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Separation from the (Evil) World: 2 Timothy 2.19–21 and the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church

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Abstract

Separation from the (evil) world based on 2 Tim 2.19-21 is a defining characteristic of exclusive brethrenism, both in its most extreme form, the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC) and in other exclusive brethren groups. I examine this text in its context and then critically assess John Nelson Darby's reading of it, working from his translation and comments elsewhere in his writings. Darby misread the text as separation from "evil" people rather than avoidance of wrongdoing, with disastrous consequences. I conclude with some reflections on the how his reading of v. 19 arose and on the dangers associated with translation work undertaken by influential individuals working in isolation from other scholars.

Key Words: Exclusive Brethren, Darby, 2 Timothy, Separation from Evil, Translation

Introduction

I was born into the fourth generation of an Exclusive Brethren (EB) family.¹ In August 1956 my father left the Brethren with his wife and young family, walking away from the only form of Christianity he knew, and as Lineham 2015, 61-66 explains, he was the *de facto* leader of around 150 others who left at the same time. I vividly remember Sunday 5 August 1956. My brothers and I were playing with our Hornby train set on the bedroom floor and sensing that we had been there for a longer time than usual on a Sunday morning, I went to ask my parents whether it was time to go to the "meeting." My mother replied, "We are not going to the meeting today." I thought my parents were apostate. Sometime later, perhaps when I was a teenager, I overheard my father telling somebody that he had left because the Scriptures enjoined him to "withdraw from iniquity" (2 Tim 2.19, Darby). The EB had responded that they could no longer have fellowship with him because of the same text.

¹ My father's paternal grandfather joined the Exclusive Brethren in the late nineteenth century, although the family's brethren connections may go back further on my mother's side, but I have no way to confirm this. Sometime in the last decade the Exclusive Brethren (EB) rebranded with the name Plymouth Brethren Church (PBCC), and in this article I refer to them either as Exclusive Brethren or Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, rather than "Plymouth Brethren", to avoid confusion with the so-called "Open Brethren," sometimes also called "Plymouth Brethren." I use the term "exclusive brethren" (lower case) to refer to those who adopt exclusive brethren theology without being part of the PBCC.

The EB had their origins with a small group of men, including John Nelson Darby, who gathered to “break bread” in a private house in Dublin in 1829 (Coad 1968, 29-30). Soon, members of this group settled in Plymouth and by the mid-1930s a large congregation was meeting there regularly (Coad 1968, 59-69). Although others referred to them as “brethren”, they avoided any denominational label (Stevenson 2017, loc. 140; Field 2008, loc. 784), considering that they were just “simple Christians gathering in the name of the Lord”. The defining mark of exclusive brethren is their doctrine of “separation from the (evil) world”. They base this on a variety of texts which I give in Darby’s *New Translation*, including Amos 3.3 (“shall two walk together except they be agreed?”); 2 Cor 6.17 (“Wherefore come out from the midst of them, and be separated”); and Heb 13.13 (“Let us go forth to him without the camp”, i.e. Christendom, see Grass 1997, 120-21). But central to their ecclesiology, is 2 Tim 2.19 (“Let everyone who names the name of *the* Lord withdraw from iniquity”).

The doctrine of separation had an impact on my own family where my mother’s siblings (still part of the EB) had no contact with her for around fifty years and she did not even hear of her father’s death in 1983 until three weeks after it had happened.² While I thought little of this at the time, as she later revealed in her self-published autobiography, it was (and still is) very traumatic for her (Church 2008: 71-73), but it pales into insignificance when compared with cases where some members of a nuclear family are excluded, with extreme and cruel separation (see e.g., Bachelard 2010, loc. 694–943).

In what follows I introduce Darby the Bible translator, followed by a discussion of 2 Tim 2.19-21 in its context and Darby’s reading of it, followed by some concluding reflections on how this reading arose and the dangers of Bible translation work undertaken by influential individuals working in isolation from others.

Darby the Bible Translator

Darby was a sophisticated scholar and an accomplished linguist, translating the entire Bible into French and German, as well as the NT into English. He also began an English translation of the OT but only got as far as Deuteronomy before he died. He was fluent in Italian (Field 2008, loc. 2825) and was also involved in a Dutch translation of the Bible (Despins 2015, 13). Lineham 1977, 53-55 records that during a visit to NZ from September 1875 to April 1876, he learned enough *te reo Māori* to preach to the Māori of the Motueka district “without a translator”.³

² Her mother died in 1958, before the separation doctrine was rigidly enforced. My parents attended the funeral.

