

The Assembly what is it?

(or the Church)

and

The practice of the discipline

« ... where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them » (Matthew 18 v.20).

« ... whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth ... » (Hebrews 12 v.6)

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Introduction

What the Assembly is — whose manifestation on earth is realised through two or three gathered in the Lord's name (Matthew 18:20) — is often not well understood by many believers. The same is true of the discipline that must be exercised within it. When it is put into practice, it is generally understood from a punitive perspective, whereas its purpose is educational! Each of us, if we are children of God — that is to say, born again — is ipso facto under God's educational regime, which is discipline. For, having received divine life as result of our new birth, having become children of God, loved by the Lord, He, together with the Father, educates us daily so that we may make progress and acquire the discernment to distinguish good from evil, as the apostle reminds us: *“... ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Hebrews 5:12–14).

Some basic principles relating to the Assembly

The Assembly

The Assembly is viewed from two different angles: what it is in Christ, and its responsibility to be God's witness on earth.

THE CHRISTIAN'S POSITION IN CHRIST VS HIS WALK

The true Christian, having necessarily undergone a genuine conversion through his new birth, is brought into the new creation, where everything is of God, where everything is of Christ! He possesses this life for eternity, and nothing can take it away from him! **He is in Christ, a new creation!** (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is his **'position in Christ'**. But it is **'in Christ'** and not as a creature of the first creation (that of Genesis 1)! The Word of God calls the moral being resulting from the new birth: **'the new man'** (Ephesians 4:24), and distinguishes it from what we are as sons of Adam, which the Word calls **'the old man'** (Romans 6:6), who, as far as faith is concerned, is morally dead and regarded as such, having been crucified with Christ.

The Christian is physically, or bodily, on earth, within the first creation. He is to bear witness there in a manner consistent with the position he holds in Christ, to reflect within the first creation the moral characteristics he has acquired as the new man. This is his ‘walk’!

Whilst, as regards the ‘position in Christ’, everything has been accomplished by God in the person of Jesus, the Son of God made flesh, matters are different when it comes to the ‘walk’; this requires the Christian to live a life consistent with his position. In this, he may fall short; it is also for this reason that the Apostle John teaches us the remedy in such a case! (1 John 1:8–2:2)

THE ASSEMBLY AS THE BODY OF CHRIST VS. THE HOUSE OF GOD

The Church, or Assembly, as ***the Body of Christ***, consists of ***all genuine Christians, without exception***. It is made up of all those whose position is ‘in Christ’, and not necessarily of those whose walk is in keeping with their position.

One enters the Body of Christ through the new birth, and by that alone; all who belong to it are born again as ***new creatures***!

The Church, or Assembly, as ***the House of God***, is made up of all those who ***profess*** to be Christians! But ***they are not necessarily born again.***

In John's letter to the seven churches, or assemblies, in Revelation 2 and 3, there is mention of the House of God, which has become a great house, in the state described by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2.

One enters the 'house of God' through baptism, and only in this way, but not all who are part of it have necessarily been born again! It goes without saying that all who are part of the Body of Christ must also profess the Christian faith and have been brought into it through Christian baptism!

THE HOUSE OF GOD HAS BECOME A GREAT HOUSE; WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

It is clear that on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, those who made up the house of God were all part of the Body of Christ. However, as early as Acts 8, we see ***Simon the sorcerer entering the house of God through baptism*** (Acts 8:13), yet ***he was not born again*** and ***was not part of the Body of Christ*** (Acts 8:18–24).

When we consider all genuine Christians, all those whose standing is in Christ, we see the Body of Christ. It is the Church that will be taken up in its entirety at the coming of the Lord Jesus: *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

When we consider ***the Church on earth***, as being ***responsible*** for ***bearing witness*** to what the Body of Christ is, by reflecting its characteristics, it is then referred to as the ***‘House of God’***. It is worth noting that in the Lord Jesus’ own assessment of the last four churches (Revelation 2:18–3:22), in which the Lord speaks of his coming, only Philadelphia re-

flects the characteristics of the Body of Christ! The Lord has no reproach for it.

2 Timothy 2:15–26 answers the question of what to do; there are **two important points** to highlight:

1. a *necessary* but **not sufficient** condition: ***to withdraw from iniquity***
2. the other is to ***pursue*** righteousness, faith and peace ***with those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart.***

Those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart are those who fulfil the requirements set by the Lord Jesus: **that of two or three gathered in His Name**, in whose midst the Lord has promised to be present.

