

The background of the entire image is a dense, multi-colored crowd of people, appearing as a mosaic of various colors. In the center, there is a bright, glowing orange and yellow light source, possibly a sunset or sunrise, which creates a silhouette of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and four children. The family is positioned in the middle ground, with their dark shapes contrasting against the bright light. The overall composition suggests a large gathering or assembly.

Walking in the Light of the Assembly

by Sosthenes

Foreword

This booklet is a draft, and therefore not designed for general distribution. However the recipient may distribute it to those in his or her judgement would benefit from it in hard-copy (copies may be requested from the author), or electronically from <http://www adayofsmallthings.com>.

We are living in difficult times. Satan has always sought to undermine the truth of Christ and His Assembly. In doing so he spoils what is for the Lord. In the Lord's eyes the Church is perfect, united and sanctified. But outwardly it is in ruins. Satan sees the ruins, and his activities are intensifying, knowing that his time is near.

Many readers will be those who earlier in their lives were connected with the Exclusive (Taylor/Symington/Hales) Brethren, now known as the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church. Or their parents or grandparents had been there, and they see the scars. In God's mercy they (the author included) have been released from a sectarian system of bondage, worse than many, due to the wonderful teaching that earlier brethren enjoyed from men such as JN Darby, CH Mackintosh, JB Stoney, FE Raven and others.

The author trusts that these few notes might be of help to such – and also to thousands of others who are seeking to be faithful to the Lord, seeing the total confusion that exists everywhere. The whole exercise is committed to God, that He might work His own way to unite saints who seek to walk in the light.

The author (under the pseudonym Sosthenes) is producing two other booklets, available similarly, simplified summaries of writings of John Nelson Darby.

[Keeping the Faith in a Ruined Church](#) – based on JND's *Faith once Delivered to the Saints*

[The Present Hope of the Church](#) - based on eleven lectures by JND in Geneva

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Walking in the Light of the Assembly

We belong to the Church. In the eyes of the Lord, it is His body. It is united. Publicly it has broken down, into many sects.

What am I to do?

What happens if there is wrong teaching or unjudged immorality in the company?

What happens if there are other disagreements or personal issues?

What happens if there are others I find I can walk with?

What happens if there is division?

What should my outlook be?

We as Christians are united. We have been baptised by one Spirit into one body. And that body is the 'Body of Christ'. He is our Head in heaven; we form His body here. The Church is a 'heavenly vessel' – that is its home is heaven, not earth. People cannot see the Church. They see buildings – that is not the Church. They see Christians – they form the Church, as a body here. Indeed, there can be little doubt, most of those who form the bride of Christ are now 'with Christ' ([Phil 1:23](#)).

So what have we here? Look around and there is division. There are hundreds of sects; in some there is sound doctrine; in others what is of Satan is allowed and promoted. Certainly, every sect is full of different opinions. Indeed, the very basis of sectarianism is wrong.

You will say, 'Are you not a member of a sect too?' That is a difficult question to answer. Those I meet with do not take sectarian ground, do not have a publicly-acknowledgeable name, do not have any headquarters or publishing house, do not have any universal leadership. But the flesh is the flesh, and sectarianism is not far away.

What is the Church?

When the Lord was here he asked his disciples, *‘Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?’* Peter gave the answer, *‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’* He had this through divine revelation. He had not deduced it logically. So the Lord went on, *‘Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’* The church was conceived through that confession. (See [Matt 16:13-19](#))

It did not come into being until the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. By then the Lord had ascended. It says, *‘There appeared unto them [about 120 disciples who were gathered together] cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost’* ([Acts 2:3-4](#)). They became united to Christ (though as far as the earth is concerned He is absent), as His church, or assembly. The church is a body comprising all those who have received the Holy Spirit; it is thus a body of which the Lord Jesus is Head – and is conceived to be a vessel drawing only from that source. As to all of us as believers, whether we perceive it or not, Christ is our righteousness, His place in the Father’s favour is also ours, and He becomes our source of wisdom, light, food, and rule in the path below. The nature and unity of the church lies in this truth.

If we understood this better we would have the answer to any question that arises. We, as believers, are to walk in ‘the light of the assembly’. As in the creation, this light ‘rules the night’ of the Lord’s absence; but it is entirely the light of Christ Himself, and of the coming day of His outshining.

The headship of Christ is a living thing – we are to *‘learn the Christ’* and become *‘instructed in Him’*. ([Eph 4:20-21](#)) One way (among many others) is to get the benefit of help and

guidance He has given in the past – if His people have acted on a previous occasion under His guidance, that is a useful (but not exclusive) place for us to start when faced with a question ourselves. Above all we need to seek His face, and get His mind as to things, and we do that by the Holy Spirit.

We accept that the Lord Jesus died and shed His blood for us. We have faith in that blood and our sins are forgiven. By the Holy Spirit, God has begun a perfect work in our souls, and He will complete it. And we are members of the body of Christ. Many who are sheltered by the blood of Christ do not have the assurance of faith, let alone appreciate the truth of the one body. That does not mean that they are any less valuable in heaven's sight than the most well instructed Christian. What a price has been paid!

Sadly too, many souls see their role as in an earthly church. It is well organised, globally or nationally, with a hierarchy of offices, varying according to the denomination – deacons – vicars – bishops – archbishops, set rules (and maybe a creed). They find there is a lot of philanthropic work to be done. There is much need in the world – it needs effort and money to alleviate the need, and many governments are corrupt and do not help. Indeed there would be more misery in the world, were it not for the effort of millions of Christians. How awful it will be when the Church has gone!

