

**Love manifested as Unity and
Division; Baptist Identity at
Romney Street Baptist Church,
1815-1854.**

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Abstract

A study of the church minutes of Romney Street Baptist Church from the 19th century provides a glimpse into Baptist identity. For this small church set in Westminster, identity was constituted by love for God and members which manifested most importantly in practices of unity and division. Love was emphasised through the significance ascribed to membership and regular participation in church life. Members were subjected to division when they behaved in ways which were not loving to God and each other; this was manifested through church discipline which aimed to encourage members towards repentance and a re-embrace of unity. While identity, arguably, shifted for many churches due to evangelical emphasis on inter-denominational unity, these Particular Baptists saw unity as something which still ought to be restricted. These rigid structures which were set-up within the church were a way of life, and part and parcel of the understanding of what it meant to be a Christian within this Baptist Church – an identity which emphasised unity, even at the sacrifice of division, and which was epitomised by love.

Love manifested as Unity and Division; Baptist Identity at Romney Street Baptist Church in the 19th Century.

'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' (Psalm 133:1).

This verse, which can be found, in the book of Psalms served as foundation of the sermon given by Henry Paice on Thursday 5 October 1815 at Romney Street Baptist Church. ¹ Henry Paice, the new minister of this relatively new congregation began the service by reading the second chapter of Acts (which ends with an emphasis on communal fellowship), prayed, and then called upon the members to signify their mutual agreement to continue as a church by holding up their right hands. ² In so doing, they united in an oath to continue as a church. This oath was followed by singing of hymns and, finally, a sermon preached by Paice. The message of the sermon was based on Psalm 133. The theme of this service was unity and the occasion of the service was division.

The history of this small chapel already included numerous divisions, one of which had recently been caused by Paice's invitation to the pastorate to serve as the first documented pastor in Romney Street's history. As a condition of his employment, Paice had requested that Isaac Watts' hymns would be included for use during the services. Numerous members objected to this change, which was most likely due to doctrinal views held by Isaac Watts pertaining to the Christology – namely, pre-existarianism, an unorthodox view of Christ's nature which argued that his human soul predated his human incarnation. This view was not novel to the incumbent members at Romney Street. Indeed, they had undergone a previous division in 1811 while worshipping at Grafton Street Church when renowned Baptist John Stevens was called to the pulpit. Stevens' pre-existarian views led to eighty members (out of nearly two hundred) to leave immediately after his installation. It was this remnant that formed Romney Street Baptist Church.³ Thus, after suffering from two recent divisions, the church held a 'public recognition service'. Its goal was not to signify the beginning of a new church (a note its members made in their minute book) but instead to recognise the renewed oath of unity they were taking as members of this congregation. - an oath marked both by unity and division.

Unity was a vogue subject as the nineteenth century began. By the late eighteenth century, rising evangelicalism encouraged unity through the great mission of extending the kingdom by spreading the gospel. For Baptists, this presented challenges due to their marked distinction from other like-minded denominations (especially Congregationalists) regarding their views on baptism. Strict views on this ordinance rendered accommodation for the sake of unity a difficult task.⁴ Throughout the nineteenth century, Briggs notes, Baptists began to

¹ This church will be identified as 'Romney Street' or 'Romney Street Baptist'. However, it must be noted that the church was not officially called by this name until 1827 when the church at Romney Street was built. Before this time, the congregants met at various locations throughout Westminster – for a time at Lewisham Street.

² This significant gesture was indicative of taking an oath. This would not have been taken lightly by the congregation, since in scripture oaths were only to be taken in cases where promises were absolute.

³ "Church Minutes 1815-1885", C.4.1, Westminster Baptist Church, London; Kenneth Dix, *Strict and Particular* (Didcot, England: Baptist Historical Society, 2001).

⁴ John H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 11.

prioritise this ‘world-wide family’ over their denominational distinction.⁵ Bebbington suggests that the central evangelical message was becoming more important than what divided them.⁶ Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, Baptists had, largely, turned away from their ‘exclusive sectarianism’ to accept the diverse practises of Christian obedience. A new ecumenical spirit had arisen wherein tolerance was granted for those who held to the same essential principles.⁷ Schism was viewed by many as a serious calamity – Robert Hall Jr., renowned Particular Baptist minister, believed it ought to be avoided in the pursuit of unity.⁸ Dunan-Page, in her study on David Crosley – an eighteenth century Baptist preacher - notes that also he valued unity far above his Baptist identity.⁹

However, evidence attests to the fact that denominational cohesion continued to be threatened by diverging beliefs and schisms in this period. These issues certainly created a tension within the general trajectory towards evangelical unity. However, they were not necessarily viewed as a contrast to unity. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in this paper through the example of the Particular Baptist church in Romney Street, unity was key to their practices of division; they divided for the sake of more intimate unity, manifested through love. Love was the foundation which guided both practices of unity and division.

Love has become a salient topic in recent historical research, with the rise of the history of emotions which has been very beneficial to understanding more fully the dynamic experience of contemporaries in the past. Looking at love provides insight into this experience by focusing on what people in the past valued most, and how they manifested this in feelings and actions. Love has been seldom used to interrogate the experiences within a church context. This is a great detriment, since love has long been associated intimately with the Christian faith – connected intricately to the atoning work of Christ to save sinners. In the nineteenth century, this was especially salient, given the increased emphasis on this atoning work within evangelicalism.¹⁰

Love was both a duty and a feeling. Particular Baptist Robert Hall noted that love was the superlative duty amongst Christians: ‘no branch of christian duty is inculcated more frequently, or with more force...’¹¹ Love was, furthermore, expressed as a feeling. In a 1795 sermon at the Strict and Particular Baptist Church at Little Wild Street, Joseph Jenkins equated love with feelings when he suggested that feelings of love proceeds from higher views of God: ‘the higher our views are of the Being...the more it charms and delights the soul...to rapture, to joy unspeakable and full of glory.’¹² In this article, love will be primarily assessed in its demonstrative form, as it manifests in church order and congregational duty within this church.

⁵ John H. Y Briggs, *Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth Century Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 9.

⁶ David Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 80.

⁷ Briggs, *A History of the English Baptists. Vol. 3*, 9, 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 44-45.

⁹ Anne Dunan-Page, “The Writings of David Crosley and Baptist Identity in the Eighteenth Century,” *Baptist Quarterly* 45, no. 5 (January 2014): 260–83, <https://doi.org/10.1179/bqu.2014.45.5.002>.