³ See also Field 2008, loc. 2826, and Despins 2015, 20. Lineham attributes this information to D[ouglas] Trewavas who was born in 1902, some twenty-five years after the said sermon was preached. I knew Trewavas when I was a teenager, and I cannot help wondering if this is a piece of brethren hagiography that has matured with age.

The first edition of Darby's English NT appeared with the publication of some individual books between 1856 and 1866 (Despins 2015, 49),⁴ and the second edition of the entire NT appeared in 1871 (Despins 2015, 13). The preface to the 1871 edition reveals that Darby was doing his text critical work and his translation around the same time as Westcott and Hort were working on their *New Testament in the Original Greek* (Aland and Aland 1989, 14) and on the NT of the RV (Metzger 2001, 99-102), although independently of them.⁵ He notes in the Preface to the second edition that in his first edition he relied on Griesbach, Tischendorf and others, but that since then, Sinaiticus had been discovered and Vaticanus published, so he made use of them in the second edition, checking "every questioned reading" against these two witnesses as well as several others, plus Tischendorf's seventh edition and the work of Alford, Meyer and De Wette. It was not his intention to produce a revision of the KJV, which he esteemed highly (Despins 2015, 17) and nor did he intend to produce a learned translation. Rather, as he also points out in his Preface, he wanted to give readers without access to the sources he had "the word of God in English, in as perfect a representation of it in that language as possible ... My object [he says] was a more correct translation."

Or as Despins 2015, 65 suggests,

Darby's purpose ... was to produce a highly literal translation providing a more accurate rendering of the original texts for a meticulous and careful study of the Word, particularly for the benefit of the poor brethren.

F. F. Bruce describes Darby's work as follows,

The version was equipped with a full critical apparatus at the foot of each column of the New Testament which set forth in detail the evidence on which particular readings and renderings were adopted. The version, however, falls short in regard to English style – which would surprise no one acquainted with Darby's voluminous prose writings (Bruce 1961, 132).

Darby died in 1881, and a third edition of the New Testament was published in 1884, with minor corrections and notes he had prepared earlier. His followers combined this with an OT they translated from his French and German editions to produce the entire Bible in 1890, the text of which remains unchanged to this day (Despins 2015, 45).⁶ The PBCC continue to use

⁴ I am grateful to Gilles Despins for providing me with PDF copies of Matthew, Acts and John.

⁵ Bruce 1961: 132 notes that those who produced the RV consulted Darby's translation, but there is no suggestion that the consultation went in the other direction.

⁶ This information comes from the "Introductory Notice to the 1884 Edition" that appears in the 1990 edition, as well as the "Introductory Notice to the 1961 Edition" also bound with the 1990 edition (which states that it "is a reprint of the first edition ... published ... in 1890 ... No change has been made to the wording of the text"). I have checked several editions of the NT (1871, 1884, 1890, 1951), as well as the pages containing 2 Tim 2.14-26 from 1920, 1939, 1990, and 2000. The wording from 1871 remains unchanged, although as I discuss below, some editions enclose some words in square brackets, and footnotes in the 1871 edition containing Greek words have been simplified with the removal or transliteration of these (see the Appendix, below). The 1890 edition was digitised by the British and Foreign Bible Society, without the footnotes. They state, "*At the Bible Society we produce Bibles without doctrinal note or comment, so we did not include his notes because in some places they a particular perspective [sic] which would not fit with our neutrality*" (Email from Mark Whitfield of the UK Bible Society to XXXXX 19 May 2021). The 1991 edition also contains a chronology of the history of the world from the creation (in 4000 BC) to the birth of the Messiah. What lies behind the sudden appearance of this chronology is a question worth investigating.

this translation, almost to the exclusion of all others. As their website explains, “[w]hile they piously respect the King James Authorized Version, and any other decent translation, they believe that the translations made by John Nelson Darby ... are more accurate.”⁷ Significantly, Darby completed his translation prior to the discoveries of Egyptian papyri in the late nineteenth century and Deissmann’s *Light from the Ancient East*, which showed how it is not always appropriate to interpret the NT “according to the strict rules of Classical Greek of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.” (Bruce 1971, 66). Darby continued to apply those rules as his discussions of ἀπο and ἐκ in Darby 1883a, 192-93 and Darby 1883b, 418-20 indicate.⁸