Sadly many Christians are taught that they can make the world a better place, and build a kingdom here for Jesus to come to. You know the old lines – *'Till we have built Jerusalem, in England's green and pleasant land'*. That is wide of the truth. The church, the bride of Christ does not belong to the earth. Jesus will not come to it; he will come and call it to be with Him, and we believe that to be very soon. That is the rapture. That is our hope.

If Jesus is the Husband-bridegroom, He must also be the Head. At the moment He is absent. He said *'I go and*

prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. – and the way was not a humanly devised one. *‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.’* ([John 14: 3,4,6](#)). The body receives its life, its impulses directly from the Head in heaven.

What am I to do?

I am called upon to walk ‘in the light of the assembly’. That is in the light of the church as a whole. (I use the words ‘assembly’ and ‘church’ interchangeably. Darby prefers ‘assembly’ and uses it in his translation. ‘Church’ has so many other meanings.) It is worked out in places – cities, towns and villages. I live in a town in South East England, about 30 miles (50km) from London. There are more than a dozen Christian assemblies in the town: there are three Anglican churches, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Salvation Army, Free Evangelical, Open Brethren, three or four evangelical/charismatic places that I am not sure what they are called, as well as the little gathering I go to. The assembly of God in my town comprises all those indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the town, whatever and wherever they may meet, if at all. And every one is related to the whole.

What happens if there is wrong teaching or unjudged immorality in the company?

So with whom should I walk? Paul tells Timothy, after breakdown had come that the Lord knows all who are His. He says that Christians were to *depart from iniquity, and follow righteousness, faith, charity [love], peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* ([2 Tim 2:19,22](#)). There have been those who have taken this scripture to extremes, cutting off all contact with those with whom they might have had a minor disagreement. JN Darby refers to the mystery of iniquity. He defines it as *‘that evil which acts in a hidden manner in the bosom of the church, as a germ destined to grow until the revolt -- a revolt which will pursue*

its course till it rises up openly against Christ manifested in glory.' ([Studies on the Apocalypse, Rev 19:11-21 – Collected Writings vol.5 p.80](#)). I do not want to go into detail (even if I were qualified to do so) as to all that this would entail, but it is clear that such iniquity is in the setting aside the working of the Spirit of God, and the establishment of a system of man. That is behind clericalism, sectarianism and heretical teaching, denying the deity of Christ, His atoning work, His resurrection, and also denying the person of the Holy Spirit. I am to separate from that. I cannot be in Christian fellowship with any gathering where this is tolerated.

Does this dechristianise those who attend such a gathering? Of course not. There may be true believers there, unhappy believers who feel uneasy about what is being held and taught, but because of family or other reasons do not have the faith to leave. So if I leave, it does not make anything of me, I am just seeking to be true to the Lord. Woe betide me, if I look down on my brother or sister who has not made such a move. That would be pride – and *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.* ([James 4:6](#)).

Some say there can be no collective position in these days of such breakdown. If that were the case, the Holy Spirit would be restricted. God can, and does support those who feel they should go alone, or with just their family. But they, especially the younger ones are missing so much!

Another important point is, on what ground do we separate? There was a controversy in the 1920's regarding whether we go by [1 Cor. 5](#) or [2 Tim. 2:19-22](#). Both are applicable, but in days of breakdown we cannot put anybody out of the assembly, because we are not the whole assembly. So we have to withdraw ourselves.

A big question is, 'How quickly should I act?' Here I have to be very close to the Lord. God is very patient; the flesh is not. I may see something clearly, but in the company there

are godly souls who are concerned, but do not see things quite so clearly. Grace would cause me to be like God – plead with them, wait on them, testify to the iniquity. When there is a refusal to act, rather than a slowness to act, then the position might be iniquitous. If, and only if this is the case, I must leave.

What happens if there are disagreements?

There have been numerous times when a person, or a party, walks out saying they are ‘withdrawing from iniquity’. Perhaps they walked out from what they perceived as a ‘loose state’. And what they were marked by was a ‘legal state’. Neither is right, of course, but it is not iniquity. It has been said that you meet state with a ministry of Christ, not administration. And there is another danger of acting quickly. Precipitative action might be interpreted by my geographically dispersed friends as being ‘faithful to the Lord’. I might be more highly regarded because of the action. But I am not being faithful to the Lord at all. He is patient, and has been patient with me.

Scripture gives two indications as to those with whom one has to cease to have Christian fellowship. Firstly there is the heretic. *An heretical man after a first and second admonition have done with* ([Titus 3:10 JND](#)). Secondly there is a list of persons which can be regarded as ‘being such’, that are unfit for Christian fellowship anywhere. Paul tells us, *‘not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.’* ([1 Cor 5:11](#)). Mercifully, over the past years, in the gathering where I break bread we have had nobody in those categories. But there have been a couple of times where a person has formed a relationship with another believer, and instead of helping their partner to see the truth more clearly, has taken a more liberal line and gone to the Anglican or Baptist church. I could not call that person immoral or a heretic, but I have had to recognize that he or she has chosen a company with whom I cannot

associate, because of their teaching, practice or associations. God will take care of them, and they are still the Lord's.

Sadly too occasions arise where action is taken which falls short of that expected of a Christian company. There may have been faults, but was there grace? A person is excommunicated (a questionable action in a broken day). The consciences of many, in the company and elsewhere are not carried. There is much prayer, the company is humbled, and God comes in to show the wrongness of the action. Maybe the person resumes his or her place, happily. Alas, so often that person is disheartened and is lost to the company, but not to the Lord.

Assembly Discipline

Our spirits need to be right too. The question of discipline in the assembly is a very solemn one and should be such a rare event that it is not necessary to go into it in detail here. Suffice it to make a few quotations from a paper by J N Darby 'On Discipline'. (Collected Writings vol.1 – Ecclesiastical 1 p.338 – *lightly edited*).