¹⁰ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford [England] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1988), 8.

¹¹ Robert Hall, *On Terms of Communion with a Particular View to the Case of the Baptists and Paedobaptists* (Boston: Wells and Lily, 1816), 82.

¹² Joseph Jenkins, *The Love of the Brethren, Proceeding from a Perception of the Love of God: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D.D Who Departed from This Life, Aug. 24, 1795. Preached in Little Wild Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Sept. 6, 1795.* (London: Bye and Law, 1795), 9.

However, the maintenance of duty was believed to be intrinsically connected to the feelings which would be shared, not only with the brethren but, importantly, with God. Particular Baptist preacher Samuel Pearce advised that true friendship with Christ would be manifested in love for believers – those of the same Christian faith. ‘We have seen then, that only such as possess an high esteem for Christ, a cordial affection for his people, and manifest a zealous concern for his people, can reasonably hope that Jesus will own them as his, and his people’s friends, at a future day.’¹³

Thus, as noted by Pearce’s imperative, there was a connection between love for God’s people and the manner in which this was expressed in quotidian church life. Indeed, I will suggest that Romney Street’s emphasis on unity, and disciplinary division, was driven, at its axiom, by love: a love which primarily involved God and secondarily the church family, with a strong link between the two. Jenkins drew this connection in his aforementioned sermon, aptly titled ‘The Love of the Brethren, proceeding from a Perception of the Love of God.’ He suggested that the love of brethren was intrinsically connected to love of God: the love for the brethren was inevitably fuelled by the love for God and from God. Importantly, maintaining ‘brotherly love’ was a manifestation of loving God.¹⁴

In this article, I examine examples of unity and division in the lives of church members at Romney Street Baptist Church. Without unity, love could not be shared. Members were subjected to division when they behaved in ways which were considered unloving to God and each other; this was enacted through church discipline which, mainly, aimed to encourage transgressing members towards repentance and a re-embrace of unity. In this analysis, I use primary source material never before used in academic research (which has only recently been catalogued) from the archives of Westminster Baptist Church in London. The documents used mainly consist of a church minute book which records reports and correspondence from church meetings between 1815-1885. The duration covered by this article, importantly begins in 1815, when this church minute book began, and ends in 1854 upon the departure of Pastor Thomas Baker. He was the last settled minister until Spurgeon intervened the prevent the church’s closure and reopened it under his own authority eleven years thereafter.

The correspondence within the minutes, notably, is largely concerned with significant issues which faced the church – such as rules and regulations for membership, disciplinary measures, building works, and consideration of pastoral candidates. This article mainly utilises narratives found in the first two categories. Along with this, also used are memoirs, sermons, and other literature published by pastors at Romney Street in the nineteenth century, or significant Baptists who would have been, almost certainly, known (by name or by their works) to the members at Romney Street.

Importantly, I must also note the particular denomination to which this group would have identified themselves in the early nineteenth century. It is not enough to identify them as Baptist, as the Baptists were not a monolithic group, even in this period. Indeed, there was the distinction between the Particular Baptists (who believed redemption was limited and particular) and the General Baptists who believed Christ died for all men. Romney Street would have certainly held to particular redemption during the nineteenth century, though even this

¹³ Samuel Pearce, *Reflections on the Character and State of Departed Christians in a Sermon Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Caleb Evans, D.D. Pastor of the Baptist Congregation, Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol; and Senior Tutor to the Academy in That City. Preached in Cannon-Street, Birmingham.* (Birmingham: J. Belcher, 1791), 13.

¹⁴ Jenkins, *The Love of the Brethren, Proceeding from a Perception of the Love of God: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D.D Who Departed from This Life, Aug. 24, 1795. Preached in Little Wild Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Sept. 6, 1795.*

delineation would not be sufficient definitive. Further distinctions within the Particular Baptists existed amongst those who identified as ‘Strict and Particular’, a group which placed significant emphasis on the practise of closed communion - to be discussed later in this article. By the end of the nineteenth century the Strict and Particular Baptists had largely become the ‘Strict Baptist’ and themselves were also torn between those who identified as ‘Gospel Standard’ or ‘Grace Baptists.’¹⁵ And, even this level of detail still does not adequately overview all of the diversity within the Baptist denomination. I will be defining this church at Romney Street as they have identified themselves in the opening title page of their church minutes which began in 1815: ‘Record of the Proceedings of the Particular Baptist Church Holding Strict Communion meeting at Lewisham Street’. Notably, this Church did practise Strict Communion and joined the London Strict Baptist association from 1846.¹⁶ Evidence suggests that they continued to hold these practises, and identify in this manner, until 1865 when C.H. Spurgeon took charge of the church and re-opened it under his authority. For the sake of this article, I will be referring to the Romney Street members as ‘Baptists’ throughout the rest of this article, with the caveat noting that this is more complicated than this one word could possibly convey. Of course, this nuanced difference does indicate that some of the distinctions applied to this denomination may not apply Baptists, or even Particular Baptists, as a generalisation. However, I am confident that the lens through which they are identified – love – would be a useful tool to understand other Baptist groups, and denominations, for future research; especially given the emphasis on love found within evangelical literature during this period. Hopefully this work will be a useful comparative framework by which to view other churches within the Baptist tradition, as well as wider nonconformity.

In this article, I will argue that while identity shifted for many churches due to evangelical emphasis on inter-denominational unity, these Romney Street Baptists saw unity as something which still ought to be restricted. This socially constituted identity was marked by love for God and love for one another. The first section in this article look at the duty of church members to love God by uniting in love with one another. Members were love God supremely by submitting to his precepts, in unity with one another. The second section in the article looks at disciplinary divisions which were instituted when ‘unity in love’ was threatened by disobedience. I intend to demonstrate that these rigid structures which were erected within the church were a way of life which was part and parcel of what it meant to be a Christian within this Baptist Church. Theirs was an identity which emphasised unity, even at the sacrifice of division; and, importantly, an identity which was epitomised by love.