GATHERED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

Among the last four churches of Revelation 2 & 3, the Lord does indeed recognise Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea as the ‘House of God’, having become a great house, but not as those gathered in His Name. His relationship of fellowship is only with a few, considered individually and not collectively.

The collective nature of being ‘gathered in the Name of the Lord’, is found only in Philadelphia. The Lord expresses there a collective fellowship!

It is therefore the characteristics of Philadelphia that we must seek in order to be gathered or assembled in the Name of the Lord, and to be able to enjoy His presence collectively.

As a reminder, these characteristics of Philadelphia are:

- Having little strength (no grand, impressive displays)
- Keeping the Word of the Lord (including 2 Timothy 2)
- Not denying the Name of the Lord (bearing witness to all that is connected with His Name)

We are not united in this way simply by professing it ourselves, nor by joining a group of Christians who profess it, but by manifesting its characteristics, which are assessed by the Lord Jesus!

The subject will be continued in the section ‘The Lord’s Table’, as the two matters are closely linked.

ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

The local assembly meets in the Name of the Lord, in His presence, for various activities: prayer, worship, edification meetings and administrative meetings.

These four types of meeting are exclusively under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through whom only the brothers, led by Him, speak.

It is the assembly that meets, not the brothers and sisters viewed individually!

The prayer meeting

This is the assembly gathered in the Name of the Lord to make its requests to God (Father or Son depending on the subject presented), or to give thanks. The brothers who speak here are ***the voice of the assembly addressing God*** (Father & Son)!

The Worship Service

It is the assembly gathered in the Name of the Lord to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. The brothers, under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit, are ***the voice of the assembly (or church) addressing God!*** With few exceptions, ***they are not, in this context, the voice of God for the assembly!***

Prayer has no place during the service, except as the very first and very last act, to commend ourselves to God, so that the service may be properly rendered to Him under the sole guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Leviticus provides illustrations of what worship entails: presenting to the Father what the assembly has appreciated during the week of the various aspects of Christ, namely the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the sacrifice for sin or for the offence! Acts of praise and worship are expressed primarily to the Father, with the Son as their object, and extending to the Son who was the object of them (burnt offering, grain offering, etc.)! Except in the context of the sin or guilt offering, the assembly does not speak of herself!

When the assemble (church) has only itself as its object, whilst addressing only the Son, it demonstrates that its heart is empty and has nothing to offer the Father concerning his Son!

When someone reads the Bible, the Word of God, they are God's mouthpiece for the assembly. Worship is not the place where God speaks to His assemble, but the reverse. Whilst, fundamentally, worship is not the place to read the Bible and certainly not to comment on it, this does not mean that reading the Word has no place. The Holy Spirit is free to use a brother to highlight a particular thought in the Word, desiring that the assembly presents this thought concerning His Son to the Father.

It is at the climax of worship, when all the thoughts of the assembly are focused on the object of the Father's heart, that the Lord's Supper takes place, with all the meanings it contains!

If there is one act that is not appropriate to address to the Father, it is surely the thanksgiving associated with the Lord's Supper! It is the Lord Jesus whom we remember; we speak to him of his death, of his body offered up, of his sufferings endured, of the significance of the single loaf of bread which the Lord broke after blessing it, followed by the cup, the blood separated from the body, and all its significance—the cup of the new covenant in his blood!

Note:

The brother who stands to break the bread is the mouth of the assembly, to which he belongs as a member of the Body of Christ. He is not the mouth of the Lord Jesus. At the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus was not the mouth of the disciples, but His own mouth, when He gave thanks, which we cannot be in this particular situation.

The edification meeting

The assembly is then gathered to hear what God has to say to it for its edification. It begins and ends with prayer and, where appropriate, thanksgiving, through the mouth of brothers led by the Holy Spirit, incorporating the singing of one or more hymns. In this context, these brothers are the mouth of the assembly addressing God. It is again under the sole guidance of the Holy Spirit that a brother (or two or three in succession) chosen by Him will then be the mouthpiece of God to teach the assembly!

It is here that the gifts of prophet, pastor and teacher described in Ephesians 4 are exercised. The gift of evangelist is for the edification of the assembly (church), but in another sense, it is an increase in numbers. This gift is not exercised within the

assembly, whilst bearing in mind that amongst those present, some — including teenagers — may not yet be converted! This does not mean that if none of these gifts are present in the assembly, those bearing the character of ‘overseers and elders’ do not also have to fulfil this task of presenting the Word.