“*We ought to remember what we are in ourselves, when we talk about exercising discipline - it is an amazingly solemn thing. When I reflect, that I am a poor sinner, saved by mere mercy, standing only in Jesus Christ for acceptance, in myself vile, it is, evidently, an awful thing to take discipline into my own hands.*

But the church may be forced to exercise discipline, as in the case of the Corinthians, [1 Cor. 5](#). I believe there is never a case of church discipline but to the shame of the whole body. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, "Ye have not mourned," [\(v.2\)](#) etc.: they all were identified with it. Like some sore on a man's body, it tells of the disease of the body, of the constitutional condition. The assembly is never prepared, or in the place to exercise discipline, unless having first identified itself with the sin of the individual. If it does not do it in that way, it takes a judicial form, which will not be

the ministration of the grace of Christ. Its priestly character in the present dispensation is one of grace.

All discipline until the last act is restorative. The act of putting outside, of excommunication, is not (properly speaking) discipline, but the saying that discipline is ineffective, and there is an end of it; the church says, "I can do no more."

As to the nature of all this, the spirit in which it should be conducted, it is priestly; and the priests ate the sin-offering within the holy place, ([Lev. 10:13](#).) I do not think any person or body of Christians can exercise discipline, unless as having the conscience clear, as having felt the power of the evil and sin before God, as if he had himself committed it. If that which is done is not done in the power of the Holy Ghost, it is nothing.

It is a terrible thing to hear sinners talking about judging another sinner, sinners judging sinners, but a blessed thing to see them exercised in conscience about sin come in among themselves. It must be in grace. I no more dare act, save in grace, than I could wish judgment to myself. "Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again, [Matt. 7:1, 2](#). If we go to exercise judgment, we shall get it.

What happens if there is division?

Indeed, so many divisions have started from what was a personal difference. We are in the House of God, judgment begins from there (see [1 Peter 4:17](#)), and scripture gives us clearly the rules, or laws of the house, or the kingdom. If I have done something against my brother, [Matthew 5:23-25](#) tells me what to: *Go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother...Agree with thine adversary quickly.* Failure to do so puts me in a precarious situation. Likewise if my brother has sinned against me the applicable scripture is [Matthew 18:15-20](#). I am to go to my brother and seek to help him, then I take one or two more, then I tell it to the church (KJV- JND uses 'assembly'), and if he will not listen to the church he is to be as a Gentile or a tax collector. What is important is that these matters are sorted out in the place – or in the gathering in that place seeking to walk in the light

of the assembly. There is every resource – divinely given – to meet the matter, however weak we might be, or however stubborn or willful the flesh is.

We need to be clear as to what is meant in Matthew 18. I do not think that it is a minor personal issue. If I have been offended, or even defrauded, I should bear it – what is that compared with what my Saviour bore? If my reaction is in the flesh, then I am sinning against my brother or sister, even if they have offended me. The Lord’s teaching in Matt 5,6 and 7, Paul in Corinth (*Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*- [1 Cor 6:7](#)). We can help one another as Paul told an unnamed brother in Philippi to help the two sisters who could not get on with one another.

Oh that when in such a situation Christians would seek to work things out together! My wife says, “If they had real love and respect for their brethren, they would do everything they could to be reconciled, knowing the universal damage that could happen if they failed to do so.” It is often been said that David and Abigail met at the bottom ([1 Sam 25:20-23](#)). Abigail took the whole thing on herself, even though she was not to blame. Bloodshed was avoided.

A Historical Perspective - John Nelson Darby

Let us look at history, specifically what let men like J N Darby, CH Mackintosh, G V Wigram, E L Bevir and others to leave the established or non conformist churches in the early 1800’s.

Most reading this will be acquainted to some degree with the teaching of J N Darby (1800-1882). An Anglo-Irish evangelist, Darby was led to the fierce conclusion that all churches, as man-made institutions, were bound to fail. The believer’s true hope was the return of Jesus Christ. With others Darby gathered in a less formal way, free of

clergy and human structure, founded on a desire to be separate from unholy organisations.

His teaching on the subject of the Christ can be summarised in the eight papers grouped in a booklet 'The Faith Once delivered to the Saints' (Available from Kingston Bible Trust and summarised on the ADOSS website as [Keeping the Faith in a Ruined Church](#). Very briefly the papers covered: (Links – [Original](#) / [Summary](#))

- [*The Faith once delivered to the Saints - Knowing where we are, and what God wants us to do, in the Confused State of Christendom*](#)
- [*The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ - Church Unity and Sectarianism*](#)
- [*Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity - Darby on Separation from Evil and Christian Unity*](#)
- [*Grace, the Power of Unity and of Gathering - God's Love and Grace – Holiness, Unity and Christian Gathering*](#)
- [*On Ecclesiastical Independency - Independent Churches, Independent Local Assemblies, Personal Judgment and Conscience*](#)
- [*Churches and the Church - The Church as the Body of Christ, the Church as the Habitation of God, and Local Churches*](#)
- [*The Notion of a Clergyman, Dispensationally the sin against the Holy Ghost - The Evil of Clericalism – One Man should not Run a Church or Assembly*](#)

What Darby had to Face

As a young man, Darby switched from law to theology at university, and eventually became a clergyman in a poor rural area near Dublin. Whilst there was blessing amongst the peasant folk, and the gentry at Powerscourt House nearby, Darby became convinced that the Church of Ireland – 'nationalism' as he called it, was a human institution with human organisation and hierarchy, in which the Holy Spirit's work was hindered. He left and met with a few others in Dublin.

