

GATHERING UNTO HIS NAME



NORMAN
CRAWFORD

GATHERING
UNTO
HIS
NAME

To LOIS

My true helpmeet and partner
for her patience and loving help

GATHERING UNTO HIS NAME

by NORMAN W. CRAWFORD

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Abbreviations

KJV	King James Version
JND	New Translation of John Nelson Darby
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RV	Revised Version 1881

Preface

Many excellent books, pamphlets and articles have been written on the principles and practices of New Testament assemblies. Many of them were written more than a half century ago, but the passing of time has not changed the truth from the Word of God that they contain. As with any teaching that professes to be scriptural, they should be read with an open Bible, comparing what they teach with the Word of God. It is my earnest prayer that the reader of "Gathering Unto His Name" will subject all that is taught here to the searchlight of Holy Scripture.

It is not my intention to replace what has formerly been written. The present chapters are an attempt to deal with questions of our time. The truth is the same, but the conditions to which it applies are constantly changing. Many of the older publications have long been out of print, so are unavailable. Some of them, though expressing much truth, have not clearly made a distinction between the body of Christ and a local assembly. In fact, it has been this failure to distinguish things that differ that has compelled me to use the term 'local assembly' so often in this book. Technically it is correct to use the term 'the assembly' to refer to the church which is His body, but there must be a clear distinction between the church and the churches.

It is my prayer that God will bless this feeble effort to teach truth that is precious to Him, and has cost much to many who have left human systems to be guided alone by Scripture. Assemblies must continue to be a protest against denominationalism. There are a number today who believe the causes for that protest have been corrected to some extent, so that each step back toward human systems is justified. If we follow this trend, we are in grave danger of making the unique testimony to the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ merely another denomination. We do not deny to other believers the use of His name. We would that no other name were known.

With a grateful heart, I thank God for my many teachers. They sought to practise and teach the principles of church order and function outlined in these pages. It is doubtful if any of the material can lay any claim to originality.

Very much thanks goes to A.J. Higgins, M.D. for many helpful suggestions. I also owe special thanks to Monte Freidig of Willmar, Minnesota, who is a careful student of the many books that have been written on this subject, and has given many valuable suggestions. Monte has also very carefully produced the Scripture index for this volume. Barbara (Clark) Salava of McKeesport, Pennsylvania gave helpful suggestions for a number of the early chapters. Judy Joyce of Livonia, Michigan, expertly designed the cover.

The first ten chapters are intended as a help to a believer who is seeking guidance from the Word of God about church fellowship. Chapters 11 to 20 have been written to answer some of the many questions about assembly practices that pertain to our present circumstances.

At the back of the book is a glossary of terms; an index of Scripture references, an index of subjects to facilitate the use of the material, and a bibliography.

We have sought to give a simple re-statement of truth from Scripture, long taught and practised among assemblies. May God richly bless each believer into whose hands this book comes!

Preface to Second Edition

The first edition sold out within a few weeks. This second edition is essentially the same as the first, with a few minor corrections. We humbly thank God for the very wide acceptance of the first edition, proving the great need for this teaching.

Introduction

Principles of Interpretation

Many people believe that the Bible is interpreted according to the whim or fancy of the reader. In their minds this discredits Biblical interpretation and allows them to say that everyone has their own way of understanding the Bible. This reasoning implies that one interpretation is as good as another. The final justification for such a view is that "even the theologians cannot agree." It is not difficult to recognise the purposes of Satan in this thinking, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9).

Miles Coverdale, who made the very first translation of the entire Bible into the English language, in his introduction to the 'Great Bible' wrote, "It will greatly helpe ye to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or wrythen, but of whom, to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before, and what followeth." This is wise counsel to any who would study Scripture.

The Bible contains within itself the keys to its understanding. We must interpret Scripture by Scripture and never rely on any superimposed scheme of interpretation. A careful study of the Word of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the ages, has revealed certain principles of interpretation which we should apply to all Scripture. These principles are not imposed upon the text of Scripture in an arbitrary way, but are the very means by which Scripture interprets Scripture. We have many illustrations of this in the way

the NT interprets the OT.

These principles are usually called Biblical hermeneutics. Some of these principles have a very special application to our study of church truth in the NT. As this is not a study in hermeneutics, we will only mention the laws of interpretation that have direct application to our subject, and give simple reasons for believing that each is a valid law of interpretation.

