He had learned personally what it meant that “*A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*”⁸⁸ In a beautiful simile, he says that while, when a bee stings, it leaves behind her sting and never gathers honey again, when a man stings another, he loses not the sting, but his honey. Never the two divided have the same sweetness they had before.⁸⁹

Not only is sweetness lost in division, effectual prayer is lost. Christ told us that when two or three *agree together* about anything they ask, it will be done for them by His Father.⁹⁰ Daniel in a crisis went to his companions.⁹¹ Paul desired that people pray, “*lifting up their hands without wrath.*”⁹² The person who brings a gift to the temple, and realizes that he is “*at a distance*” from his brother, is to leave the gift at the altar until reconciliation is made. God will not accept the gift.⁹³ Our relationships with one another are the evidence of our relationship with God. The husband who does not love, honor, and live in an understanding way with his wife, is warned not to think that his prayers will be hindered.⁹⁴ Not only is the sweetness lost, and with it effectual prayer, but so also the use of our gifts is hindered.

When vessels are soured with vinegar, they spoil liquor that is poured into them; they make it good for nothing. Many men have excellent gifts, but they are in such sour, vinegary spirits that they are of little or no use in church and commonwealth . . . Our divisions hinder the breaking forth of the luster, the shine of religion in its beauty and glory! The fire of our contentions raises such a smoke that it smothers us; it takes away our comeliness.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Psalm 94:1 (ESV) *O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth!* Nahum 1:2 (ESV) *The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. Hebrews 10:30 (ESV) For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”*

⁸⁸ Proverbs 15:4

⁸⁹ *Irenicum*: 274.

⁹⁰ Matthew 18:19.

⁹¹ Daniel 2:17–18 (ESV) ¹⁷ *Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,* ¹⁸ *and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

⁹² 1 Timothy 2:8.

⁹³ Matthew 5:23–24 (ESV) ²³ *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,* ²⁴ *leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

⁹⁴ 1 Peter 3:7 (ESV) *Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

⁹⁵ *Irenicum*: 280, 283.

MOTIVATION FOR OUR PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Paul rebuked the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12 for their divisions and showed them a more excellent way, more excellent than all the dividing principles, distempers and practices. Burroughs saw that we all want to have our own way and when we don't (as in James 4), we strive and divide. But "the way of love, of engaging hearts one to another, is the only way to bring men to unity of judgment, yea the only way, when all is done, for men to have their wills."⁹⁶ Rachel Sue Brighton has written,

Burroughs in many places expressed confidence that God would perfect the faith of Christians who disagreed; but if God chose not to reveal His will in such ways, then the differences, left to stand, would provide opportunities for Christians to exercise their gifts of grace and loving fellowship. Rather than becoming stumbling blocks, such differences would allow God's grace to work through the life of the church.⁹⁷

God has a hand in our divisions. "The melting of metal discovers the dross, for they divide the one from the other. These are the melting times, and thereby discovering times."⁹⁸ When the tempest comes, these are the times that God exercises the graces of his servants. And God is at work in these contentions to "bring forth further light. Sparks are beaten out by the flints striking together. Many sparks of light, many truths, are beaten out by the beatings of men's spirits one against another."⁹⁹

Do we have differences? Burroughs talks of two rivers in the east that ran along in one channel for sixty miles, "without any noise, and yet they kept themselves distinct; the color of the waters remain distinct all along."¹⁰⁰ Why couldn't Congregationalists and Presbyterians work more like that? Maybe the problem, Burroughs suggests, is that they had started at the wrong end of the equation. "**If we cannot be of one mind that we may agree, let us agree that we may be of one mind.**"¹⁰¹

In the covenant of grace dear to Congregationalists and Presbyterians, God told us that we would be His people and that he would be our God, and he would give us "one heart and one way."¹⁰² Christ praying for us to the Father said that our visible unity would be the proof to the world that He had been sent by the Father. Burroughs envisions Christ speaking to the divided Church of His day and saying to his Father, "If they are not united one to another in love and peace, but have a spirit of division ruling among them, what will the world think? Surely, that Thou did not send Me; that I who am their Head, their Teacher and Lord, never came from Thee, for Thou art wisdom, holiness and love."¹⁰³

Burroughs concludes that one verse would be enough alone to pierce our hearts through and through: "*Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves*

⁹⁶ *Irenicum*: 370.