Finding that others throughout Britain and worldwide were also of like mind, there was soon a global fellowship, not

taking sectarian ground, but gathering simply to the Lord's name in the light of the one body.

Satan soon attacked and heretical doctrine as to the Lord's person was taught by B W Newton in Plymouth. Refusal by some to refute it led to Darby and others separating from that gathering and breaking bread separately.

Few thought Newton right, but persons from Newton's assembly went to Bristol and broke bread at Bethesda Chapel, where some prominent brethren such as George Müller (of children's home fame), and Henry Craik held sway. Müller and Co, said that these did not hold Newton's doctrine and therefore they were free to break bread. Darby pointed out that these persons were identified with a company others in Plymouth were not in fellowship with and therefore their action in admitting these persons was inconsistent with the unity of the body. This led to the so-called 'Open Division' of 1848. The Open Brethren continue now, and admit to the supper any lover of the Lord. However they will ask more searching questions when a person asks to join their particular gathering. They also see all gatherings as independent one of the other.

There are numerous publications on the subject of the Open Division, including Alfred Gardiner's book 'The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth' (1961), pages 159-167 (obtainable from Kingston Bible Trust). A paper by JND ['The Bethesda Circular'](#) is also of interest.

A sad division occurred in 1908 where there was a personal matter in Alnwick in the North-East of England. Instead of it being resolved there, the brethren divided and some went and broke bread in a nearby gathering, Glanton. Glanton might have been well-intentioned in receiving those from Alnwick, believing them to be in the right, but they acted outside of their remit. This whole matter is outlined in Alfred Gardiner's book 'pages 159-167. In this book there is a letter written by James Taylor Sr. (1870-1953), which says, *'Much is made of the spirituality of those at Glanton, but*

spirituality and good intentions, and the like cannot justify an unscriptural action. Then it is a very solemn thing to assume to have the Lord's guidance in an action that is contrary to the Word. In this way He is made responsible for the transgression!' Taylor draws on the well-intentioned but sinful act of Uzzah in [2 Sam. 6](#).

There has been controversy as to the role of the nearest meeting when there is a divided state. [Deut 21:1-9](#) gives an indication of a certain principle of proximity (*If one be found slain in the land ... thy elders and thy judges ... shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain: and it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man...*) but it does not cover interference. Even though Glanton was the next meeting to Alnwick, they did not have the authority to decide as to the divided issue. The matter should have been left in Alnwick. There is a helpful letter by Charles Coates as to the matter (reproduced later). Coates says.

“ In a case where principles contrary to the truth are the cause of local division, and this is fully ascertained, it is the responsibility and privilege of the brethren to identify themselves with those who are seeking to maintain what is due to the Lord, and to repudiate what is contrary. There is no interference whatever with local responsibility in either case. If the nearest meeting has no special responsibility in such cases, who has? To leave such matters altogether undetermined would be fatal to true fellowship either locally or generally. Indeed Glanton was held to be quite in order in declining, for the time, to receive from either party in Alnwick. It was when they absolved saints from their local responsibility in Alnwick by receiving them at Glanton that a serious issue was raised. (C A Coates, Letters, p185 (CAC vol.22))

The trouble is that things are much easier now. Had I been in the early church, if I had left I would have had nowhere else to go. I would have to have waited till others took the same action. Not till the 18th century when sects started to proliferate could I leave and go to another gathering in the town (but that gathering might tolerate iniquity too). Now it is easy. I can drive 30 or 40 miles to break bread

elsewhere, that is not a problem. I can communicate by phone or Skype and have a 'virtual fellowship'. I can listen to or watch videos of preachings from CD's and DVD's, websites or even You-tube. But this is not true Christian fellowship, walking in the light of the assembly.

What happens if there are others I find I can walk with?

2 Tim 2:19 is individual. I am called upon to depart from iniquity. If in God's grace there are others who have moved the same way I am obligated to walk with them, They may not be those I like personally, and they may not like me; they may be of different social backgrounds, but this is not the point. It needs only two or three - *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* ([Matt 18:20](#)).

So if we have a situation where it is imperative to act – we have pursued all the avenues that grace would allow, the truth is refused and there is 'no remedy'. I name the iniquity; I plead with my brethren; they refuse; I leave. Hopefully many more – even the majority – do too. So there is a basis for fellowship.

I find others who have moved in the place where I am, or nearby. We meet and break bread. Breaking bread is an expression of Christian fellowship. There are others. If we are not careful we form another little sect – it might be more legal or it might be more liberal in its outlook, but it is a sect nonetheless. We break bread in the light of the whole. We learn of another gathering of believers who have acted similarly, and we are able to have fellowship with them. If we are in the same town then we break bread together; if not we 'commend to and receive from' that company. Neither claims to be the assembly in the place; each is acting in the light of the assembly in the place that he or she is in. And all recognise the whole Church, the body of Christ, down here. One city cannot have administrative control over another.

What dangers are there?

The complication arises if my gathering is already in fellowship with some other gatherings, and a gathering with whom we feel there is no barrier to fellowship, is in fellowship with others. We agree there is no reason before God, that we should not be united in fellowship. But we are also acting in the light of the assembly worldwide. So we both say, 'We ought to be walking together and enjoying the privileges of Christian fellowship together, but to be together we need to carry our brethren worldwide.' What can we do? We could call together a super-conference and decide on a worldwide merge. (That has been tried, with unhappy results). That would be the human way. Or we could wait on God, that if it is in His time and His way, the way to be together can be opened up. It may be that this will not happen, after all, it might lead to sectarian pride: 'We are the best sect in Christendom'.