The Law of Context

The very first principle of interpreting Scripture is the law of context. It is safe to say that not one single statement of Scripture should ever be taken out of its context for its interpretation. The Divine Author has the right to give a greater interpretation to His own words, as sometimes seems to be the case where OT Scriptures are used in the NT, but no reverent student of the Word of God will ever knowingly do this, unless there is clear authority from Scripture, "for God is not the Author of confusion." He has given us His Word in an order, and in language which is understandable. This law of context is the rule for the understanding of all written material, and the careful study of divine revelation through the centuries has proven the great wisdom of adhering to it in every part of the Word of God.

It is by this law that the NT interprets the OT. Many examples of this can be found, such as the way Hebrews 2:6-9 interprets Psalm 8:4-6, or Hebrews 10:5-10 views Psalm 40:6-8.

The Law of Relevance

A second principle which deserves to be called a first principle is that Scripture is always relevant. The very truth of 'a once for all' revelation (Jude 3), demands that we believe it was given to apply to all times. It is sometimes contended that, seeing the NT teaches that it is the normal condition for all believers to be baptised

and to form part of a local church (assembly), we must use some different standard now when believers are divided in Christendom, as we find them today. What standard will we use? A believer can only answer that there can be no other standard than God's Word. The words of Paul to Timothy should settle this matter for all, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished (perfectly supplied) unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Therefore the Word of God is not only relevant, but sufficient for every need, whenever it may arise.

The fact that Scripture is relevant for all time will save us from using the present confusion in Christendom as a tool to interpret it. We should never try to fit our circumstances into the Word of God, but always seek to conform our practice to its precepts.

The Law of Positive Pattern

A third principle which has direct application to the subject of assembly practice is that we do not argue from the silence of Scripture. We have a pattern in the NT, a complete blueprint. To argue from silence is to deny the all-sufficiency of Scripture. In an attempt to justify the introduction of non-scriptural practices, there are those who have said that we have no Scripture for chairs, hymn-books, bound Bibles, or even buildings; but, surely we do have a spiritual pattern to meet every spiritual need of an assembly. The very fact that an assembly is a building of God (I Cor. 3:9) teaches that the design is from Him. We do not have a word about hymn-books, but we do have clear guidance about singing (I Cor. 14:15 etc.). There is no mention of how a Bible should be bound, but there is clear teaching as to the place the Bible has in an assembly.

The Law of Total Mention

The law of total mention is almost as important as the laws of interpretation already described. When a subject is of great importance to God and His people, it is given a large place in the Bible. The prominence given to the truth of the church attests to its importance. The proof of this law is evident in the fact that Scripture gives a large place to truths of great spiritual significance. Twenty-one verses give us a description of the creation of the universe, but the Holy Spirit takes thirty-eight chapters to describe the tabernacle in the wilderness and its divine service, for it all speaks of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, in whom the Father finds all His delight.

On the road to Emmaus, the Lord Jesus showed the importance of 'all the prophets' and 'all the Scriptures' and that 'all things must be fulfilled' (Luke 24:27, 44). He wove together the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms in their total mention of Himself.

The Law of Plain Sense

The law of plain sense is vital to the understanding of Scripture. We do not use, what may be to us, an obscure text to interpret what is plain and clear. We should always use the principle that the plain, and often repeated, statements of Scripture help us to interpret the more difficult passages. Matthew 1:23 gives us a plain sense interpretation of the promise of Isaiah 7:14. By inspiration, Matthew tells us that the prophecy concerns a virgin birth, not merely a young maiden giving birth to a son. In Matthew 2:6, the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is given a literal interpretation. Bethlehem, the village of twenty families in the hills of Judæa, is the birthplace of the Lord of eternity.

The Laws of Grammar

If language has meaning at all, then we must be careful

that we understand its grammar. So careful is the Holy Spirit that in Galatians 3:16-18, Paul is able to draw a sharp line between a true interpretation and a false one by the fact that the noun 'seed' is a singular in Genesis 17:7 and not a plural.

We owe a tremendous debt to scholars of the two languages in which the Old and New Testaments were mainly written for the blessing of being able to read a Bible in our mother tongue with confidence that we have the Word of God written. There is a vast wealth of language aids for the careful student to help him in his understanding of the inerrant Scriptures. Grammar is not the first rule, but it is an important one.