The context of 2 Tim 2.19-21

It would be a diversion to enter the debate on the authorship of Second Timothy and the related question of the date. Darby accepted Pauline authorship and a date sometime in the sixties of the first century. In what follows I refer to the author as Paul for convenience, without prejudging the question of authorship. The letters are addressed to Timothy in Ephesus (1 Tim 1.3) and the second letter contains a wide variety of injunctions, with thirty-two second person singular imperatives, most of which concern Timothy’s own conduct and behaviour.

Both letters indicate that false teaching was an issue in Ephesus (1 Tim 1.4-7, 19-20; 4.1-5; 6.3-10, 20; 2 Tim 2.14-26; 3.1-9; 4.1-4). In 2 Tim 2.14-26 Paul instructs Timothy on how to respond to this with a mixture of exhortations on what sort of person he should be and how he should behave. Verses 14-16 encourage Timothy that, while working to become a faithful interpreter of Scripture,⁹ he is to remind some person or persons of “these things”,¹⁰ to warn them to avoid disputes over words (λογομαχέω), and to avoid worthless empty words himself. In vv. 22-23 he is to flee from youthful desires, to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, and to avoid “stupid and senseless controversies ... that ... breed quarrels” (NRSV). Finally, in a further oblique instruction to Timothy, vv. 24-26 describe the Lord’s servant. This person “must

⁷ Online: <https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/beliefs/holy-bible/>. It does raise the question of what they consider to be a “decent” translation.

⁸ Compare Darby’s treatment of these prepositions with Harris 2012, 39-40, 57-58, 103.

⁹ This injunction is in the aorist tense while the other imperatives in these verses are present imperatives. Campbell 2008, 84-95 suggests that present imperatives normally convey general commands and aorist imperatives specific commands, also noting that these distinctions do not always apply, which seems to be the case here. The aorist imperative is probably a constative aorist referring to Timothy’s manner of life, as in Rom 12.1 where the same form (παραστήσαι) of the same word also appears in a more general exhortation.

¹⁰ The verb ὑπομνήσκω, “to remind” can have two direct objects, an accusative of the person to be reminded and an accusative of the content of the reminder. There is only one accusative here (ταῦτα, “these things”, referring to the content of the reminder). The other, unstated, direct object could be the church in Ephesus, the faithful people of 2.2, the false teachers in 2.25-26 or Timothy himself. The NLT supplies “everyone”, and the NIV “people”, while Darby supplies no other object, implying that it is Timothy. The same verb appears in Tit 3.1 with an accusative of the people reminded, and the content of the reminder expressed with an infinitive. See Laansma 2009, 167, 170, and Marshall and Towner 2009, 745-46. Prior 1989, 158-60 suggests that Timothy himself is the object. While Marshall and Towner 2009, 746 prefer some other direct object (probably the faithful people of 2.2) they also suggest the translation, “Do not ever let these things out of your mind, Timothy, as you bear witness in the presence of God”.

not be quarrelsome, but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness,” and the hoped-for outcome is that “God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and that they may escape from the snare of the devil” (NRSV). The rehabilitation of these opponents seems to be paramount in the context.

Between these two sets of instructions, vv. 17-18 describe the presenting issue in Ephesus: worthless talk will lead Timothy’s opponents to go further in their “impiety” (ἀσέβεια), and their talk will spread like gangrene. Paul names two of these opponents, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who were claiming that the resurrection had already taken place, and whose teaching had ruined the faith of some people.

Verses 19-21 state some principles and an injunction. Verse 19 claims that God’s firm foundation is still in place, sealed with two inscriptions. The first inscription is a statement of confidence that the Lord knows those that are his and the second is a third person imperative calling on those who name the name of the Lord to turn away from wrongdoing. This is followed in vv. 20-21 by an extended metaphor about utensils in a large house, “some ... for special purposes and some for common use” (NIV). Those who cleanse themselves “from these” (ἀπὸ τούτων) will become utensils for special purposes (v. 21).

Inappropriate speech appears in vv. 14, 16, 17 and 23. Hymenaeus and Philetus were offending in their speech about the resurrection, and Timothy was to speak gently to correct them. Wrangling over words, and rash and worthless speech were dangerous, and Paul instructs Timothy on how to deal with that, both in terms of his response and his character.

