

# Letter: 46e 93 Brother, Plymouth, [Rec'd] February 5th, 1846

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the critical role of the Holy Spirit in maintaining unity and authenticity within the church amidst its weaknesses.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:20, Ephesians 4:4

**Topics:** "Unity in the Church", "Role of the Holy Spirit"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit's presence in maintaining the unity of the church, arguing that true blessing comes when believers gather in Christ's name, regardless of their scattered condition. He expresses concern over the church's departure from its original standing and warns against human attempts to organize or govern the church, which can lead to confusion. Darby believes that the essence of the church lies in its spiritual unity rather than in visible structures, and that the Holy Spirit is the source of power and life within the body of Christ. He encourages believers to acknowledge their weaknesses and rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and strength, affirming that Christ remains the Head of the church despite its imperfections.

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## Transcript

p93 BELOVED BROTHER, - I was glad to get something from you, and glad to get this letter. In reply to it I can only say, without answering for every expression in it, after running it over, instead of quarrelling with it as an objection, as to the general bearing and object of it, I believe that it is having departed from what has suggested itself to your mind which has been the weakness of the brethren. I believe that churches have been merged in the [mass\*] of ecclesiastical popular hierarchism and lost; but I believe that the visible church, as you call it, has been merged there too. Still there is a difference, because churches were the administrative form, while the church as a body on earth was the vital unity.

{\*Compare 27\_exp6, page323.}

What I felt from the beginning, and began with, was this: the Holy Ghost remains, and therefore, the essential principle of unity with His presence for (the fact we are now concerned in) wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. When this is really sought, there will certainly be blessing by His presence. We have found it so, most sweetly and graciously, who have met separately here.

When there is an attempt at displaying the position and the unity, there will always be a mess and a failure. God will not take such a place with us. We must get into the place of His mind to get His strength; that is now, the failure of the church. But there He will be with us. I have always said this; I know it has troubled some, even those I specially love; but I am sure it is the Lord's mind. I have said we are the witnesses of the weakness and low state of the church. We are not stronger nor better than the others, dissenters, &c.; but we only own our bad and lost state, and therefore can find blessing. I do not limit what the blessed Spirit can do for us in this low estate, but I take the place where He can do it. Hence, government of bodies in an authorised way, I believe there is none; where this is assumed, there will be confusion. It was here; and it was constantly and openly said that this was to be a model, so that all in distant places might refer to it. My thorough conviction is that conscience was utterly gone, save in those who were utterly miserable.

I only therefore so far seek the original standing of the church, as to believe that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, Christ will be; and that the Spirit of God is necessarily the only source of power, and that what He does will be blessing through the Lordship of Christ. These provide for all times. If more be attempted now, it will be confusion only. The original condition is owned as a sinner, or mutilated man, owns integrity of conscience or a whole body. But there a most important point comes in: I cannot supply the lack by human arrangement or wisdom: I must be dependent. I should disown whatever was not of the Spirit, and in this sense disown whatever was - not short of the original standing, for that in the complete sense I am, but - what man has done to fill it up; because this does not own the coming short, nor the Spirit of God. I would always own what is of God's Spirit in any. The rule seems to me here very simple.

I do not doubt that dispensed power is disorganised; but the Holy Ghost is always competent to act in the circumstances God's people are in. The secret is, not to pretend to get beyond it. Life, and divine power, is always there; and I use the members I have, with full confession that I am in an imperfect state. We must remember that the body must exist, though not in a united state; and so even locally. I can then, therefore, own their gifts and the like, and get my warrant in two or three united for blessing promised to that. Then if gifts exist, they cannot be exercised but as members of the body; because they are such, not by outward union, but by the vital power of the Head through the Holy Ghost. "Visible body," I suspect, misleads us a little. Clearly the corporate operation is in the actual living body down here on earth; but there it is the members must act, so that I do not think it makes a difficulty. I believe, if we were to act on 1 Corinthians 12, 14, farther than power exists to verify it, we should make a mess. But then the existence of the body, whatever its scattered condition, necessarily continues, because it depends on the existence of the Head, and its union with it. In this the Holy Ghost is necessarily supreme.

The body exists in virtue of there being one Holy Ghost. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling. Indeed this is the very point which is denied here. Then Christ necessarily nourishes and cherishes us as His own flesh, as members of His body; and this goes on "till we all come," &c. (Eph. 4) Hence I apprehend we cannot deny the body and its unity, whatever its unfaithfulness and condition, and (so far as the Holy Ghost is owned) His operation in it, without denying the divine title of the Holy Ghost, and the care and headship of Christ over the church. Here I get, not a question of the church's conduct, but of Christ's, and the truth of the Holy Ghost being on earth, and His title when there, and yet owning of Christ's Lordship. And this is how far I own others. If a minister has gifts in the Establishment, I own it as through the Spirit, Christ begetting the members of His body, or nourishing it. But I cannot go along with what it is mixed up with, because it is not of the body, nor of the Spirit. I cannot touch the unclean, I am to separate the precious from the vile. But I cannot give up

Ephesians 4 while I own the faithfulness of Christ.

Now if we meet, yea, and when we do not meet, all I look for is that this principle should be owned, because it is owning the Holy Ghost Himself, and that to me is everything. We meet and worship; and at this time we who have separated meet in different rooms, that we may in the truest and simplest way, in our weakness, worship. Then whatever the Holy Ghost may give to any one, He is supreme to feed us with - perhaps nothing in the way of speaking; and it must be in the unity of the body. If you were here, you could be in the unity of the body, as one of ourselves. This Satan cannot destroy, because it is connected with Christ's title and power. If men set up to imitate the administration of the body, it will be popery or dissent at once.

And this is what I see of the visibility of the body: it connects itself with this infinitely important principle, the presence and action of the Holy Ghost on earth. It is not merely a saved thing in the counsels of God, but a living thing animated down here by its union with the Head, and the presence of the Holy Ghost in it. It is a real actual thing the Holy Ghost acting down here. If two are faithful in this, they will be blessed in it. If they said; "We are the body," not owning all the members, in whatever condition, they would morally cease to be of it. I own them, but in nothing their condition. The principle is all-important.

Christ has attached therefore its practical operation to two or three, and owns them by His presence. He has provided for its maintenance. Thus in all states of ruin it cannot cease, till He cease to be the Head, and the Holy Spirit to be as the guide and the comforter sent down.

God sanctioned the setting up of Saul; He never did, the departure from the Holy Ghost. The "two or three" take definitely the place of the temple, which was the locality of God's presence, as a principle of union. That is what makes all the difference. Hence, in the division of Israel, the righteous sought the temple as a point of unity, and David is to us here Christ by the Holy Ghost.

On the other hand church government, save as the Spirit is always power, cannot be acted on.

Let me hear from you, for this is of all importance at the present moment.

Ever, beloved brother, very affectionately.

Plymouth [Received], February 5th, 1846.

[51046E]

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