As a reminder, the gift of prophecy is not about foretelling the future, but rather about discerning the true spiritual needs of the souls attending this edifying meeting, in order to meet them.

The leading of the Spirit is not necessarily given through the singing of a hymn (*), whilst searching the Bible for a suitable passage! Rather, in dependence on the Spirit, a brother presents a subject that corresponds to the needs of the assembly!

(*) Although it is good if the hymn relates to the needs perceived by the Holy Spirit and provides guidance.

The administrative meeting

This meeting is also an assembly meeting ***in the presence of the Lord***, a fact that is very often forgotten. The administration of the assembly is entrusted by the Lord to the brothers,

who examine the various problems to be resolved under the Lord's watchful eye.

It is the brothers who are in charge, but the final say rests with the assembly. After a problem has been examined by the brothers and the conclusion has been presented to the assembly, if a sister has a valid objection, it is fitting for the brothers to take this into account!

Discipline exercised by the assembly is one of the matters dealt with at these administrative meetings.

The Lord's Supper

The 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 10 and 11, gives us a summary of what pertains to the Lord's Supper, instituted by the Lord Jesus on the eve of His death!

The Lord's Supper is not the Passover meal! Judas took part in the Passover meal. It was during the Passover meal that, having received the piece of bread dipped in the dish, he went out (John 13:26–30).

To convey its full significance, the Apostle Paul discusses it from two perspectives:

1. **Remembrance:** ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ — not only **to remember his death** but also to proclaim it, until he comes.
2. The setting in which the Lord’s Supper takes place, that is to say, at **His Table**, and what it expresses, namely the communion of the blood of Christ and the communion of the Body of Christ, as well as **the unity of the Body** which is the Assembly, which is expressed by this single loaf.

THE LORD’S SUPPER IS ONE, YET CONSISTS OF TWO ACTIONS.

The Lord’s Supper speaks to us of Christ’s death, the blood separated from the Body. It is at the high point of worship that the Holy Spirit leads the assembly to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

The Bread

It speaks to us of the Body of Christ, the body He took on during His ministry on earth, that body offered as a sacrifice; this is the aspect of remembrance, but it is also the expression of the Body of Christ, which is the Assembly, composed of

all those who are born again; the one loaf is the expression of this unity of the Body!

The Cup

Through the wine it contains, it speaks to us of the blood shed, of the price paid for our salvation, but also of the blood of the new covenant. The Assembly, the Bride of Christ, enters into no covenant, but it is on the basis of this shed blood that the Bridegroom of the Assembly will establish his relationship with his people Israel, at least the remnant, and with those of the nations who have believed in the Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed by the remnant. They will turn to Him whom they have pierced!

The Lord's Supper is one

The service of the Lord's Supper, for the bread and for the cup, is a single act performed by a single brother. These two acts are continuous; after distributing the bread, without doing anything else, he takes the cup and gives thanks. The hymn is sung after the cup, as was the case when it was instituted: 'Having sung a hymn, they went out ...' (Matthew 26:30)

Singing a hymn between the bread and the cup breaks the continuity, and it is not appropriate to read the Word, nor to comment on it!

For at this point in the service, the Holy Spirit will never ask the brother to be the mouth of God for the assembly, but rather ***the mouth of the assembly for the Lord Jesus!***

The Lord's Table

It is at the Lord's Table that the Lord's Supper is taken, nowhere else. This does not mean that the Lord does not come individually to His own children, to sup with them and they with Him, as the Lord shows in Revelation 3:20! But this is not the Lord's Supper!

The Lord's Table is intimately linked to being ***gathered together in the Name of the Lord***. For the Table to be the Lord's, He must be present there, even if there are only two or three, in the greatest weakness, as in the case of Philadelphia.

We have already addressed this question in the sections '***THE HOUSE OF GOD HAS BECOME A GREAT HOUSE; WHAT IS TO BE***

DONE?’ and ‘GATHERED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD’; we continue here.

What, then, are the conditions that must be met in order to be gathered in this way?