There are two things that I hear. One is 'We were right; they were wrong, if they are to come to us they must do so individually'. In one sense this is right, indeed my wife, mother-in-law and myself did that in 1975. There was nothing evil in the company we were with, and I have to admit humbly there were some personal issues. But I was convinced that the action that led to a division three years earlier was not constitutional. There were practices in both companies with which I disagreed – and I am sure there were many things that each could point to with me. But the spirit that says 'We were right; they were wrong' is not the spirit of Christ. Better to say, 'We have all been unfaithful to the Lord, may we be given grace to work things out humbly, under the leadership and guidance of the blest Holy Spirit'.

Another thing I hear is, 'There is no assembly position (or no representation of the assembly) in such-and-such a place'. Such a statement is, in my opinion, an affront to the Holy Spirit. Unless the situation in that place is one of total apostasy (and who am I to say?), the assembly is

there, in perfection, and the Lord takes His delight in it. That there are none there, with whom I am able to walk, is another matter. *The Lord knoweth them that are his* ([2 Tim 2:19](#)).

It is more difficult when division comes in. Of course if there is clear iniquity and faithful believers are compelled to leave, directed by the Lord in obedience to Him, it is clear. This was the case in point with those with whom I was in fellowship, as a young man, in 1970. Iniquity had, no doubt, been working for years, and some had left. But God made an issue abundantly clear, and in His mercy, I, like many others, was *'as a firebrand plucked out of the burning'* ([Amos 4:11](#)). Many left, and the love and joy that was there were evident. There were a lot of scars; this led to tension. Some wanted to hang on to the 'old system'; others wanted to throw everything out. But the ground for fellowship was abundantly clear.

Sadly, no doubt due to the terrible effect of the 'System', further division took place within two years. There was a difference of opinion in a gathering in Scotland as to whether membership of a professional association constituted an 'unequal yoke', according to [2 Cor. 6:14](#) (It is not the place to discuss this here). Some who took a more liberal line seceded, and broke bread separately. While the closest meeting was considering the matter, and godly persons were still seeking to come to a common judgement, another gathering decided in assembly to recognise those who had left, and 'Are you with X's judgment?' became a mantra. This forced a general division. More sober brethren felt that more time should have been given for things to be worked out, and that the assembly was still functioning in weakness, the precipitative judgment in another city was a breach of the Lord's rights in a local assembly (this being the issue, not the association question). Indeed this sort of thing has happened on a number of occasions, circumstances might have varied, with different questions, but a failure to recognise that the Lord has sovereign relationships with

each local assembly, seeking to act on behalf of the whole church in the town or city where it is located, and in relationship to the body of Christ universally, has led to these sorrowful schisms.

What should my outlook be?

Have these lessons been learned? I hope so. My generation has suffered several divisions; mercifully many younger ones have not. They do not have to learn the hard way.

May we walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ([Eph. 4: 1-3](#)).

May we hold to what the Lord said to His Father, *‘That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me’ ([John 17:21](#)).*

And in our relations together may we be *kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you ([Eph 4:32](#)).*

I have recently seen three very helpful timeless articles by Charles Coates (1862-1945). One is entitled [‘Brethren do not Divide’](#), another [‘What would happen if Somebody from Thyatira left that Company and tried to Break Bread in Philadelphia’](#), and the other [‘Local Responsibility’](#) (quoted above). Also there is a helpful letter by John Nelson Darby on separation. I have titled it [‘When and how should I leave a Company?’](#) These put things more clearly than I can, having been written by somebody far more devoted and spiritual than me. These can be found on the [ADSOSS website](#), and follow this paper.

I could write more, - about other divisions and local issues earlier and since. The circumstances have varied, assembly procedure, difficulty of a brother regarding addressing the

Holy Spirit, some business matters, a wedding, and so forth. These things may have needed to be worked out (but personal matters left). But what has been the real issue in all of them has been the Lord's rights in His assembly. He is jealous of them.

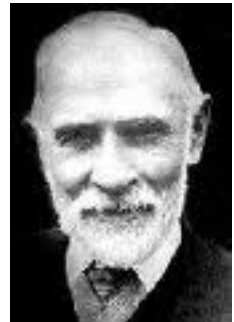
I am a bit of a historian of these sad affairs. Rather than be a historian, I should be like a servant of the Lord, Percy Lyon (c1879-1966) who I knew when a youth in London styled '*a broken hearted churchman*'. May I, and all my dear Christian friends not fret about matters, but keep near the Lord who has seven stars (seven local assemblies) in His right hand.

Local Responsibility

by Charles Coates (1862-1945)

In this paper, Coates shows the position I should take in the Christian gathering I am attached to, and how it relates to others in the same town, and others with a similar outlook. It helps us too to see how we should behave if division comes in.

It is evident that the words "local responsibility" mean something quite different in the minds of different persons. Some seem to think that "local responsibility" only attaches to saints taking a certain position, or meeting in a certain way. Others seem to attach it only to saints in good moral state, or, as it has been said, "those morally fit to exercise it." Others again seem to think that the breaking of bread determines whether saints can be viewed



as having “local responsibility” or not. These and other thoughts which I have seen in various letters, show that a good deal of confusion is in many minds as to this principle, and I dare say this accounts, to some extent, for the diversity of judgment amongst brethren as to the question now before us.