A Closer Look at 2 Tim 2.19-21

Verses 19-21 follow on from the description of the false teaching and its outcome. Paul reminds Timothy of “the stability and permanence of God’s work” (Knight 1992, 415). Despite the false teaching, the firm foundation of God was still standing, and it was marked by two inscriptions drawn from the story of the rebellion of Korah and his followers in Numbers 16. The identity of the foundation is debated, with most scholars suggesting it is the church (see 1 Tim 3.15), or perhaps “the truth revealed in Christ.”¹¹

The first inscription is an allusion to Num 16.5 encouraging Timothy by reminding him that the Lord knows those who are his.¹² As Knight 1992, 416 explains, the rebellion of Korah,

¹¹ Marshall and Towner 2009, 756. On pp. 745-46 Marshall and Towner give six options, plus “a counsel of despair” – “no specific reference.” They prefer a reference to the church, as also Knight 1992, 415. Mounce 2000, 529 suggests “the individuals who are firmly elect, not being swayed by the heresy.” Laansma 2009, 175 suggests it is “God’s truth.” Darby gives a footnote saying, “[s]peculation as to what the foundation is is futile, particularly that of those who speak of the invisible church. The church is founded, a building; not a foundation. It is simply God’s foundation, abstractly”.

¹² The verb translated “knows” (ἔγνω, also in the LXX) is an aorist. Marshall and Towner 2009, 757 comment, “The tense in ἔγνω is strange. A timeless expression would be appropriate, but the past tense may be

did not devastate the congregation of Israel, and false teaching will not devastate the church at Ephesus. The statement ... affirms God's ability to differentiate between true and false believers and becomes here the reason for believing that God's foundation stands firm in the present situation.

The second inscription is probably from Num 16.24-27 where God instructs the congregation of Israel to separate themselves from association with Korah and his group. It is preceded by a phrase either from Isa 26.13 or Joel 2.32 (LXX 3.5), referring to God's people calling on his name. Faithful believers in Ephesus who identify with the name of the Lord are to turn away from "wrongdoing" (ἄδικία) .

The verb "to turn away" (ἀφίστημι), appears fourteen times in the New Testament, mostly followed by the preposition ἀπό ("from"),¹³ as here, and often referring to turning away from a person or persons (as in Numbers 16), The same verb appears in the Greek Old Testament for avoiding or abstaining from what is wrong (Exod 23.7; 4 Kgdms 3.3; 10.29; 13.2, 6, 11, 14.24; 15.9, 18, 24, 28; 17.22; Sir 7.2), particularly of the kings of Israel not turning away from the sins of Jeroboam. Here, the call is to turn away from "unrighteousness", "wickedness", or "wrongdoing" (ἄδικία), a word only appearing here in the Pastorals, although common elsewhere in Paul (Rom 1.18, 29; 2.8; 3.5; 6.13; 9.14; 1 Cor 13.6; 2 Cor 12.13; 2 Thess 2.10, 12), where it is at times opposed to what is true (Rom 1.18; 2.8; 1 Cor 13.6; 2 Thess 2.10-12). The same combination of verb and object appears in Sir 7.2; 35.3 where ben Sira enjoins his readers to keep away from wickedness. Here in 2 Tim 2.19 the word refers to either a wrong action (as in 2 Cor 12.23; Heb 8.22) or a quality such as unrighteousness or wickedness (as in Rom 2.8; 9.14, see BDAG 20-21). The connection with what is true elsewhere in Paul is probably also present here where the false teachers had "deviated" (ἀστοχέω) from the "truth" (ἀλήθεια, v. 18), and the injunction is probably addressed to them, calling them back to faithfulness to the truth. It is unlikely that Paul is enjoining Timothy to leave the church in their hands, and it is also unlikely that he is telling him to excommunicate them. The language of expulsion would be more appropriate for that (see 1 Cor 5.3-5).