- To be aware that the local assembly is composed of all the true believers in the area, and that those gathered in the Name of the Lord are merely its visible expression. This is particularly evident during the Lord’s Supper at the Lord’s Table.
- To tolerate no form of **known evil**, whether moral or doctrinal.
- To welcome into its midst all genuine Christians, without reservation, **with the sole exception** of those associated with circles where moral or doctrinal evil is tolerated, from which they should withdraw in accordance with 2 Timothy 2
- To acknowledge one’s own weakness and one’s own share of responsibility in the downfall of the responsible Church.
- To recognise, in a communion without any reservation, all local assemblies gathered on the same

ground. And not on the basis of an association of any kind whatsoever.

- If two gatherings of Christians united on this same basis are not in practical fellowship, ***fellowship must be restored by removing whatever is causing the hindrance. Failure to do so then gives rise to a sectarian character, contrary to that found in Philadelphia.***

Discipline in the Assembly

A few introductory words

A REMINDER OF A COMMENT BY A SERVANT (H. ROSSIER)

In his study of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, particularly chapter 5, here is a comment worth noting, as it is often forgotten:

Our chapter highlights ***a scandal endured by the assembly at Corinth, a case of fornication*** such as was not found even among the nations. ...

The apostle adds in verse 9: '*I have written to you in the epistle not to mix with fornicators*' ... This did not mean, he adds, that they were to have no dealings whatsoever with ***the sexually immoral people of this world***. *We are constantly in contact with evil*; otherwise we would have to be '*taken out of the world*'—but '*if anyone CALLED A BROTHER is a fornicator*', etc., ***we must not associate with him***. This was one of ***the aspects of discipline*** that the Corinthians were unaware of, and the apostle is now instructing them on what they were to do.

We must obey this word, understanding that *if someone has been cut off from the assembly, we cannot even eat ‘with such a man’*, so that, *realising the exclusion* in which he finds himself, *he may be compelled to restore fellowship with the assembly*. *He has been cast out as a wicked man and retains that character until his return.*

It was *NOT a matter* for the assembly to pass *JUDICIAL JUDGEMENT ON THIS MAN*, but *to remove the leaven from among them, for the sake of the purity of God’s house* in this world.

If the Corinthians had not done so, they would have forfeited every right to be the assembly of God in Corinth. *Alas, we are often called upon to exercise this discipline: let us not exercise it as the act of a court, but out of love*, so that *the fallen Christian* may regain *the fellowship he has lost* and, as *the Spirit of God works* through humiliation in his soul, *he may be restored to the place from which he had to be removed*. On the other hand, let us never act towards the excommunicated person *with that false love* so often seen, by *maintaining fraternal relations with him* which betray *our indifference to evil* and, in fact, *prevent discipline from having its effect on his conscience*.

HOW IS THIS OFTEN UNDERSTOOD NOWADAYS?

We forget that in most cases, the downfall of the one who has had to undergo this extreme form of discipline is due to a lack of teaching and pastoral care which would have brought, through the Holy Spirit, the necessary correction in the understanding of the Word and in the walk of the brother in question!

The consequence is that discipline is reduced to ***the application of rules!*** This leads the brothers administering it to ***act as judges***, even going so far as to be both judge and party in certain cases!

The teaching, which out of love for the one under discipline calls ***for refraining from fellowship with him***, is transformed into a law, ***even forbidding a servant to speak to that soul with a view to helping him emerge from his serious moral condition!***

It is therefore very useful to revisit the very foundations of what discipline is!

What is discipline, that of the Father?

Discipline is not primarily a function of the assembly (church), but rather *that of the Father!*

From the moment of our new birth, having been *created by God as new creatures*, we must live as such!

We must learn to *distinguish between our old man and our new man.*

The old man is ruled by *the flesh*, and *the new man* by *the Spirit!* And *the flesh* lusts *against the Spirit*, and the Spirit *against the flesh* (Galatians 5:17). This will remain true until our last breath or the coming of the Lord.

To learn, we *need to be taught*, and *it is through this teaching that the Father's discipline of His children begins.*

This discipline is first *educational*, then *corrective*, but also *punitive.* The Father's discipline is *always exercised in love, even when we need to be severely punished to understand something we refuse to admit through SIMPLE FAITH IN HIS WORD.*

The worst stage of discipline is when we refuse to submit to God's hand, and He is forced to say:

‘... this have they begun to do. And now ***will they be hindered in nothing that they meditate doing***. Come, let us go down, and there ***confound their language***, that they may not understand one another's speech ...’ (Genesis 11:6–7)

This is also what happens amongst believers who use the same words, quote the same passages from the Word, yet do not understand one another — or no longer do!