The Law of First Mention

We should not underestimate the importance of the law of first mention. The first mention of the large aspect of the church came from the lips of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:18, and the first mention of a local assembly came from Him in Matthew 18:15-20. It can be shown that it is a general rule of the Bible that the first mention of a truth contains some of the vital elements of that truth that will be more fully developed as the divine revelation unfolds throughout the rest of Scripture. The first mention of a truth cannot contain all that pertains to it, but it may well be the truth in embryo which will develop as that doctrine progresses through the Scriptures.

The Law of Progressive Mention

There is a progress of doctrine in the NT. This is the principle by which God makes the revelation of truth increasingly clear as the Word proceeds to its consummation. For example, from the teaching of the Lord Jesus on prayer in Matthew 7:7, there is a progressive development of the subject to the end of the NT (I John 5:14, 15).

There is another way that this law can be demonstrated.

Apostles and prophets had a prominent place in the early testimonies, but their work was foundational, and they passed from the scene. Temporary sign gifts have a prominent place in the early epistles and pass from view in later epistles. In Paul's letters, the elderhood has very little place in early letters, but becomes very prominent in his later writings.

The Law of Distinction

This is a law that is closely linked to the law of context and yet it needs special mention. Without entering into the entire subject of the distinctions of the dispensations, it is usually easy to get all Bible readers to distinguish the difference between law and grace. Even those who refer to themselves as "Covenant Theologians" have very little problem here. All are agreed that we must distinguish what we are reading in accordance with the requirements already stated from Miles Coverdale, or a similar system.

It is not only necessary to distinguish law and grace, but also such distinct things as positional truth from practical teaching, salvation and rewards, Israel and the church, the two resurrections, and the distinction between the church which is the body of Christ and a local company of believers.

We will seek to consistently apply these hermeneutics as we examine the teaching of the New Testament on the church and the churches. They are not artificially imposed laws, but they are the very laws that Scripture demands for its own understanding.

Chapter 1

A Scriptural Definition of the Church

The King James Version consistently translates the Greek word *ekklēsia* by the English word ‘church’, but there are three exceptions. In Acts 19:32, 39 and 41, it translates *ekklēsia* as ‘assembly’ three times. There are times when we have wished that the translators had translated these three occasions by the words ‘secular assembly’, which is what the context shows it to be. Then in all the other 112 occasions it could have consistently translated *ekklēsia* by the word ‘assembly’ and left out of the NT the modern form of the Old English word ‘kirke’ or church. ‘Church’ is a good word, but it has two very wrong uses in Christendom. In the religious world ‘a church’ is either a building used for religious purposes, or an organisation made up of member congregations, that has adopted a denominational name to distinguish it from other ‘Christian organisations’. You will search in vain in the NT to find either one of these uses for the word ‘church’.

Two Meanings of the Word ‘Church’

Ekklēsia is made up of two words, *klēsis*, ‘a calling’ and the preposition *ek*, meaning ‘out of’. It simply means an out-calling, and the two ways it is used in the NT are of vital importance to us. It is the use that the Holy Spirit makes of a word that gives to us its true spiritual meaning. It is used in Matthew 16:18 by the Lord Jesus, “Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” It is used in a similar way in Ephesians 1:22, 23, “And gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body,

the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." This is the widest use of the word. The church that Christ promised to build, and which Paul calls the body of Christ, includes every believer in this day of grace, from the Day of Pentecost to the rapture (see also Eph. 3:1-12; 5:23-32; Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23). They have been taken 'out of the nations as God's out-calling (Acts 15:14), and for that church the Lord Jesus gave Himself (Eph. 5:25). The term 'universal' is often applied to this large, spiritual aspect of the church by men, but the New Testament does not use this word.

The second use of the word 'church' is more frequent in the NT. It is used for a company of believers who meet regularly in a given locality (I Cor. 1:1, 2 etc.). It is never used for a building where a local assembly meets. A comparison of the ways that the Holy Spirit uses 'church' in a local aspect, will show how wrong it is to use it for a building. Paul speaks of "The church in their house" (Rom. 16:5); "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3), and "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 11:22). These would be ridiculous statements if 'church' ever meant a building. At this point we hope the reader will understand why we use the term 'local assembly' when speaking of 'the local church' and we will follow this practice as we examine this subject. When we are referring to the larger or 'universal' aspect of the church, we will use the term 'the body'.