The extended metaphor about a "great house" and its utensils in vv. 20-21 clarify this obligation and its outcome. Some utensils are for special use and are therefore to be honoured (εἰς τιμῆν), and others are for profane use, perhaps for the removal of rubbish or excrement (Knight 1992, 418). They are dishonoured (εἰς ἀτιμίαν) by this use, and will ultimately be discarded with their dishonourable contents (Marshall and Towner 2009, 760-61). The large house probably signifies the Christian community in Ephesus, containing both false teachers and teachers of the truth. As Knight suggests, "[t]he implication is that there may indeed be vessels

simply due to taking over a quotation unchanged or possibly to the clumsy translation of a Semitic perfective." See McKay 1981, 308-9.

¹³ Luke 4.13; 13.27; Acts 5.38; 12.10; 15.38; 19.9; 22.29; 2 Cor 12.8; Heb 3.12. In Luke 2.37 it is followed by a genitive to refer to Anna never leaving the temple; in Luke 8.13 it is used absolutely to refer to seed falling on rocky ground falling away; in Acts 5.37 it is followed by the preposition ὀπίσω and has the sense "to follow after"; and in 1 Tim 4.1 it is followed by a genitive with the sense "to renounce the faith."

like the false teachers in the professing Christian community, but their activity indicates that they are dishonorable” (Knight 1992, 418).

Verse 21 applies the metaphor. Those (lit. “anyone”, *τις*, probably any member of the congregation) who purify themselves “from these” (*ἀπὸ τούτων*) will become a vessel to be honoured (*εἰς τιμὴν*), an expression elaborated with an adjectival phrase and two adjectival perfect passive participles. They will be set apart (*ἡγιασμένον*), useful for the master of the house (*εὐχρηστον τῷ δεσπότῃ*) and prepared (*ἡτοιμασμένον*) for every good work.

The results are straightforward, but what is required is more complex. The verb “to purify” (*ἐκκαθαίρω*) only appears twice in the NT, here and in 1 Cor 5.7. In 1 Cor 5.7 it refers to removing the “old yeast” of malice and evil that had permeated the church at Corinth, evidenced by their tacit approval of a sexually immoral man. It appears twice in the Greek Old Testament, in Deut 26.13 for the “removal” (MT *בָּחַר*) of those parts of the first fruits that were offered to God from the offeror’s house, and as a variant reading in Codex Vaticanus in Judg 7.4, where God directs Gideon to take his large army to the river bank, where God would “refine” (MT *צָרַף*) the people by indicating those who should return to their homes. Josephus and Philo use the word in several contexts to refer to purification,¹⁴ and it appears several times in classical Greek sources to express similar ideas.¹⁵ The evidence seems to indicate that the preposition *ἐκ* intensifies the verb *καθαίρω* giving the sense “to cleanse thoroughly” (Link and Schattenmann 1986, 3, 102; Harris 2012, 113), although at times it seems to be indistinguishable from *καθαίρω* (*NIDNTTE*, s.v. *καθαρός κ.τ.λ.* 2, 568).

They are to cleanse themselves “from these” (*ἀπὸ τούτων*), a phrase with no obvious antecedent. The nearest candidate seems to be “the dishonourable utensils” (as implied by the NIV), although this is unlikely since these utensils are still necessary, even though they are dishonourable, and the metaphor includes the idea of transformation from a dishonourable utensil to a special one. As Marshall and Towner 2009, 762 suggest, “what is envisaged is a vessel used for one type of service being transformed to be suitable for another type, not the separation of one kind of vessel from another in order to become clean.” It seems likely that the initial antecedent is these dishonourable utensils, which refer by extension “somewhat loosely to the activities of the opponents, including their false teaching and the associated evil way of life” (Marshall and Towner 2009, 762).¹⁶ Laansma 2009, 176 suggests,

¹⁴ In Philo it refers to a “purified mind” (*Plant.* 64, *Ebr.* 28, *Somm.* 2.73), for fine (refined) bread (*Somm.* 2.158, *Gen* 40.16), in a quotation of Deut 26.13 (*Somm.* 2.272), for cleansing defilement (*Mos.* 1.303, *Decal.* 10). It appears in Josephus for cleansing the feet of sacrifices (*Ant.* 3.227), for Galilee being purged of its terrors (*War* 1.307) and for God’s desire to purge the temple by fire (*War* 4.323).

¹⁵ It appears in Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.86.4 referring to the cleaning of the intestines during embalming; in 4.26.2 for the custom of the Issedones cleaning the decapitated head of one’s dead father; and in 4.65.1 for a similar custom of the Scythians. Epictetus *Diss.* II, 21, 15 refers to the purification of one’s judgements, and in *Diss.* II 21, 15 to the purification of one’s moral purpose.