What I understand by “local responsibility” is that saints, though undoubtedly having their place in the one assembly of God, viewed in its totality as comprehending all saints on earth, have also a place, clearly recognised in Scripture, in relation to the locality in which they reside. We read of the assembly in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus, in Cenchrea, in Corinth, etc., etc., and we learn from Revelation 1-3 that each local assembly is viewed and addressed by the Lord as having a distinct place and responsibility before Him. It is true that the one who has an ear, wherever he may be, is called to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. This makes clear that the assemblies are not independent of each other, but that what is said to any assembly is necessary and profitable for all who desire to have the Lord’s mind as to things. The Lord has not one mind for the assembly in Ephesus, and another for the assembly in Smyrna, but He does regard each in its own place and condition, and addresses it accordingly. Now it seems to me, that we should clearly see and acknowledge this local responsibility, as well as truth which pertains to the assembly at large, viewed in its general unity.

I fully believe that the assembly is a heavenly stranger, not indigenous to earth; not morally linked with anything in the present world system. As a matter of fact, it is on earth as the vessel of God’s testimony, and for the expression of Christ. It is in an actual company of men and women here on earth that God dwells and Christ is expressed. Scripture clearly recognises that this company in Ephesus is distinct from the company in Smyrna; they are two distinct assemblies and each is addressed by the

Lord in its local responsibility and according to its local condition.

I judge that the recognition of this is not as many seem to suppose, a mere point of ecclesiastical order or formal correctness, but that it is of great moral importance, because all questions in regard to the practical walking together of saints stand connected with what is local. That is, as resident in Teignmouth, all my immediate relations and associations are with the saints in Teignmouth. It is in relation with them, that I personally maintain, compromise, or abandon the truth of the assembly. I recognise the assembly of God in Teignmouth, of which all saints in the town form part. Therefore with scripture before me - the Lord's mind as to things - I must hold to the fact that the assembly in Teignmouth is viewed by the Lord as distinct from the assembly in Exeter or in Plymouth. That is, it has a local position and responsibility of its own.

The saints are the assembly of God, the temple of God, Christ's body, 1 Timothy 3: 15; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 12:27. They are in this holy position by the call of God and in virtue of the presence of the Spirit. It may be said that many of them do not know or recognise the position to which they are called, and in which they are set by God. But speaking as an individual saint enlightened by God as to His will, I see what the saints are according to God, and I hold to it as the truth, even if no other agrees with me. I own the one assembly locally as well as the one assembly universally, because I see both aspects of the truth in Scripture.

Assembly order and discipline are necessarily local. It is to the local assembly you tell your grievance, In [Matthew 18: 17](#), it is the local assembly that puts away from itself a wicked person; that comes together to break bread and so on. All this must be admitted, I think, by those subject to Scripture and we are to follow it as righteousness, [2](#)

Timothy 2:22: that is, what is right and according to God.

I take it that it is a part of righteousness and that which faith would assuredly hold fast, that the assembly of God is to be owned locally as well as generally. In owning it, love would surely come into activity towards one's local brethren, and we should use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of *peace*. All this would be moral evidence that we were calling upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

Much of the difficulty of the present situation seems to me to arise from the fact that the "meeting" in a town is viewed as having some kind of corporate existence and responsibility apart from all other saints in the town. This, I submit, is really a sectarian idea and ought not to be entertained.

If but one individual in a town were seeking to pursue righteousness, faith, etc., he would necessarily have to walk alone locally, though being quite free to join his brethren elsewhere in their privileges as opportunity occurred, if no moral questions intervened as a barrier. If two or three, or twenty or thirty saints in a town were individually set to walk in the path I have indicated, they could, of course, walk together but they would not embrace in their thoughts anything less than the whole local assembly composed of all saints in the town.

Now it seems to me that if these twenty or thirty get into confusion through the unhappy activity and allowance of the flesh, they have no title to give up (nor, if they were men of faith, would they wish to give up) what they originally started with. They are still of the assembly of God in Teignmouth, or wherever it is, and it is on this very ground that they must judge themselves, so that their ways and spirit may be consistent with the holy character of that

assembly.

Evil may come in amongst them, which they may have to judge and put away from amongst themselves. Or it is even possible that iniquity may come to predominate so much, that nothing remains for the faithful but to depart from it. Or, an even more difficult case: there may be evil with confessedly no power to deal with it, and in such a case the Lord is evidently raising with them the question of their whole moral state. This calls for deep searchings of heart and profound humiliation before Him.

In connection with this, does it not seem clear from Revelation 2 & 3 that the Lord must be owned as having to say directly to each local assembly? He does not commission Philadelphia to deal with Laodicea. It is He Himself who rebukes, chastens and calls to repentance.

If a number of saints in a town professing to own their local responsibility as being of God's assembly say that they have not faith to come together to break bread, does it not raise a serious question in the minds of all who believe that the Lord deals directly with each local assembly? Does it not suggest that under the Lord's eye there may be a moral reason for the want of faith? Some reason which perhaps the most spiritual persons in an adjacent town might not be able to discern? Would it not be wisdom to recognise the Lord as having some voice in connection with this confessed want of faith?

It seems to me that if saints really held the scriptural thought of local responsibility they would not think of taking up, save by prayer and counsel, the case of saints in confusion in another town. They would press upon them to seek the Lord, and to act before Him according to their own exercises and faith in their own town. It would be no question of whether they were a "meeting" or not, but of

recognising them as being of God's assembly in another place.

Much has been said as to a case where prolonged endeavours have failed to bring about local reconciliation between divided saints. The question is asked, "How long is this to go on?" Well, surely if a number of saints, waiting on the Lord and humbled before Him, were really clear so as to be gathered to His name, He would make it plain when His time had come for them to break bread together again. I judge they would be able to show themselves to be so clear of all the past confusion, and as to their position in regard to their unreconciled brethren, that saints in other towns would have no difficulty in extending to them the right hand of fellowship.