Its application in the assembly

*This educational principle used by our Father is also **the model** for the exercise of discipline in the assembly.*

Discipline is part of the administration of the assembly, an administration entrusted to the brothers who bear the responsibility for it.

Discipline begins with sound teaching of the Word.

Nowadays, the problem begins at this very stage: ***we teach rules of good conduct!*** This implies that ***the Christian is capable of adhering to these rules on their own!***

Discipline is exercised ***directly, in its punitive form***, whilst allowing for a degree of flexibility depending on the relationship with the individual, ***as soon as these rules are broken!***

Those who condemn forget that ***they themselves are incapable of living up to these rules!***

That is the reason for all the tragedies!

Teaching rules of good conduct leads to ***two types of Christians: the self-righteous*** or ***people in great distress***.

- **The self-righteous** come to terms with their conscience and take things lightly; ***they are the ones who often fall or are among those who condemn!***
- **The others are in great distress**, for they find themselves unable to live up to these rules, however good they may be! And no one comes to their aid!

The root of the problem lies in basic teaching:

We fail to distinguish *between the first creation*, into which sin entered, *and the new creation*, in which everything comes from God; *between the human spirit and the Spirit of God*; *between human emotions and what the Holy Spirit produces*; *between the old man and the new man!*

These rules are good in themselves, *but on the one hand the natural man, the old man, is incapable of following them*, and on the other hand, *the new man has no rules to follow*. He is led *by the Holy Spirit*, who shows him *in the Word the framework within which he is to conduct himself*, and *the Holy Spirit provides him with the power to move within the framework of the Word!*

This is what the Father wants to teach His children, to bring them up! And for this, He has given gifts such as those we read about in Ephesians 4:11!

The Teacher teaches the Scriptures, *the Prophet* discerns the present needs of the souls making up the assembly (church) and responds to them, *the Shepherd* cares for the souls and provides them with what they need to grow!

N.B. There is also the *gift of an apostle*, which is *still active* today *through the Word of God*, which they contributed

to complete! It goes without saying that **no one today can claim to possess such a gift!**

The **Pastor** is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and not a person who has received a degree or certificate from a theological college

It is within this framework that discipline is exercised in the assembly.

It cares for souls by teaching them with patience, but they may also need to be corrected, **in the sense of a teacher correcting mistakes in a dictation or a calculation**, and **not in the sense of punishment!** Corrections are actions carried out in love, guided by the Holy Spirit, and **not simply correcting because a rule has not been followed**; the brother in charge, **guided by the Holy Spirit**, shows the soul concerned that, *in that specific situation*, it is **the old man**, and **not the new man**, who is at work! When **the corrective action is received**, **the soul makes progress** and then lives **in communion with the Lord Jesus.**

If, after all the care given in dependence on the Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, **the corrective actions produce no effect**, **the soul not submitting to the Holy Spirit (nor to the brothers)**, the brothers in charge must then, **with**

sorrow, without any legalistic or accusatory spirit, in dependence on the Lord and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, move on to the phase of punitive discipline, which also has several stages, the final one being exclusion!

Exclusion is not an act designed to get rid of someone who is unbearable! It is an act carried out in dependence on the Lord and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, an act of love, which has in mind the good of the person from whom the Assembly must separate in obedience to the Word. ***The assembly does not see this as a relief!!!! It sees that it is the assembly itself that has sinned*** [*‘Israel has sinned’* (Joshua 7:11)]!

Let us recall here the comment by Brother H. Rossier mentioned above:

It was **NOT a matter**, for the assembly, of passing **JUDICIAL JUDGEMENT ON THIS MAN**, but ***of removing the leaven from among them, for the sake of the purity of the house of God*** in this world.

Very often, the one who must be excluded *has never received the pastoral care* mentioned above, which would have prevented him from falling!

The assembly must feel its own guilt, and in particular *the brothers who have not done the work* the Lord asked them to do, out of personal comfort, or even for fear of tarnishing their reputation, if that required 'swimming against the tide'!

We would prefer to keep this quiet, but sometimes exclusion also becomes a weapon in *power struggles amongst brothers*, which is a sign of a very poor state of affairs!

Behaviour towards the one who has been excluded

(Whether rightly or wrongly).