¹⁶ Other options Marshall and Towner canvas and reject are the disputes with the false teachers (v. 14), which they consider to be too remote, or the dishonourable vessels themselves. Lane 1986, 3, 915 seems to go too

[w]ith some violence to the image ... the idea appears to be one of being promoted from being a vessel of dishonor to one of honor. This cleansing is accomplished by getting rid of the associations of a vessel unto dishonor. In the present situation, this means getting rid of the practices (teachings and behaviors) of the false teachers.

Paul encourages the false teachers to turn away from their wrongdoing so that they can again become contributing members of the community.¹⁷

Darby on 2 Tim 2.19-21

One of Darby's contributions to the theological landscape was dispensationalism, a scheme dividing history into distinct time periods (Wilkinson 2007, 100-101; Lewis 2021, 132). A key aspect of Darby's dispensationalism is that no sooner had a dispensation begun, a "total and immediate failure" emerged (Wilkinson 2007, 101). As Darby 1836a,7 explains,

... in every instance, there was total and immediate failure as regarded man (sic), however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man has thus failed in the outset; and further, that there is no instance of the restoration of a dispensation afforded us, though there might be partial revivals of it through faith (see also Darby 1836c, 112-23. Grass 1997, 96-127 discusses Darby's view of the ruin of the church.).

That this was the case in first century Ephesus is apparent from Darby's *Synopsis*, his five-volume commentary on the Bible. Timothy is working in a church which is hopelessly corrupt (Darby 1869, 5, 161-62). On 2 Tim 2.19-21, Darby writes,

here we have distinct evidence of the state of things which this epistle contemplates; namely, that the outward assembly had taken quite a new character, very different from that which it had at the beginning; and that now the individual was thrown upon his personal faithfulness as a resource, and as a means of escape from the general corruption (Darby 1869, 5, 180).

What the individual was to do becomes clear in Darby's translation of these verses, and especially v. 21.¹⁸ The NIV reads "[t]hose who cleanse themselves from the latter" and the NRSV "All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned." Darby reads, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them]." Darby provides a footnote explaining the addition of the words in the square brackets.¹⁹ He noted the ἐκ in

far (and also, as we will see, Darby) when he suggests, "[b]y separating himself from the false teachers and cleaning himself from their disreputable actions, Timothy will be prepared for any task to which his Master is calling him." Cf. also Knight 1992, 418, who suggests it is the dishonourable vessels, which "speaks by implication of the false teachers ... The condition is that one cleanse oneself from the defilement of fellowship with "these" and the effects of their teaching and actions," as also Mounce 2000, 532. Marshall and Towner 2009, 758 cite Larson 1997, as arguing that since to "name the name of the Lord" in Lev 24.16 refers to blasphemy "this is the usage here". They conclude, "[t]he clause refers then rather to the opponents whose teaching is regarded as a form of blasphemy and urges them to mend their ways."

¹⁷ Note Marshall and Towner 2009, 762, "The passage as a whole is difficult for three reasons: the shift from the initial description of materials, which in the end is not especially relevant, to that of functions; the stress on the value assigned to the vessels regardless of the fact that even dishonourable functions are necessary functions; and the loose reference of the phrase ἀπὸ τούτων. When allowance is made for these points, the basic lesson is fundamentally clear".

¹⁸ See the Appendix, below, for Darby's translation of these verses and his footnote to v. 21.

¹⁹ A notable feature of Darby's translation is the use of square brackets. According to the "Introductory Note to the 1961 Edition", "*Square brackets* [] *in the text* indicate (a) words added to complete the sense in English ... or (b) words as to which there are variations in the original manuscripts." In v. 19 the word "Lord" (κύριος) has no Greek definite article in two places, and Darby added it in square brackets to indicate that. There were no brackets

ἐκκαθαίρω as well as the preposition ἀπό and sought to give semantic value to both prepositions, by reading ἐκ as “from” and ἀπό in terms of separation, leading to his addition of the words “in separating himself from them.” He writes, “the church is to put out from itself the wicked person, and thus maintains [sic] its separation from evil” (Darby 1835, 365). However, if the church will not do this, the individual is to act:

wherever the body declines the putting away of evil, it becomes in its unity a denier of God's character of holiness, and then separation from the evil is the path of the saint; and the unity he has left is the very greatest evil that can exist where the name of Christ is named. Saints may remain ... but the duty of the saint as to it is plain ... “Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (Darby 1835, 363).