I have seen papers giving suppositional cases which seem designed to make the truth of local responsibility appear absurd and impracticable, but I conclude that it is our business to see what the truth really is, and then to own the Lord in connection with the practical working of it out. The Sadducees thought to make the truth of resurrection look ridiculous by their case of the woman with seven husbands, but the Lord gave them a very simple answer, '*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.*' ([Matt.22:29](#)). If I see a thing in Scripture I am not deterred from adhering to it by any supposed or real difficulties, for I know that 'the power of God' is equal to every emergency; and it is not to be thought that we can walk in the truth of the assembly in the wisdom or power of men.

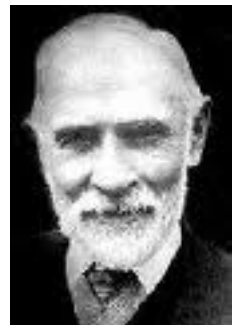
One word, in conclusion, as to the course, which brethren in many places have adopted, of declining for a time to receive from places where division occurs. Great exception has been taken to this course, but I fail to see on what scriptural grounds. No person instructed in the truth of the assembly would advocate going to *both* parties in a case

of local division, but would it be wise or gracious to assume at once that every local breach is irreparable, and to decide at once which of the two parties – perhaps equally culpable – we will go with? If brethren go on with one party in such a case, they necessarily refuse the other, and thus decide the case at once. But should not patience be exercised, and space given for repentance, and healing of the breach? No principle is involved in this; it is simply a time of waiting upon God to grant local healing, if it is His will. If healing be not granted, time is needed to enable saints in other places to consider the facts and principles involved therein, of any local breach, and to wait on God for wisdom and guidance in regard to it. So, as far as I know, this is all the brethren desire, and I think any godly person would be quite willing to waive for the time his individual privilege in breaking bread, that such patience might be exercised.

What would happen if Somebody from Thyatira left that Company and tried to Break Bread in Philadelphia

A letter written by Charles Coates (1862-1945)

... The question is raised by you as to whether the breach of 1908 was not caused by some misunderstanding. It appears that it is still your conviction that it was so. I would most gladly do anything possible to remove misunderstandings.



You say, I do not see disorder if, say, a saint in Laodicea or Thyatira, feeling the condition of things, and having read the instructions of 2 Timothy 2, withdrew and was received at Philadelphia. I cannot see that Philadelphia would be interfering with the Lord's prerogative in receiving such a one.

If such a one had gone to Philadelphia it seems to me very probable that the brethren would have said something like this to him:

Dear brother,

We are deeply interested in you, as being of the assembly in Thyatira, for we love the brethren everywhere, and we feel a special care for those who are comparatively near to us, as you are. We are conscious that the spiritual power we have is only little, but this makes us desirous of clinging tenaciously to every intimation of the Lord's mind that we can gather from His word. And we should like to put before you what we have learned from Him.

*For a long time we have had a copy of a letter written by the apostle Paul, and we recognise that the things he wrote are the Lord's commandment to us. We have gathered from that letter that assembly exercises are to be taken up and worked out in each locality where the saints are found, for not only was it addressed to 'the assembly of God *which is in Corinth*', but to 'all that *in every place* call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'. This has taught us to recognise the assembly of God as in local responsibility in each place where saints are found, and that 'in every place' the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ can be called on as One who is available to direct His saints, and to adjust them locally. Indeed we count it a most precious privilege that we can thus refer directly to the Lord in our own locality, and obtain His grace and help in seeking to keep His word and not to deny His Name. We thankfully own that we are set in Philadelphia in responsibility to maintain here all that is due to the Lord, and also to avail ourselves of all the resources and sufficiency that is in Him for us. We feel it to be a great privilege that in our local exercises we have not to look to our brethren in Sardis or Smyrna, but directly to our beloved and only, Lord. We have proved His grace and faithfulness and sufficiency in our local needs, and we earnestly and*

affectionately entreat you not to call upon us, who are of another assembly, but to call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ that He may show you His mind and act for you in the locality in which He has set you.

We may say, further, that we have just recently received from Patmos a copy of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, and we have been intensely interested in John's letters to the seven assemblies in this district. These have greatly confirmed us in what we had previously gathered from Paul. We have been greatly comforted by having a direct communication from the Lord to us locally. It has given us the sweetest sense of His love and concern, not only for the assembly universally, but for His saints in each local assembly. This is exceedingly precious to us, and we earnestly desire that you should prove the value of it in your own locality. We know something of your exercises, for we have read the epistle to the angel of the assembly in Thyatira, and it encouraged us much to know that the Lord was taking direct account of you in your locality even as He did of us in ours. We counsel you to attend to what He says. He is addressing you in your local responsibility, and your blessing will lie in owning this, and in obtaining His grace to answer to His mind.

*As to what you say about withdrawing from the assembly in Thyatira, we do not understand what you mean. Are you not one of those of whom the Lord has spoken as the assembly in Thyatira? This is how *He* regards you, and therefore how *we* regard you. We could understand your having to withdraw from iniquity, and to purify yourself from vessels to dishonour, for we, too, have read Paul's second letter to Timothy. But we believe it to be impossible for you to withdraw from the assembly in Thyatira so long as you are resident there. The Lord is unquestionably addressing you *there*, and though we have observed with sorrow that there is much in the assembly there of which He does not approve we have also noted that there are some exercised souls there whom He has addressed as 'the rest who are in Thyatira'.*

Why cannot you take up your exercises with them?