Love as Unity

The love believers had for one-another was deeply connected to the love that they had for God. As noted recently by psychology researchers there has been noted a strong connection between the love one has for God and the love shared with people. While a study by Moore et. al. focuses on love in families, its findings might extend to ‘church families’: the authors suggest that greater unity in love with family members fosters greater unity with God.¹⁷ Indeed, this perspective of love transcends history; the connection between loving God and

¹⁵Dix, *Strict and Particular*, 1–5; Geoffrey Ralph Breed, *Particular Baptists in Victorian England and Their Strict Communion Organizations* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2003), 1–8.

¹⁶ “Church Minutes 1815-1885”; Breed, *Particular Baptists in Victorian England and Their Strict Communion Organizations*, 193.

¹⁷ T. J. Moore et al., “Loving God, Loving Others: The Sacred Among American Mainline Protestant Families,” *Marriage & Family Review* 54, no. 7 (October 3, 2018): 733–48.

loving others amongst Christians is often manifestly plain. Simon May, in his work on the history of love, asserts that love became a 'supreme virtue' due to the impact of Christianity; it was through love that one came closest to the divine. Martin Luther went as far to once proclaim: 'we are gods through love'.¹⁸

The Bible notably makes this teaching plain when it claims that the greatest commandment is 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' And the second, closely connected greatest commandment: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The connection between loving God and loving others was profoundly connected in the minds of these Baptists in the nineteenth century. They believed that by uniting in love with each other, they were, in effect, loving God supremely. Thus, the importance of this unity received great emphasis.

John Gill, one of the most pre-eminent Particular Baptists, whose influence would have certainly been felt by the members at Romney Street, made love salient when discussing the duties incumbent upon church members. In this list of duties, he noted firstly that their duty was to: 'Principally – love one another. This love ought to be fervent, unfeigned, and universal to the saints, weaker as well as stronger, poor as well as rich.' The rest of the duties in his list uncovered ways in which members might love one another, such as: keeping unity, sympathising with each other, watching over each other, and bearing each other.¹⁹ Romney Street elevated Christian unity as synonymous with expressing love. In their confession, released in 1826, 'uniting in love' featured as a significant theme. A section devoted to love in its entirety suggested that members should unite in 'brotherly love' with one another:

'We believe it to be our duty and privilege to walk with each other in all humility and brotherly love (1 John 4:11) – to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24) – and (when circumstances render it necessary) to warn, rebuke and admonish one another (2 Thess. 3:15) according to the rules of the gospel...'²⁰

Love formed the basis for the rigid structures which were erected within the church, which members were expected to heed if they wanted to continue in fellowship with this church. Love has been frequently associated with duty and obedience in research on family relationships as well as individual spirituality.²¹ It was, likewise, a significant element in church relationships, though attention has not been sufficiently paid to this link. As noted, uniting with one another was expected to foster greater loving unity with God; as long as his precepts were obeyed. Indeed, obedience was seen as key to love. This is eminently apparent in a circular by The West Midland Association of Particular Baptist Churches, issued in 1841: "We long to love him supremely, to obey him unhesitatingly, to submit to him unreservedly, to serve him unweariedly, to love him exclusively..."²²

¹⁸ Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2011), 82–93.

¹⁹ John Gill, *Gill's Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity* (Philadelphia: Delaplaine and Hellings, 1810).

²⁰ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

²¹ Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2014), 102–20; Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²² *The First Circular Letter of the Ministers and Messengers of The West Midland Association of Particular Baptist Churches Assembled at Hilston on the 29th and 30th of June, 1841.* (Shrewsbury: J. Crumpton, Mandol, 1841).

Thus, for members, the expectations were two-fold; they were expected to hold each other accountable and likewise to accept discipline from one another. This balance was expected to foster greater unity with God. The intentional purpose of discipline will be covered in the section on ‘divisions’. Firstly, however, was the expectation of unity – and the greatest manifestation of this was continued attendance at the church.

Church Attendance

Indeed, the most emphasised duty of church members was attendance – it was a duty which was foundational to membership itself. Failing to attend church was a justified reason for church discipline and it was the most common offence listed in the church minutes at Romney Street. Members were frequently disciplined due to continued absence from Church without a good excuse.²³ The Church Rules derived in 1826, note that failing to attend was equivalent with ‘want of love to Christ’.²⁴ At least 75% of disciplinary acts recorded in the minute book, were due to this offence. Non-attendance could have meant that members simply stopped attending Romney Street. Minutes recorded that some members hadn’t been seen for at least a decade and were presumed dead – without confirmation they were excluded. Occasionally, the minutes also mentioned that they had ‘joined another church’ though it was unclear what type of church or whether it was agreeable. In 1833 a significant portion of the membership left on-mass when the former pastor Christopher Woollacott, caused a division in the church. His ministry had been declared unfruitful, and he left, taking with him seventy-three members in 1833 – at least fifty of whom were women. Indeed, far more women were excluded than men (150 out of 261 exclusions were women) and, likewise, more women were excluded due to ‘non-attendance’ than men (116 women were excluded for ‘non-attendance’ in contrast to 55 men). While this article does not focus upon gender, this raises an interesting point which warrants further research to determine whether this was a normative feature in Baptist life in this era.

To ‘take up their place’ by attending church was paramount. It was hardly an atypical emphasis as it was frequently noted in other Baptist didactic literature. Joseph Ivimey, a Particular Baptist minister and historian, would have been well-known to Romney Street members. He preached the sermon for the ‘laying of the cornerstone’ of their new chapel in 1827.²⁵ His *Pastoral Counsels*²⁶ addressed members of his own church with the first duty emphasised as the need to attend public worship.²⁷

The ‘Strict and Particular Baptist Church’ in London at Little Wild Street Church, also included this edict in its standing rules. These rules dated back to 1695, when it noted as its first rule the importance of church attendance. Indeed, absences from church warranted an investigation to determine whether the truancy was an excusable one.²⁸ *The Baptist Magazine* published many

²³ Gill, *Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity*, 540.

²⁴ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

²⁵ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

²⁶ Ivimey was an important figure in Strict and Particular Baptist communities in the 19th century. He was involved in setting up the Baptist Union in 1812, and he also preached at the Romney Street service to commemorate the new chapel.

²⁷ George Pritchard, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Joseph Ivimey* (London: George Wightman, 1835), 146.

²⁸ “Little Wild Street Baptist Church” (n.d.), C/LONDON/LITTLEWILD1, Angus Library and Archive, Regent’s College Oxford.

articles on this subject, including one in 1833 whose author noted ‘it is the duty of a church member to attend *regularly* the public meeting of the church on the Lord’s Day.’²⁹ Indeed, to do otherwise was considered to be ‘walking disorderly’.