If the church does not expel the false teachers, the individual is to leave (as did my father in 1956). Conversely, the EB expelled him based on the same text. As I have observed exclusive brethren over more than half a century, I have seen this text applied many times, especially over obscure points of doctrine. Individuals who disagree with some aspect of belief or practice leave the group, and others who are considered wrong in some belief or practice are expelled or “withdrawn from”.

But how valid a reading is it? The text is complex and different readings are possible, but the referent of the object of the verb ἀφίστημι (“to turn away”) in v. 19 is the noun ἀδικία (“wrongdoing”), not “wrongdoers” (which would be ἐργάται ἀδικίας as in Luke 13.27). The subject is “anyone” (τις), in the congregation, including the false teachers. All are to abstain from wrongdoing. The great house metaphor clarifies this by suggesting that false teachers who do this can again become functioning members of the community.

Darby’s reading, which is possible but unlikely, is that the church is to expel the false teachers, and if it does not do that, the individual is to withdraw and leave the church in their hands.²⁰ This Darby did in the 1820s when he left the established church and gathered around him a community of like-minded followers. It was not his intention to form a new church, rather Darby saw the brethren as a group of believers gathered to the name of Christ (rather than the name of some denomination), reflecting the primitive church’s pristine purity, and awaiting Christ’s return (Bass 1952, 73-85). Exclusive brethren (of all varieties) continue to follow Darby’s teaching by expelling those they consider to be “wicked persons”, thus maintaining their purity as they separate from the evil world. Bass traces this back to Darby himself, when he analyses

around the words “in separating himself from them” in 1871, 1884 or 1920, although the words are in italics in the 1890 digitised edition (for the same reason). Brackets first appeared in 1939 and were there until the 2000 edition when they were removed. It appears that Darby thought they were justifiably part of the text of Scripture, while his later followers seem to have differed. The recent removal of the brackets suggests that the PBCC suppose that they are going back to Darby’s understanding.

²⁰ After I had completed the final draft of this article I came across Bruce 1949, 133-34, a few paragraphs taken from an article originally published in *The Witness*. Bruce argues that “these” in v. 21 are “those things against which Paul has been uttering warnings against in verse 14 and following”, and notes that this is “one of the rare occasions where ... [Darby’s] normally accurate but inelegant *New Translation* goes quite astray.” The editor of the publication refers to it as “the only correct reading of text and context ... corroborated (sic) by other scholarly (and ‘safe’) authorities.”

Darby's tract on church discipline, "... [it] has, as its primary object, the protection of the purity and unity of the body of Christ, in which there is little thought for the welfare of the individual, for the body must be kept pure at all cost" (Bass 1952, 143; cf. Darby 1836b, 345-46). And, as Krapohl 1988, 427 suggests, "[w]hen his [Darby's] influence, diffused around the globe and steadily weakened by age began to ebb, the Exclusives used his own litmus test of doctrinal purity to destroy one another."

Some Concluding Reflections

Darby is an enigmatic figure as the epitaph on his tombstone reveals, "As Unknown and Well Known" (his translation of 2 Cor 6:9). Outside of exclusive brethren circles he is mostly unknown, but within these circles he is not only well-known, but revered and remains influential almost a century and a half after his death. Indeed, my own father who was born almost forty years after Darby had died, referred to him all his life as "beloved JND". Language like this is common among exclusive brethren of all varieties, as also the claim that "they say that his translation is the most accurate" (without ever specifying who "they" are, see e.g. Field 2008: loc. 3019 and Despins 2015: 195).

Second Timothy 2 has been etched in my memory from an early age, and particularly the words "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (Darby) This translation is relatively uncontroversial and not dissimilar to the KJV's "depart from iniquity," although while several translations use the word "iniquity" (Darby, ESV, KJV, NKJV), to my knowledge only Darby has the verb "withdraw", a word which hardly has the sense "abstain" that I suggest above is more suitable in the context.