If you have not been able to get on happily together with them you need the Lord's grace locally to enable you to do so. He wants you to recognise His voice, and to obtain His grace for the adjustment of your local differences. We are ready to help you in every spiritual way that is in our power, but we believe the greatest help we can give you is to exhort you to be cast upon the Lord that you may prove His sufficiency in your own locality where He addresses you. He has reserved to Himself the authority to adjust and regulate things amongst you at Thyatira; He has not committed any charge as to this to us. We believe it to be your great privilege to recognise His direct authority where you are, and to obtain His personal direction and grace for every difficulty and exercise in regard to your walking together there. We believe it to be His holy and perfect ordering that it should be so.

Are you not prepared to accept that the above is according to Scripture? Then why accept another kind of action which is not at all in accord with it? If there is a divine order, that which is not consistent with it must be disorder. To acknowledge that there is a divine principle which should govern our action, and in practice to go contrary to it, is a course which I find it difficult to understand.

With love and greetings in our Lord, on behalf of your brethren in Philadelphia

Your brother X.

A Letter by J N Darby on Separation

“I am not so afraid of leaving an assembly, or setting up another table, as some other brethren

Wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name, He is in the midst.

If any Christians now set up to be the church, or did any formal act which pretended to it, I should leave them as being a false pretension

I write rather because of the importance of the point than for any immediate occasion of circumstances: I mean leaving an assembly, or setting up, as it is called, another table. I am not so afraid of it as some other brethren, but I must explain my reasons. If such or such a meeting were the church here, leaving it would be severing oneself from the assembly of God. But though wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name, He is in the midst, and the blessing and responsibility, of the church are, in a certain sense also, if any Christians now set up to be the church, or did any formal act which pretended to it, I should leave them as being a false pretension, and denying the very testimony to the state of ruin which God has called us to render. It would have ceased to be the table of the people and testimony of God, at least intelligently. It might be evil pretension or ignorance; it might call for patience, if it was in ignorance, or for remedy, if that was possible: but such a pretension I believe false, and I could not abide in what is false. I think it of the last importance that this pretension of any body should be kept down: I could not



own it a moment, because it is not the truth.

“If anyone, through the flesh, separated from two or three walking godlily before God in the unity of the whole body of Christ, it would not merely be an act of schism, he would ... deprive himself of the blessing of God’s presence.

But then, on the other hand, united testimony to the truth is the greatest possible blessing from on high. And I think that if anyone, through the flesh, separated from two or three walking godlily before God in the unity of the whole body of Christ, it would not merely be an act of schism, but he would necessarily deprive himself of the blessing of God’s presence. It resolves itself, like all else, into a question of flesh and Spirit. If the Spirit of God is in and sanctions the body, he who leaves in the flesh deprives himself of the blessing, and sins. If, on the contrary, the Spirit of God does not sanction the body, he who leaves it will get into the power and liberty of the Spirit by following Him. That is the real way to look at it. There may be evil, and yet the Spirit of God sanction the body (not, of course, its then state), or at least act with the body in putting it away.

“If the evil is not put away, but persisted in, is the Spirit of God with those who continue in the evil, or with him who will not? Or is the doctrine of the unity of the body to be made a cover for evil?”

I cannot stay in evil to preserve unity.

But if the Spirit of God, by any faithful person, moves in this, and if the evil is not put away, but persisted in, is the Spirit of God with those who continue in the evil, or with him who will not? Or is the doctrine of the unity of the body to be made a cover for evil? That is precisely the delusion of

Satan in popery, and the worst form of evil under the sun. If the matter, instead of being brought to the conscience of the body, is maintained by the authority of a few, and the body of believers despised, it is the additional concomitant evil of the clergy, which is the element also of popery. Now, I believe myself, the elements of this have been distinctly brought out at [Plymouth?]; and I cannot stay in evil to preserve unity. I do not want unity in evil but separation from it. God's unity is always founded on separation, since sin came into the world. "Get thee out" is the first word of God's call: it is to Himself. If one gets out alone it may require more faith, but that is all; one will be with Him, and that, dear brother, is what I care most about, though overjoyed to be with my brethren on that ground. I do not say that some more spiritual person might not have done more or better than I: God must judge of that. I am sure I am a poor creature; but at all cost I must walk with God for myself. . . .

"Some get hold of a particular evil which galls their flesh, and they leave. Do you think that the plea of unity will heal? Never. All are in the wrong.

I should not break bread till the last extremity: and if I did, it would be in the fullest, openest testimony, that I did not own the others then to be the table of the Lord at all.

Suppose clericalism so strong that the conscience of the body does not act at all, even when appealed to; is a simple saint who has perhaps no influence to set anything right, because of this very evil, therefore to stay with it? What resource has he? I suppose another case. Evil goes on, fleshly pretension, a low state of things on all sides. Some get hold of a particular evil which galls their flesh, and they leave. Do you think that the plea of unity will heal? Never. All are in the wrong. Now this often happens. Now the Lord in these cases is always over all. He chastens what was not of Him by such a separation, and shows the flesh in detail

even where, in the main, His name was sought. If the seceders act in the flesh, they will not find blessing. God governs in these things, and will own righteousness where it is, if only in certain points. They would not prosper if it were so; but they might remain a shame and sorrow to those they left. If it be merely pride of flesh, it will soon come to nothing. "There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest." If occasion has been given in any way, the Lord, because He loves, will not let go till the evil be purged out. If I do not act with Him, He will (and I should thank Him for it) put me down in the matter too. He loves the church, and has all power in heaven and earth, and never lets slip the reins.

I should not break bread till the last extremity: and if I did, it would be in the fullest, openest testimony, that I did not own the others then to be the table of the Lord at all. I should think worse of them than of sectarian bodies, because having more pretension to light. "Now ye say we see." But I should not (God forbid!) cease to pray continually, and so much the more earnestly, for them, that they might prosper through the fullness of the grace that is in Christ for them

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