⁹⁷ Rachel Sue Brighton, "Knowing When to Yield: Accommodation and Discernment in Jeremiah Burroughs' *Irenicum*," (Acadia Divinity College, 2014): 81.

⁹⁸ *Irenicum*: 350.

⁹⁹ *Irenicum*: 352.

¹⁰⁰ *Irenicum*: 366.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Jeremiah 32:38-39.

¹⁰³ *Irenicum*: 290.

*have been taught by God to love one another.*¹⁰⁴ “Oh, Lord,” this lover of Christ’s Church writes, “are we in these days such kind of Christians as these were?”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:9 (ESV)

¹⁰⁵ *Irenicum*: 366.

APPENDIX 1

Joining Principles (these are discussed more briefly and are found on pp. 385-426)

1. In the midst of all the differences of judgment and weaknesses of the saints, it is not impossible but that they may live in peace and love together.
2. That shall never be gotten by strife which may be had by love and peace.
3. It is better to do good than to receive good.
4. The good of other men is my good as well as theirs.
5. My good is more in the public than in myself.
6. What I would have others do to me, that will I endeavor to do to them.
7. It is as great an honor to have my will by yielding, as be overcoming.
8. I will never meddle with any strife but that which shall have peace to be the end of it.
9. No man shall ever be my enemy who is not more his own than mine, yea, more the enemy of God than mine.
10. I would rather suffer the greatest evil than do the least.
11. I will labor to do good to all, but provoke none.
12. Peace with all men, it is good, but with God and my own conscience, it is necessary.
13. If I must err, considering what our condition is here in this world, I would rather err by too much gentleness and mildness than by too much rigor and severity.
14. Peace is never bought too dearly but by sin and baseness.

Joining Considerations

1. Consider the many things wherein God has joined us (one body, one Spirit, our calling in one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God).
2. Consider how far we can agree.
3. Consider people's tempers, spirits, temptations, education, years, and gifts.
4. Consider that what we get by contention will never justify the cost.
5. Consider that the strongest have need of the weakest.
6. Consider, when anything falls out that occasions strife, that it may be that this is but a trial and temptation.
7. Consider how the heart of God is set upon making peace with us, and what it cost Him.
8. Consider how unworthy we were when Jesus Christ received us into union with Himself.
9. Consider that we are called to peace.
10. Consider the presence of God and Christ.
11. Consider what account we can give to Jesus Christ of all our divisions.
12. Let every person consider his or her own weakness.
13. Let us consider our mortality.
14. Consider the life of heaven.

Joining Practices

1. The practice of the tongue: gentle language.
2. Let us humble ourselves for our divisions.
3. Amnesty . . . let all former unkindness be forgotten.
4. Never contend unless you are sure you understand one another as to what you contend for.
5. Be ingenious.

- a. Do not lie in wait to seize advantages.
 - b. Make the best interpretations of things you can.
6. So far as reason and conscience will give way, yield to those whom you contend with.
7. If you must strive, strive to see who shall do one another the most good, who shall engage one another in the most and greatest offices of love.
8. Let every person be diligent in the work that God calls him to.
9. In all strivings with men, take care that due respect to their persons be given as much as possible.
10. Labor to get good by the wrongs that are done to us.
11. Turn your zeal from working one against another to zeal for God.
12. In seeking to direct others to good, let it appear that you seek rather to be helpful to them than to get victory over them.
13. Make up breaches as soon as possible.
14. Let us account those brethren in whom we see godliness, and carry ourselves towards them accordingly, even though they will not so account us.
15. Pray.

APPENDIX 2 (from Last Days Ministries Magazine)