When it is used for a local assembly, the word 'church' is only found in the singular number, speaking of one assembly. I do not believe there is a single case where a group of assemblies are called 'the church'. Some have claimed that Acts 9:31 is the one exception to this rule, but it is likely that 'the church' (a singular in Greek), referred to in this verse, is the church at Jerusalem which

had been scattered as the result of the persecution under Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:4). So, when a New Testament writer refers to a number of assemblies, they are called:

- ‘Churches of God’ emphasising their Purpose.
- ‘Churches of Christ’ emphasising their Lord.
- ‘Churches of the saints’ emphasising their Composition.
- ‘Churches of the Gentiles’ emphasising their Background.
- ‘Churches of Galatia’ etc. emphasising their Location.

They are never referred to as ‘the visible church’, or ‘the church on earth’ as a name for a number of them. It is also significant that when the Holy Spirit uses the plural ‘churches’, it is always ‘churches of Asia’ etc., but when He is using the singular it is the ‘church in Corinth’ or the ‘church at Colosse’ etc.

We should be careful to note how the Holy Spirit consistently uses a word if we have a desire to understand His words (1 Cor. 2:13). It is a common practice today to group together member congregations which are answerable to a governing body and refer to them as ‘The Baptist Church’, ‘The Lutheran Church’ or ‘The Methodist Church’, etc. There are many godly Christians that take these names, and any born-again believers within these systems are fellow-members of the body of Christ, but the Word of God never uses ‘church’ in this way. It is also a common practice to group together all believers in the world at any given time and call them by such names as ‘the early church’ or ‘the church of the twentieth century’ etc., but this use of ‘church’ is not in the NT either. Every believer is a member of the church which is His body, but many who are members of that body are in heaven, and it is unscriptural for us to divide up that body and call some of them ‘the church on earth’, for the Lord Jesus does not have two spiritual bodies, one on earth and the other in heaven. It is most significant that the Holy Spirit does not do this. God

grant that we will be preserved from making another mistake, which is just as serious, that is, grouping assemblies together into any kind of a federation or 'fellowship', and referring to them as 'the fellowship in North America', or some other unscriptural name.

It is very helpful to us to see, then, that in the NT there is the 'church which is His body' and local assemblies and nothing else (I Cor. 10:32). If we want to find justification for the great organisations that have grown up in Christendom, whether they are religious, political, social or philanthropic, we will have to find it outside of the Bible. In our introduction we claimed that we will follow a consistent method of interpretation. We have stated (in the Introduction) that the Bible is a once-for-all complete revelation from God, and that we do not interpret it by reading back into it our circumstances, but rather we interpret the present conditions by its infallible guidance. With the Word of God open before us, we can say then, that the word 'church' is used in two ways in the NT, and there is nothing else. The one exception, where 'church' is used for Israel (Acts 7:38), only strengthens the rule. The reasons for the exception are not hard to find. Israel was a called-out people, they had a gathering centre and they were God's testimony as a redeemed people. We hope none of our readers will confuse Israel and the church!

The high spiritual truth of the first three chapters of Ephesians is related to the body and is positional, rather than practical teaching. We will see this more fully as we pursue the subject of the church and the churches in the NT. We will also see that all practical truth, related to our behaviour, is given in connection with an assembly (I Cor. 10:32). Although individual believers should live as a testimony for God, and the Scriptures have much to say about the value of the godly life, all collective testimony can be shown to be the testimony of a local assembly. If I live godly in Christ Jesus, I will add

spiritual weight to the testimony of the assembly with which I am associated, and if I fail in my personal testimony, I will mar the testimony of that assembly. This is the teaching of the NT and it is emphasised at this point to show that the body and an assembly are the two aspects of *ekklēsia* in the NT, and there isn't anything else.

We have not at this point attempted to define what we mean by an assembly. We will try, in chapter 2, to discover from the NT how God defines one. We want now to look at the great spiritual truth of 'the church which is His body.'

The Church which is His Body

God has a purpose for this age which is in keeping with "The eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). He is presently engaged in taking out of the nations a people for His name (Acts 15:14). We need again to be reminded that this world is under the condemnation of a holy God. He is not in the business of improving it, and if we wish to live our lives in keeping with His will, we will not attempt it either. We may as well try to stop the flow of Niagara with a teaspoon as to try to stem the course of this age. However, we can be workers together with God in rescuing from the roaring flood all who will turn in true repentance to the Saviour.