The attitude remains one of love (not according to the thoughts of the natural man, the old man), but of **love according to God!** For acts of discipline, even punitive ones, are intended *out of love for the one who is the object of them, so that he may confess his sin* (1 John 1:9) and *find the path to restoration!* To this end, and this end alone, the assembly no longer expresses any fellowship with the one thus excluded, so that he may become aware of the evil in which he finds himself!

They find themselves in the condition of the leper described in Leviticus 13 & 14!

Whilst the assembly must, out of love for the one who is excluded, keep their distance, there is nevertheless ***the work of the priest (not of a judge!!)*** who, without expressing fellowship, examines all the signs of healing, and ***as a servant within the framework of the New Testament, also provides the teaching necessary to heal the one who is afflicted with this moral leprosy!*** This service is often neglected! ***The introduction of rules*** forbidding anyone from speaking to the person ***actually creates obstacles to this work!***

Let us recall here the comment by our brother H. Rossier mentioned above:

This does not mean that we need not inquire into the effects produced by exclusion, that we should not watch with care for the first signs of a return to the good, and encourage on this path the one who has fallen, so that the work of restoration may be complete.

What does someone do who has been excluded, unjustly accused?

Such cases are not as rare as one might be led to believe! **The distress of a person in such a situation is very great!** This situation arises when rules are introduced! Brothers set themselves up or are appointed as judges, sometimes being implicated themselves! **Alas, this becomes a settling of scores!** What a disgrace on the part of those who ought to bear witness to what divine life is! The one who is the victim entrusts himself to the Lord and asks Him to understand the reason for such a trial and to give him the strength to endure it in fellowship with Him.

How do the other assemblies behave?

If, on the basis of the expression of the unity of the Body mentioned in the 1st part, they accept a priori the decision taken by the local assembly in question, does this necessarily mean that it should lead to ***indifference towards the brother or sister who may have been unjustly accused and excluded?***

The article ‘**unjust** accusations’ (*) *is addressed to the victim*, but *this DOES NOT EXCUSE the action of the assembly that acted unjustly!*

(*) This is an article by our brother Paul Fuzier, to which the previous paragraph refers.

It is very often the case that those who have acted unjustly use this teaching to leave their victim in this state of distress! It is as if the one who strikes his brother’s left cheek were condemning him so as not to let him strike the right cheek as well!

Brothers from other assemblies, particularly those in leadership roles, also have a duty to ensure that the actions of the assembly that has excommunicated are truly an act in dependence on the Lord, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and not a carnal act! As happens when there are **conflicts of interest** amongst brothers, which is sin in itself [see the state of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6)]!

The apostle Paul shows how to deal with such a situation! He does not act within the assembly itself, but shows them the Lord’s will, inviting them to follow it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

What should be done when events lead to divisions?

Alas, this is not uncommon!

Letting things slide, a lack of vigilance, a failure to react to an evil that was beginning to take root, a lack of care for souls — and now brothers feel, rightly or wrongly, that they must respond to the teaching of 2 Timothy 2:

‘Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity’ (2 Timothy 2:19).

What is to be done? What a disaster!

The answer lies in **Joseph’s conduct towards his brothers.**
(Genesis 43–45)

N.B. It is worth noting that *Joseph represents the Lord Jesus*, and *his brothers the brothers in question*, for very often one side wants to play the role of Joseph!

Generally speaking, each side claims to be *‘honest people’, whilst being fully aware of their own failings*, just as Joseph’s brothers knew full well that they were lying when they said so!

*Communion with the Lord Jesus, the true Joseph, **will not be possible** as long as everyone continues to claim ‘we are **honest** people’ and ‘**this is the temple of the Lord**’!*

It is only when all have confessed, through the mouth of Judah:

*‘**God has found our iniquity**’— a genuine confession speaking not of another’s iniquity but of **one’s own**—that communion is restored with the Lord Jesus, and consequently among the brothers themselves.*

The iniquity that is always difficult to confess lies in a lack of care and vigilance in the face of evil, that little bit of leaven which causes the whole lump to rise, and which remains unjudged!

Once the leaven has taken hold of the whole dough, it is no longer a matter of the situation in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, where ‘the wicked’ must be removed, but rather the situation described in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy, in which one must cease to be impure by withdrawing from iniquity and seek fellowship with those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart, seeking righteousness, faith, love and peace.

As long as we consider ourselves to be 'honest people', we prefer to cast out 'the wicked' rather than admit that we ourselves are impure and turn away from wickedness by following the Holy Spirit's instruction!