"Withdraw" appears in one other text in Darby's *New Translation*, 2 Thess 3.6, which reads "Now we enjoin you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the instruction which he received from us." The Greek word here is *στέλλω*, for which BDAG 942 gives the definition "to stand aloof from" or "avoid." Darby has a footnote which has changed over time. In 1872 it simply read "Or 'shrink'". In 1884 the Greek equivalent *στέλλεσθαι* was added to the note, while it now reads "Or 'shrink from,' 'avoid;' only occurs here and 2 Cor. 8. 20. Not as 'withdraw,' 2 Tim. 2. 19." The last sentence of this note is somewhat ambiguous, and while it is from Darby's followers, his *Synopsis* gives some indication of his thinking. He comments "The apostle ... exhorts them to be firm, and to withdraw from those who would not hearken to his admonitions, but continued to walk disorderly and in idleness; not however in such a manner as to treat them as enemies, but to admonish them as brethren" (Darby 1869, 4, 131). Disorderly brethren in 2 Thess 3.6 are to be avoided, while false teachers in Ephesus are to be excluded, and if the church declines to do that, faithful believers are to separate themselves from them.

What is significant about this word in Darby's translation is that in both contexts, it is people who are to be "withdrawn from", explicitly in 2 Thess 3.6 and implicitly in 2 Tim 2.19,

for this is how exclusive brethren continue to read this verse. This implication comes from the great house metaphor. When v. 21 is read as a call to the false teachers to amend their ways and so become functioning members of the community, it becomes clear that v. 19 is a call to them to abstain from wrongdoing. But when Darby read v. 21 as a call to separate from false teachers, it influenced his reading of v. 19 so that he saw that as a call to either expel the false teachers or separate from a church which declines to do that, that is to “withdraw from the wrongdoers”, and treat them as enemies as the comment in his *Synopsis* at 2 Thess 3:6 implies.

This study is instructive in two ways. First, context matters, in translation as well as in exegesis, and one misunderstood verse can influence other verses in the context, including the preceding context since reading is an iterative process rather than a linear one (Eco 1979, 3-43). Darby’s translation of 2 Tim 2:19 is relatively uncontroversial, but when read in the context of his translation of v. 21, it becomes open to misunderstanding. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it shows the danger of translation work undertaken by a single influential individual in isolation from others. His followers continue to rely on his translation and his writings to the exclusion of almost anything outside his ongoing circle of influence. What Darby thought these verses meant can be extracted from his translation and his other writings, which is what his followers have done for the past 150 years with disastrous effects. I wonder, had he been prepared to collaborate with others doing translation and text critical work at the same time as he was, whether subsequent brethren history may have been very different.

Appendix: 2 Tim 2.19-21

	UBS5	Darby	NIV	NRSV
2 Tim 2.19	ὁ μέντοι στερεὸς θεμέλιος τοῦ θεοῦ ἔστηκεν, ἔχων τὴν σφραγίδα ταύτην· Ἔγνω κύριος τοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ, καί, Ἀποστήτω ἀπὸ ἀδικίας πᾶς ὁ ὀνομάζων τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου.	Yet the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, [The] Lord knows those that are his; and, Let every one who names the name of [the] Lord withdraw from iniquity.	Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."	Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."
2 Tim 2.20	Ἐν μεγάλῃ δὲ οἰκίᾳ οὐκ ἔστιν μόνον σκευὴ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργυροῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ ξύλινα καὶ ὀστράκινα, καὶ ἃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν ἃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν	But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.	In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use.	In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary.
2 Tim 2.21	ἐὰν οὖν τις ἐκκαθήρῃ ἑαυτὸν ἀπὸ τούτων, ἔσται σκεῦος εἰς τιμὴν, ἡγιασμένον, εὐχρηστον τῷ δεσπότῃ, εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἡτοιμασμένον.	If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them], he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work.	Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.	All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.

Footnote 1871/1884/1920	Footnote 1839/1950/1990
ἐκκαθαίρω ἀπό. ἐκκ. is only found 1 Cor. v. 7, 'Purge out the old leaven.' There it was getting rid of it out of the lump; here he has to purge himself from among them (the vessels). Hence we have ἀπό, which, with ἐκ, is rendered by 'separating from.'	The word for 'purified' is only found here and 1 Cor. 5. 7, 'Purge out.' There it was to get rid of the old leaven out of the lump; here the one who names the name of the Lord has to purge himself from among the vessels. Hence we have an additional preposition which is rendered by 'separating from.' Lit. 'purified himself away from these.'

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