Church Membership

It must also be noted that church membership did not simply refer to the cohort of attendees who regularly and intermittently attended the church. Membership included those who had intentionally joined with this specific church, as their own ‘church family’. This was the body of believers with whom they were expected to unite on a regular basis. Thus, the process of becoming a member was rigorous.

The Baptist view on church membership was frequently written about in conduct literature. John Gill’s seventeenth century instructions regarding church order were re-published in 1810 in his *Body of Divinity*. This account was based on a New Testament model of the church wherein each guideline was supported with a bible verse as proof.³⁰ It is a helpful contextual resource for understanding the membership procedures at Romney Street in the nineteenth century. John Gill believed that membership should not be available to ‘anyone at pleasure’ but instead should be reserved for those who demonstrate their Christianity through a profession of faith in Christ.³¹ Indeed, the church minutes suggest there were two means by which a candidate might become a church member: by his/her testimony or by a transfer of membership from another church (often called ‘dismission’). The former procedure was for candidates who were not presently a member at any other church. Candidates would relay their Christian testimony to the members at the church, to ensure that those who joined the fellowship were united with the rest of the congregation. The importance of this was echoed in the final statement in Romney Street’s 1825 Confession of Faith: ‘it be our duty to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.”’³² To ensure this, it was emphasised from the beginning, in the procedures to become a member of the Church.

In order to assess a candidate’s potential for unity with the church, Romney Street Baptist expected candidates to submit a letter of intent to join the church to the deacons. After this submission, a month would elapse between the proposal and the decision to accept or reject the candidate. During this interim period, two ‘messengers’ would be appointed to investigate the candidate’s spiritual and moral condition through multiple home visits.³³ This was not an unusual practice in Baptist churches; Little Wild Street Church also referred to this procedure. Becoming a member entailed a rigorous process, the aim of which was to discern whether or not candidates would be able to live in loving unity with the incumbent members of the church. The foundation of this investigation would have been based on two main issues: moral life and doctrinal beliefs – both of which will be interrogated more in the next section on division.

Once a candidate had been accepted as a member, he or she was expected to unite with the church and ‘filled up [his/her] place’.³⁴ In addition to their attendance, church members were

²⁹ “On the Obligation of Church Members to Attend on the Public Worship of the Church,” *The Baptist Magazine*, 1833.

³⁰ Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, 256–57.

³¹ Gill, *Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity*, 520.

³² “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

³³ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

³⁴ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

expected to fulfil various other expectations which demonstrated their love for each other and love for God, including participation in the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Indeed, to even be admitted as a member of Romney Street, baptism by immersion was a prerequisite (a common practise within Baptist churches). While it was not believed that the ordinances granted salvation, Baptists vehemently contended their importance as they were believed to be directed by God. Indeed, one American Baptist author, when presented with that query, said that attempts to determine what is 'essential' to salvation is 'unworthy of a Christian.' He argued that such vernacular gives adherents an excuse for disobedience. 'This examining with accuracy how far a man may go on the verge of hell, is to me a terrible calculation. This trying how close one can graze the edge of damnation is an experiment which alarms, frightens, appals me.'³⁵ The proper administration of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper was supremely important - both were demonstrations of unity with God and one's congregation. Indeed, they were vital enough to warrant a fracture of this unity when doctrines surround these principles were disobeyed, as will be noted in the final section of this article.

Thus, love was not only represented through unity with the church family – it was also represented by division by discipline. Indeed, as Bebbington asserts, 'the upholding of discipline was one of the signs of a high Baptist regard for the visible church'.³⁶ The membership was, in theory, meant to comprise only those members who were pious and sincere in their faith – those who had been baptised and joined the membership testifying to their love shared with God, and thus uniting in love with the local church. When church members violated the laws of God as understood by this church, the most loving thing to do was through discipline which would hopefully have restorative effects. This is the subject of the next section: division and love.

Love as disciplinary division

Division was a significant aspect of love between church members at Romney Street. There were, certainly, numerous occasions wherein a division took place at the church. The narrative at the beginning of this article was one example in which a formal division ensued which marked the beginning of Romney Street Church. This division was enacted, most likely, due to doctrinal differences. However, divisions did not just transpire when Churches restructured; they also took place when members were expelled. A significant example of this at Romney Street was, as noted, when second pastor Christopher Woollacott left Romney Street in 1833 and took a large proportion of the membership with him. Members who left with Woollacott were noted as 'withdrawn from' in the minutes. Divisions of this category were more frequent at Romney Street than large-scale restructuring divisions of the entire church. Admittedly, it may seem odd to compare the large-scale divisions which cause churches to split and the expulsion of individual members for moral and doctrinal reasons, but I suggest a relationship existed between the two. Church order and unity was obviously threatened by large-scale disagreements and transgressive behaviour which resulted in restructuring. However, it was, perhaps, reduced at Romney Street through rigorous attention to individual and smaller group instances of disagreements and transgressive behaviour.

³⁵ R. Fuller, *Baptism and the Terms of Communion* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1854), 101.

³⁶ Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, 182.

When members were ‘withdrawn from’, or ‘excluded’³⁷, a formal division was placed between them and the remaining members of the church. The exclusion of members from this community was not done hastily. Accusations which might warrant excommunication were examined and investigated; research would be conducted into their private lives to a degree unseen in the present day. For the sake of unity, it was important not to expel every member suspected of misdeeds, but they were certainly rigorously investigated. In cases where evidence suggested that these accusations were true, discipline would ensue which was, typically, manifested as ejection from the church membership; this was an act of love. Members submitted to each other in this ecclesiastical discipline³⁸ as they were mutually helping one another to grow in love and obedience to God.