All who are linked by living faith to Christ, in this dispensation, form a part of the true church (Eph. 2:21, 22). We are so vitally linked to the Head in heaven that we are spiritually His body (Eph. 1:22, 23), and we are linked to one another as members of the same body (Eph. 3:6). This great truth, developed in the Ephesian and Colossian Epistles, is positional, that is, it is eternally true of every believer, whatever their spiritual condition might be, or wherever they may go on Sunday. No bond in nature can compare with the

'oneness' of believers in Christ. Each believer is equally precious to the Lord who died for him, each one shares a common life in Him and together are fellow-members of His body.

Our own wretched hearts can betray us into attitudes toward fellow-believers that are totally unchristlike. Even if we cannot walk or work or worship in a collective way with all who belong to Christ, we should ever remember that they are dear to God and for them Christ shed His precious blood. If conviction from the Word of God causes us to withdraw from any who walk disorderly (II Thess. 3:6-8), how careful we must be that we ever maintain the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and that we earnestly desire and pray and work for their full recovery, while at the same time not putting ourselves above any who belong to Christ. Pride of position is a serious sin, and pride of ecclesiastical position is even worse.

There are three passages that link the truth of the one body with a local assembly (Eph. 4:3-6; I Cor. 10:16-22; 12:13). An assembly is an expression of the body, but this does not mean that it is a miniature of it. The marriage of believers is an expression of the union between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:23-32), but it is certainly not a miniature of it. At this point in our study it will suffice to say that the oneness of the body should be seen in the unity of the assembly. In partaking of one loaf at the Lord's supper we are confessing that all true believers are one in Christ, "For we, being many, are one bread (loaf)." Satan cannot prevail against the church built by Christ (Matt. 16:18), but he has succeeded in dividing up Christian testimony by sectarianism and denominationalism. He is not content with this, but does his utmost to mar the unity of an assembly by introducing envy which results in strife and division. There is ever a need to heed Paul's exhortation, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, for there is

one body..." (Eph. 4:3, 4). The verb used in this verse is significant. We cannot make or keep the unity of the Spirit, for God has already done that, "There is one body...". We can endeavour to keep that unity *in the bond of peace* "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (v. 2). By this endeavour, we give practical expression to the work that God has done spiritually.

The Church as a Mystery

Pictures and principles of gathering are found in the OT, but the church cannot be found in it. In Ephesians 3, Paul develops the great mystery of the church. He describes the church first of all as being hidden. It was in the thoughts of God, but unknown by men in the ages that preceded the present one. Ephesians 3:5 is the Scripture's own definition of a NT mystery. Rather than being something mysterious, it is a truth not previously revealed, but now the great secret of the one body has been made known and is the theme of the revelation given to Paul and the other apostles by the Spirit. The 'now' of Ephesians 3:5 must be taken in a very real, immediate sense. Although there were prophecies that described Israel as a channel of blessing to Gentiles, it had never before been revealed that the same gospel would be preached to Jew and Gentile, and that both would be made fellow-heirs, fellow-members and fellow-partakers in the church—the theatre where God is displaying His many-faceted wisdom (Eph. 3:6-10). It is no wonder that at the close of this chapter, Paul's spirit breaks out into the doxology, "Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever, Amen" (v. 21, RV).

In NT days, believers met for years without ever fully knowing the truth of the one body. They were not gathered on the ground of the one body, for they plainly did not have the revelation of it. This expression of

‘gathering on the ground of the one body’ has come to mean that all who are in the body are automatically given the right to enjoy all the privileges of a local assembly; yet privileges are not known in Christian testimony apart from responsibilities. All true believers should be in an assembly, and this is the standard of NT practice, but through lack of teaching, lack of godly example, sin in their lives, or the acceptance of bad doctrine, they are not in a local assembly, even though they are in the body and equally loved by the Lord.

We have sought to show that the truth of the one body is high and holy and that it should strongly affect our attitude toward fellow-believers. Separation is holy truth, but man-made divisions are always the work of Satan.

The church is the fulness of Christ (Eph. 1:23). It is the fulness of Him who Himself is filled up with all the fulness of God. This is a truth that surpasses our comprehension. We have been taken from the decay of death (Eph. 2:1) and from under the inheritance of wrath (v. 3) and have, by matchless grace, been brought into the church which is His body to ‘complete Christ.’ We say with Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

Chapter 2

A Simple Description of an Assembly

The law of first mention was described in the introduction as being a tool of interpretation. Its value will be seen now as we examine what the NT says about a local assembly. The first description of an assembly is given in Matthew 18:15-20; the first example of an assembly is seen in Acts 2:41, 42 and the first epistle describing the order of an assembly is I Corinthians. The law of total (proportionate) mention will also be seen to be of great value in understanding the identifying marks of an assembly. It has been said:

- A. The Gospels prophetically announce the assembly;
- B. The Acts historically present assemblies;
- C. The Epistles doctrinally address them.

