

John Wilbur [1832] *Letters to a Friend on Some of the Primitive Doctrines of Christianity* by John Wilbur. The Tract Association of Friends, 1995.

Letter IV On the Secession in America

... I would ask if it is not alike dangerous to man and dishonourable towards God to deny that Jesus Christ has done anything for our salvation without us, and to deny that he is doing anything for us, within us, for the same purpose; seeing that if we reject either of these provisions, we cannot be saved, for we cannot so much as begin a good life, without application of that great sacrifice of his body, once made for all men. Nor in the second place can we advance a single day of our lives in the Christian way and warfare against sin without his presence and help continually extended to us. The former was a mighty offering of his own body, a living sacrifice, once made for the reconciliation of man; the latter is a continual extension and operation of his power and spirit, light and grace, perceptively working in the hearts of men, for their preservation and safe guidance through the whole course of their lives; for however much and long a man may have gone forward cooperating with the spirit of God within himself, yet he can never witness preservation and continuance in well-doing but through the power of this grace and spirit of God working in him and with him; and if the declarations of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul be correct, a man might, for want of continuance herein, sin against the Holy Ghost, and fall from a good state into one from which it would be impossible even for the atonement itself to restore him.

(John Wilbur, 1832, p.19-20)

Letter V On the Holy Scriptures

... there appears to be a great difference of opinion between us as a people, and other professing Christians – which difference Robert Barclay in his apology for the true Christian divinity, has set forth in a clear, cogent, and scriptural manner. He has in that work answered the great question, whether that principle which contains the light, grace, spirit and faith of the gospel, or the Bible, is the first and best leader and controller of the Christian's life and practice; and he has made fairly the Bible to decide this question itself. ... I would suggest the following queries for the consideration for all inquirers:

1st. Can the Scriptures, or did they ever, save anyone without the spirit?

2nd. Is a person called to the work of the ministry by the Scriptures, or by the spirit of Jesus Christ?

3rd. Is a man brought under a concern to go from one place to another to preach the gospel, by the Scripture, or by the constraining power of the spirit and love of Jesus Christ?

4th. And when he has arrived at the place assigned, and is assembled with the people, is it not that spirit of Christ that truly unfolds the Scriptures, and brings to view the state of men, either in the words of Scripture or in some other suitable language?

5th. And when a professed minister preaches in any of our meetings, his doctrines not being repugnant to the letter of the Scriptures, are the elders or others able to judge by the Scriptures, or by the Spirit of truth, whether his ministry is from the right spring or not?

6th. Did not the Jews think they had eternal life in the Scriptures, and would not come unto Christ that they might have life?

Finally, Christ the Lord, is the minister and leader of his people, (others as well as ministers,) for they do believe the truth of his gracious words, that he *is with them*, and dwelleth in them, and girdeth them, and bringeth all things to their remembrance; and they know him and his word which he spake in the days of his flesh, to be unequivocal and true, and not feigned words, or vain pretensions. They know too, by blessed experience, that their faith in Him, their leader, is a practical and living principle

– that it is not mere theory; and that they find this living experience confirmed to them by literal testimonies from the Scriptures. Hence they are enabled livingly to believe the Scriptures, and to assign them their proper place; or rather to allow them to take their own station and allotment in the blessed schedule of God’s providence, declaring them to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; [2 Timothy 3:16-17] and that *through faith* they are able to make us wise unto salvation; where too he has also placed them, and where they acknowledge themselves to have been placed. Hereby those who attempt to put them in the place of the immediate [unmediated] and life-giving instruction of the spirit of Christ, are not true and genuine believers of the full, fair, and irrefragable testimony of the Holy Scriptures, as it relates to the question before us.

(John Wilbur, 1832, p.21-22)

... Now, therefore, as the Scriptures are true and authentic in word and doctrine, and stand above all other writings, we may fully admit them to be the only outward, fit rule and standard by which all the professors of Christianity may prove and try their doctrines; and more especially, where that Spirit which trieth spirits, is not so well known and understood. This outward test being then generally agreed to by all, is a treasure of inestimable value, and the more so, because it instructs them of the purchase of their redemption, and emphatically directs all to the light and grace of God, through the gospel, which are the very things our forefathers and we as a people have insisted on. But, we see, nevertheless for that want of a perfectly single eye to the light of Christ, some of the doctrines of this perfect standard are misconstrued and differently understood, so that Christendom has become divided into diverse denominations, ...

(John Wilbur, 1832, p.23)

[Satan] now very insidiously resorts to art and intrigue; he is very plausible with them, seeking if he can, to relax their direct hold upon God, and their dependence singly on him. He asks but small concessions at once [first], and admits that something that shall very nearly resemble the right things, and yet not be the thing itself; he gives it a good name, alleging its necessity, and extolling its advantages. And however the adversary hates the Scripture, and would induce men to disbelieve them altogether, still, when he cannot effect this purpose, it is like himself, to exalt them in name, even above their right order and true standing, that so he may dishonor Christ; hence he would place the Scriptures instead of, or before the instructions of Christ’s spirit, casting shade over men’s minds, and over the true faith of the gospel, subtly suggesting the impracticability of a direct leading of the Holy Spirit, and thus inducing ministers to abandon that flesh-paining exercise of waiting for the promise of the Father, and setting them to work, to preach the letter only instead of Christ Jesus in the demonstration of the spirit ...

(John Wilbur, 1832, p.24-25)