Indeed, churches were viewed as the ‘moral courts’ who ensured the purity of the church as the bride of Christ was protected. Discipline was an important punitive measure both to protect this purity, and to correct saints who were viewed to be straying.³⁹ Love for God and for fellow church members was demonstrated through the rigorous management of these standards. If members significantly strayed, they were held to account with discipline which mainly intended to be temporary. This disciplinary action barred them from church ‘fellowship’ until they could be restored through repentance. John Gill, in his magnum corpus: *Body of Divinity*, set out the parameters for excommunication (expulsion) by first defining what excommunications did not include –namely, a ‘delivery to Satan.’ Excommunication was, instead, the ‘removal of a man from the communion of the church, and all privileges associated’.⁴⁰

The language used in the church’s minute book to mark these occasions is noteworthy – sometimes when members were excluded from membership, the authors marked their expulsion by stating that ‘their names were erased from the church book.’ This phrase was not exclusive to Romney Baptist; it was also used to describe the expulsion of members in other Baptist Churches⁴¹ Using this vernacular to describe member expulsion would have been significant to the members of this community. It would have conjured up images of the scene described in Revelation 22, which describes future blessing to those who follow God’s commandments as well as the dire consequences for those who tried to impede his glory: ‘God shall take away his part out of the book of life’. This signified their removal from fellowship with God. However, as noted, these members were not facing permanent exclusion. The aim of discipline was to encourage the members to repent of transgressing and, eventually, be restored to the fellowship. This was echoed by Gill, who very explicitly advised that excommunication was not equivalent to eternal condemnation. Nonetheless, the imagery would not have been lost on the recipients of this discipline.

The ‘privileges associated’ which Gill mentioned above are those which were naturally born out of fellowship. In essence, these Baptist members were encouraged to implore what is

³⁷ Both of these terms were used in the minute book to refer to the same procedures – the formal division between the incumbent members of Romney Street and the transgressing member(s)

³⁸ Jenkins, *The Love of the Brethren, Proceeding from a Perception of the Love of God: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D.D Who Departed from This Life, Aug. 24, 1795. Preached in Little Wild Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Sept. 6, 1795.*

³⁹ D. Bustin, “Hanserd Knollys and the Formation of Particular Baptist Identity in Seventeenth Century London,” in *Baptist Identities: International Studies from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. I. Randall, T. Pilli, and A. Cross (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006), 17.

⁴⁰ Gill, *Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity*, 539.

⁴¹ “Little Wild Street Baptist Church.”

colloquially known today as ‘tough love’. Members were treated as ‘outsiders’ of the group until it was clear that their discipline had its effect (repentance) and reconciliation (with God and the Church fellowship) was granted. Indeed, division was both physical and symbolic: the physical separation from their brethren would have, undoubtedly, signified their separation from God. In separating themselves from their fellow brothers and sisters, these Baptists hoped that unity might ultimately be achieved through restoration.

During this disciplinary period, members were to be avoided, noted Gill. When considering how this discipline should be manifested, he advised: ‘[By] avoiding familiar conversation with them; not keeping company with them, not eating with them at the Lord’s Table.’⁴² Two main reasons for such discipline were both related to infringing on unity: by desecrating the primary love of God by living immorally and by threatening the unity within the church family through doctrinal disputes.

Exclusions for Immorality

In the Romney Street minutes at least thirty-one instances of ‘immorality’ were recorded as cause for exclusion.⁴³ Bebbington notes that the most frequently disciplined violations in this genre for Baptists included breaking the Sabbath, exogamous marriages, sexual immorality, and drinking.⁴⁴ Exclusions for immoral reasons in the minutes included various indiscretions, such as: lying and deceit, use of profane language, and a general description of ‘unfavourable character’ where no further details were unveiled. Of the thirty-one instances of exclusions due to immorality identified, nearly half were sexual crimes: pregnancy outside of wedlock, adultery, and premarital sex. The most significant example of this involved the scandal of John Blackaby and Mary Evans.

A church members’ meeting in August 1835 discussed ‘scandalous offense’ (as noted by the church minute book). In the previous meeting, members had voted unanimously to exclude Mary Evans from church fellowship, owing to her ‘being in a situation in which no unmarried female ought to be found.’ Miss Evans, it was revealed, had been engaged in an affair with an unidentified married man. Rumours suggested that her partner was a member at their church, Mr Joseph Blackaby. Blackaby, after arriving late to this meeting, was put on the spot, as the pastor called upon him to answer before God and the church – ‘Was there any truth in this report?’ He denied any guilt in this matter. Nevertheless, a committee of brethren was appointed to investigate these matters.

Thus, members awaited in anticipation for the truth to be revealed weeks later, at the October meeting. The committee members, after a couple of months of elaborate investigating, reported their findings. Unimpeachable testimony revealed that Blackaby had been in the habit of visiting Miss Evans in the late hours of the day, alone, for hours at a time. No other man was observed to visit her so frequently, and the committee had concluded it was reasonable to believe that Blackaby was, in fact, the guilty partner of Miss Evans’ adulterous crime. The committee confronted Miss Evans, but she refused to reveal the man’s identity. She would only

⁴² Gill, *Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity*, 539.

⁴³ It is interesting that most of these were the remit of the male population of the church (at least twenty). This warrants further examination, looking at the gendered nature of exclusions in the church.

⁴⁴ Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, 182.

speak about the affair with the accused, Mr Blackaby. By November, this tale was nearing its anti-climactic finish. The ‘messengers’ who led this investigation reported to the church that no progress had been made; Mr Blackaby as well as his wife, Sarah, both admitted to knowing the identity of Miss Evans co-conspirator. However, they refused to give up his name. Thus, the church members made the following resolution: Joseph and Sarah Blackaby were to be excluded from church membership. They were both expelled, and the mystery of this affair remained unsolved.⁴⁵

Sexual indiscretions were not atypical reasons for exclusion in the minutes; as noted, these accounted for a significant proportion of exclusions granted due to immorality. Indeed, deviant sexual behaviour was addressed in many denominations and churches. For some, attitudes towards sex were, arguably, intrinsically connected to perceptions of unorthodox religion.⁴⁶ Evidence has also demonstrated that myriad couples engaged in deviant behaviour in spite of the potential consequences in their church settings.⁴⁷

Thus, the case of the Blackabys and Mary Evans was not an unusual one. As already noted, the minutes of Romney Street contain a plethora of exclusion on the grounds of sexual immorality. However, two things were exceptional regarding this case. Firstly, was the amount of time devoted to it in the minutes. While sexual deviance was not uncommon reason for exclusions in the moral category, most cases only devoted a few sentences at most to the crimes. In this case, more than two full pages of church minutes were devoted to this case. Perhaps this extensive coverage was related to the enigma surround this case, which is the second exceptional point. Unlike most other cases of expulsion which reveal a detailed account in the minutes, it is not entirely clear why Romney Street expelled the Blackabys. They clearly suspected Joseph was complicit in the ‘scandal’ with Mary Evans; if she wasn’t, they seemed to believe it was morally remiss of the couple not to reveal her ‘co-conspirator’. Ultimately, the case seemingly remained unresolved. On the other hand, there may have been more nuance in this situation which was not revealed in the minute book of member meetings. Unfortunately, the deacon meeting minutes did not survive for this period – which might have unveiled some of this mystery.

Besides sexual indiscretions, numerous other examples of serious immoral behaviours were noted in the minutes. One of the most devastating cases in the minutes is the story of a working-class man who attempted suicide: Samuel Maisey.

In September 1842 Maisey's master instructed him to take a portion of gold to the refiners. Samuel was feeling rather unwell on this occasion, and decided to forego walking, as was his custom, and take a cab instead. After exiting the cab, he realized he had forgotten the gold inside, and was unlikely to ever recover it. In this dire situation, Maisey resolved to take his own life; he prepared himself some poison. He did not use the poison immediately but kept it on hand to be used once his master discovered his negligence. Soon, this moment arrived. Maisey attempted to ingest his fatal concoction, but was discovered by his wife who obstructed him, by calling for a nearby officer. Upon hearing this, the church sent a couple of messengers

⁴⁵ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

⁴⁶ William Gibson and Joanne Begiato, *Sex and the Church in the Long Eithteenth Century: Religion, Enlightenment and the Sexual Revolution*, 2017.

⁴⁷ Leanne Calvert, “‘He Came to Her Bed Pretending Courtship’: Sex, Courtship and the Making of Marriage in Ulster, 1750–1844,” *Irish Historical Studies* 42, no. 162 (November 2018): 244–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2018.32>.

to visit Maisey and speak to him. Two months later, at a church meeting, the messengers confirmed what had occurred, and the church agreed to withdraw from him.⁴⁸ This was a typical response to suicide in this era, which was not only viewed as a sin, but remained criminalised until 1961. A contributor to the *Baptist Magazine* demonstrated a distasteful response to suicide as he remarked on passing by a funeral for a man who had just committed suicide. He found the procession to be ghastly, as though the friends and family of this individual were sanctioning the perpetrator's horrid crime. He perceived this procession as an insult to God, as if the attendees were saying 'We will do thee [the perpetrator] honour, whatever becomes of the honour of God!'⁴⁹

Classifying suicide as a reason for exclusion was not intended to be callous. While expulsion was certainly intended to be punitive and 'purge the church...from infection', it was also meant to inspire redemption. Members who received church discipline would, ideally, be restored to the membership, following repentance and a period of separation. Such was the case for Stephen and Martha Gamman, a married couple who was excluded in 1826 when it was discovered that they had premarital relations. However, the minutes note that the church anticipated they would shortly be restored to fellowship: "It may appear that they are the subjects of sincere repentance, and that they may again be received, at no distant period to the Church."⁵⁰ Indeed, they were restored to fellowship in Spring 1828. Samuel Maisey's attempted suicide, likewise, did not eject him permanently from Romney Street. He was restored to the fellowship as a member in 1856.⁵¹

Other cases of exclusion for immorality included those which disturbed the peace and wrought divisions in the church. In order to promote unity, there was considerable intolerance for difficulties caused by divisive behaviour. Members who were suspected of enjoying division for its own sake (rather than out of love) were reprimanded. In 1822 James Peck was excluded from membership after he produced a tract with passages which uncovered private details about members of the church.⁵² In 1825, James Tyrrell was likewise excluded for spreading gossip about the incumbent pastor, Christopher Woollacott.⁵³ Three of fourteen rules listed in 1825 were dedicated to instructing members how to deal biblically with personal offences and avoid gossip.⁵⁴

Immoral offenses also could refer more broadly to members who were 'irregular in their lives and conversations.'⁵⁵ This applied to members who were suspected of hypocrisy, laziness, deceit, or other instances of immorality which had not been covered by the transgressions already mentioned. This was the case for J.T. Spooner, who was admitted to the church membership in December of 1832, but was ejected the following March when it was discovered that this 'bachelor' was not who he claimed to be. Investigation by messengers found that Spooner had a wife and two children whom he had abandoned upon moving to Westminster.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Frequently, excommunications are described as "withdrawals." Minutes record the ejection of church members from the fellowship as "we withdrew from him/her." "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁴⁹ "On Suicide," *The Baptist Magazine*, 1818.

⁵⁰ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁵¹ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁵² "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁵³ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁵⁴ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁵⁵ Gill, *Gill's Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity*, 539.

⁵⁶ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

Doctrinal Deviance

Disciplinary divisions were distributed not only due to immorality but also for doctrinal deviance from Romney Street's views. Indeed, while the general sentiment within evangelicalism at this time was towards greater unity amongst many Protestants, the importance of particular doctrines was salient enough in this church that the influence of this large movement did not displace its emphasis. Wolffe, in an article discussing unity and diversity in North Atlantic evangelicalism, notes the trend towards unity amongst various denominations, united by the evangelical message.⁵⁷ This is echoed by Bebbington, who asserts this was likewise a trend amongst the Baptists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁸ However, this trend was challenged by groups in various denominations who viewed growing evangelical unity as a threat to denominational distinctives. Indeed, Congregationalist R.W. Dale wrote *A Manual of Congregational Principles* for this precise reason in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁹ Bebbington suggests that while this era fostered great unity, evangelicalism also served as the impetus for a 'time of extraordinary divisiveness'.⁶⁰

Thus, while there were those within wider evangelicalism who, on the one hand, suggested that uniformity should only be required in those elements essential to salvation⁶¹, this argument was not appropriated by all. An account published by The West Midland Association of Particular Baptist Churches in 1840 suggested that growing charity amongst Christians should not supplant the love of God in Christ: 'but that charity which is distinct from "the love of truth," is distinct from "the love of Christ" and the author went on to suggest that accepting errors was a 'departure from' God and, additionally, a 'disparagement' of him.⁶² Romney Street likewise continued to value their Particular Baptist and strict communionist distinctives in this evangelical era. While most of the doctrines which catalysed members to be excluded may not have been viewed as essential to salvation, they would have almost certainly believed that intentionally rejecting these doctrines would be a dangerous situation in which to reside – one qualified by disobedience to God.

Romney Street members strongly believed that unity required a uniformity of belief with regard to myriad doctrines – even those deemed as non-essential to salvation. This emphasis provided the grounds for their intimate investigations of membership candidates. Shared beliefs were integral to a loving unity, and if 'heresies' were advocated, it was loving to 'divide' from these particular members until they repented of these views. Thirty-four of the identified church expulsions between 1815 and 1854 were for doctrinal reasons. The most common error for which members were expelled in this era regarded beliefs held regarding the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

⁵⁷ Wolffe, John, "Unity in Diversity? North Atlantic Evangelical Thought in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Unity and Diversity in the Church*, ed. Swanson, R.N., vol. 32, Studies in Church History (Blackwell Publishers LTD, 1996), 364.

⁵⁸ Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, 80–81.

⁵⁹ Timothy Larsen, "Congregationalists," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas, New product edition, vol. 3 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶⁰ Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, 87.

⁶¹ Wolffe, John, "Unity in Diversity? North Atlantic Evangelical Thought in the Mid-Nineteenth Century."

⁶² *An Account of the Formation of The West Midland Association of Particular Baptist Churches* (London: M. & S. Higham, 1840).

Nearly half of doctrinal exclusions in the church minutes were implemented due to attendance at 'pedobaptist churches. These exclusions were scattered throughout the duration of this period, with the first related exclusion in the 1820s and still occurring in the final year of this article - in 1854. This error likely referred to members attending Congregational Churches, who would have been similarly minded to these Baptists regarding particular redemption and independent church polity, though they would have differed significantly in their views on Baptism. Indeed, a segment of their 1826 Confession was dedicated to the importance of this ordinance and its connection to membership: 'We believe...that immersion in water "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," is the only proper mode and that every believer, after baptism, has a scriptural right to the privileges of a church state.'⁶³

This debate became increasingly controversial when cases involved the connection of the ordinance of Baptism with that of the Lord's Supper; this inspired the long-standing debate between the practises of closed communion or open communion, which had been reinvigorated in the early nineteenth century. The Romney Street Baptist Church minutes noted at least seven exclusions due to violations of closed communion throughout this period. It is possible that more existed; many of the exclusions denoted for 'pedobaptist' reasons included participation in unlawful communion, though it was not explicitly identified as 'open communion'. The practice of closed communion (also called 'strict communion') was commonplace for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶⁴ Closed communion practises insisted that those who participated in the Lord's Supper were church members who had undergone baptism by immersion. Therefore, visiting members from Congregationalist churches were prohibited from participating, even though they agreed on other doctrines, as noted. After John Bunyan's seventeenth century protestations to closed communion in his publication *Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism – No Bar to Communion*, this debate didn't gain momentum again until the late eighteenth and, again, in the early nineteenth centuries, when a new publication war arose between some notable Baptist ministers, inspired by increasing evangelical sentiments.⁶⁵ Indeed, some Baptists who had historically practised strict communion were finding it increasingly difficult to justify doing; it resulted in the exclusion of fellow-believers from the Lord's Supper in a time when increasing unity was being found through gospel agreement.⁶⁶

These new pamphlet wars reinvigorated this debate, which continued throughout the nineteenth century. Whilst there had long been a cohort of Particular Baptist Churches who held to open communion, this was significantly increasing within their churches throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ This inspired a small cohort of devoted ministers and churches to organise the London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches in 1846. Romney Street Baptist Church, under its minister Edward Ransom Hammond, was one of its initial

⁶³ "Church Minutes 1815-1885."

⁶⁴ Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771 - 1892: From John Gill to C. H. Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 231.

⁶⁵ Oliver, 231–33; Dix, *Strict and Particular*, 2–4; Breed, *Particular Baptists in Victorian England and Their Strict Communion Organizations*, 9–28. For insight into the eighteenth and nineteenth century debate, see: Abraham Booth, *An Apology for the Baptists: In Which They Are Vindicated from the Imputation of Laying an Unwarrantable Stress on the Ordinance of Baptism; and Against the Charge of Bigotry in Refusing Communion at the Lord's Table to Paedobaptists* (London: Henry Taylor, 1788); Hall, *On Terms of Communion with a Particular View to the Case of the Baptists and Paedobaptists*; J. Kinghorn, *Baptism, a Term of Communion at the Lord's Supper* (London: Paternoster Press, 1816).

⁶⁶ Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771 - 1892*, 232–33.

⁶⁷ Oliver, 232.

members.⁶⁸ Interestingly, all but one of the exclusions explicitly related to closed communion practices were issued, likewise, in 1846.

Nineteenth century advocates of open communion (also called ‘mixed communion’) tended to base their argument largely on the maintenance of love.⁶⁹ Open communionists argued that it was unloving to exclude from the Lord’s Supper those whom they considered brothers and sisters in Christ who were like-minded in many other doctrines with themselves.⁷⁰ This was argued by Robert Hall Jr., one of the predominant advocates of ‘open communion’ in his work *On Terms of Communion* published in 1816: ‘But to refuse the communion of sincere Christians, is not a natural expression of Christian love, but does the diametrically opposite.’⁷¹ Hall was speaking of the pain caused to other Christian believers who, though attending the service, were forced to withdraw from communion ‘as though they had no part or lot in the matter.’⁷²

Advocates of closed communion ardently defended their principles. They believed this practice was not an insult against love, but a necessity due to conscience. The practice of the Lord’s Supper was such a significant ordinance which needed to comply with the order they believed God had instituted.⁷³ Joseph Kinghorn published a response to Hall in 1816, in which asked his readers to consider the ramifications of Hall’s argument: love for men was exchanged for love to God: ‘...brother love...should never induce us to act contrary to the will of Christ, or to shew love to *men*, at the expence of obedience to the directions of the Lord.’⁷⁴ This was not simply a disagreement in terms, as Hall suggested, but integral to the way that these Baptists identified themselves in their relationship with God.

Indeed, many Baptists holding strict communion would have perceived that practising communion with those whom were not baptised by immersion was an abdication of their beliefs. Haykin notes that Strict Baptists felt that fraternisation with churches which refused these principles was a betrayal of fellowship.⁷⁵ This is echoed in an 1863 publication of *The Strict Baptist Magazine* which asserted that such practices were destructive to the essence of what made a Baptist church – sentiments which, seemingly, reflect those of Romney Street.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Dix, *Strict and Particular*, 188.

⁶⁹ It is notable that, while Bunyan’s 1673 argument against closed communion is not bereft of the importance of love, Robert Hall’s 1816 objection begins his argument for mixed communion with a section on the obligation of love. Further research might be employed to determine whether this is typical for doctrinal arguments in this time – a potential influence of the ‘cult of sentimentalism’.

⁷⁰ This argument would have mainly included Congregationalist brothers and sisters, as they were the most like-minded in other areas- they both practiced an independent church polity, both were Calvinistic in their doctrine. Their point of divergence was baptism - Strict Baptists practiced credobaptism (immersion) while Congregationalists practiced pedobaptism (infant or household baptism). It was not uncommon for Congregationalist members to preach in Strict Baptist pulpits due to these similarities...but due to differences in baptism they could not partake in communion together. Hall, R. (1836). *Works of Robert Hall*. London: Paternoster Row.

⁷¹ Hall, *On Terms of Communion with a Particular View to the Case of the Baptists and Paedobaptists*, 86.

⁷² Hall, 87.

⁷³ Kinghorn, *Baptism, a Term of Communion at the Lord’s Supper*, 36.

⁷⁴ Kinghorn, 39.

⁷⁵ Michael Haykin, “The Baptist Identity: A View from the Eighteenth Century,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2009): 138.

⁷⁶ Notably, it is unclear whether Romney Street at this point (1846-1865) officially identified as ‘Strict Baptist’ as they had always identified as Particular Baptists who held strict communion. They joined The London Strict Baptist Association from 1846 until, at least, 1865 according to the Strict Baptist Society’s database.

The author of the article suggested that when the qualification of communion no longer included baptism by immersion then the church was ‘no longer a Baptist church.’⁷⁷ Strong feelings on this issue were the motivation for severe discipline, within the church, against those who advocated mixed communion – either by practice or by doctrinal agreement. Strict communion was, therefore, an imperative practice at Romney Street. Its members believed that practising or advocating any form of open communion was an affront to what they believed the Bible commanded. Baptist by immersion must precede membership, they believed, and to do otherwise was to defy their love for God and, therefore, to potentially forfeit Baptist identity.

As mentioned earlier in this article, requests to be transferred to another church could be refused if the church a person wished to join held disagreeable doctrines. In February of 1846 John Freeman, his wife Mary and their son John all left Romney Street. As was customary, they asked their former church to transfer them to their new church. Their request was denied, since the new church practised mixed communion; the Freemans were immediately excluded from membership.⁷⁸ This was likewise the case for many other members at Romney Street who, although they joined another Particular Baptist church, were excluded instead of transferred, owing to differences regarding the practice of open communion.

Attending a church which practised mixed communion was not the only cause for exclusion for this particular transgression. In 1822 Anne Grey was excluded for having sympathies with mixed communion practice. It was discovered, after a visit by church members, that Anne believed certain circumstances may warrant the practice of mixed communion. This discovery was followed by several conversations with leaders in the church, including the pastor at the time, Henry Paice. All tried in vain to convince her that this view was not acceptable. Anne's belief remained firm, and she was excluded from the church membership, as the church agreed that it could not ‘receive or recognise as a member...any person who approves of mixed communion under any circumstance.’⁷⁹

Thus, as demonstrated in this section, there were instances in which division was an acceptable practice - namely when church members deviated from orthodox norms which were considered correct, and - indeed - essential to Christian life. The commitment, at Romney Street Baptist, to these beliefs superseded evangelical unity. Indeed, its members believed that through the rigid enforcement of piety and doctrine that they were reinforcing unity which was truly founded upon on love for God – a love which was demonstrated by obedience to him. By maintaining these standards, they were loving their church family most – in a way which allowed them to likewise love God supremely.

Conclusion

Members at Romney Street Baptist Church were concerned immensely with unity. They believed unity was central to the church's mission. Their opening narrative in the Church Minutes notes that their church had been formed by recent doctrinal division, and the incumbent members agreed by an oath to continue in unity. This unity was demonstrated through attending the church, becoming members, and living in brotherly (and sisterly) love for one another. This love for each other proceeded out of their love for God. Also important to this love was the space for disciplinary division, which, despite the opening story which lamented recent divisions in the church, was still core to its mission. These Baptists believed

⁷⁷ “Baptist Churches,” *The Voice of Truth; or, Strict Baptists' Magazine*, 1863.

⁷⁸ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

⁷⁹ “Church Minutes 1815-1885.”

that there was, indeed, a place for division when members violated God's laws through engaging in immorality or holding to deviant doctrines. Indeed, in an age when many churches were shifting towards an emphasis on greater trans-denominational unity due to evangelicalism, this Particular Baptist congregation constituted an identity which continued to practise some forms of division in order to galvanise a greater unity within their folds. The supreme aim of exercising divisionary discipline on these occasions was to reconcile the member(s) to their church and their God. Baptist identity was marked by the dual importance of unity and division, both of which were underwritten by love for God and fellow members of their church family. They believed that living in unity with one another and addressing deviance through division was a means of loving God – which was the pre-eminent force in their lives. Their love for one another was achieved through both uniting in love and dividing in love – with a unity, marked by loving God supremely, as an ultimate aim. Indeed, it was through these practises that they believed they found what Samuel Pearce identified as the centrepiece of love – 'true friendship with Christ'.⁸⁰

Further research would be beneficial in this topic, examining aspects touched upon in this article, though not covered in detail: research into the gendered nature of disciplinary action in Baptist churches in the nineteenth century might yield interesting information about how men and women were viewed differently as sinners. Also, research into the changing vocabulary about discipline between the seventeenth century and nineteenth century was noted when comparing Bunyan with Hall – did the 'cult of sentimentalism' influence theological emphases over time? And, finally, this particular article is only a microcosm of disciplinary proceedings in Baptist life, as it covers the on-goings of this Particular Baptist (holding strict communion) church. Research which compares the experience of this church with others in England, and indeed globally, would unveil whether this experience was typical. Did other churches yield a tension between unity and division, as I have argued, which was founded upon a desire to love God supremely? And was this manifested through an affectionate, and somewhat exacting, love for each other?

⁸⁰ Pearce, *Reflections on the Character and State of Departed Christians in a Sermon Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Caleb Evans, D.D. Pastor of the Baptist Congregation, Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol; and Senior Tutor to the Academy in That City. Preached in Cannon-Street, Birmingham.*