This latter fact is very particularly true of the two epistles that deal with assembly order, I Corinthians and I Timothy.

In recent times, we have encountered people who object to the use of Matthew 18:20 as a description of a local assembly. I have placed their objections under four headings.

Four Objections Used by Some to Discredit Using Matthew 18:20 as a Description of a Local Assembly

1 It does not contain all the truth about the functions of an assembly.

The first mention of an assembly gives us the truth in embryo form. Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them," is a simple statement that contains some

of the most precious principles of assembly truth. This text is often found hanging on a wall of the building where an assembly meets. Does this verse contain all the truth revealed about a local assembly? It certainly does not. Does John 3:16 contain all the truth of the gospel? The greatest gospel verse in the Bible says nothing about such great doctrines as human depravity, the need of repentance or the great truth of justification; yet we gladly use it as a simple statement of gospel truth. What John 3:16 is to the gospel, Matthew 18:20 is to a local assembly. Further truth was revealed after the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church at Pentecost. This is in keeping with the progress of teaching in the NT (John 16:13).

2 No assemblies existed when the Lord spoke these words.

In Matthew 18, the Lord Jesus is giving instruction that will not become effective until after assemblies are planted. To say that He is here giving instruction about how a Jewish synagogue should function is preposterous. In chapters 11 and 12 of this Gospel, the claims of the King are rejected and He condemns the nations and turns His attention to the Kingdom in mystery (ch. 13), giving truth that relates to the present time when the King is absent. The thought of the Lord giving teaching for the future is the chief principle of His ministry to His own, for He would soon leave them and He is fortifying them for the days when He will not be among them. Matthew 18:15-20 was spoken by the Lord to give instruction for assemblies that did not yet exist.

3 This is a matter of personal fellowship, not church fellowship.

It has been said, "Strictly speaking, the primary interpretation of this Scripture is not church fellowship, but personal fellowship between believers." Is this true? The simple answer is, No. We should never take one verse of Scripture out of context for its interpretation.

What is the context here? Verse 15 begins, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee..." so the subject is a personal trespass. This is the way the problem began, but as it progressed it involved "one or two more," and then "two or three" (v. 16), and at verse 17 it involved the church—a local assembly. The words that follow are most solemn, "If he refuse to hear the church..." It is now removed from the sphere of personal fellowship and it is church fellowship which is in the context. "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The first person, singular pronoun 'thee' in this clause may refer to the man who has been trespassed against, but the statement of the Lord in the following verse guards against any thought that it is merely a personal action of the offended man. It is significant that although the 'thee' of verse 17 is singular, the 'ye' of verse 18 is plural. The 'binding' of verse 18 is an active verb and is a second person plural. In fact, this goes much higher than the local assembly, for the action on earth has not been legislated by the assembly, but has been the implementation of a divine decree. The assembly elders do not have the authority to decree, but they do have the solemn responsibility to carry out what God has decreed.

This, then, is the context of verses 19 and 20. It is a matter of church discipline which has involved the entire assembly. The subject is not changed nor are the two or three in verses 19 and 20 a different two or three from verse 16. It is still the matter of the trespass that is now being taken to God in prayer (v. 19), and it is in relation to the assembly's discipline that the two or three are gathered in verse 20. There are some things we can say about these two or three brethren. They have the confidence of the man against whom the trespass was committed, and they have the confidence of the assembly to which the matter was taken. In later N'T practice, such men functioned as elders in local assemblies. The

Lord had just dealt with a straying sheep, and a certain man goes after it, "If so be he find it" (vv. 12-14). We will have no trouble seeing that the context is dealing with a shepherd's work—the work of NT elders. The man who had trespassed was the straying sheep, and the purpose of the two or three was to find him.

4 Matthew 18:20 is a matter of discipline.

I think I can hear a reader say, "Do you mean to tell me that 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name,' is a case of assembly discipline? Then how can we apply this text to being gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?" There is really no need to be surprised at this or to fear that the text is being incorrectly interpreted when we say that this is assembly truth. There are almost identical conditions described in I Corinthians 5:1-8. It is true that rather than being a personal trespass, the sin is moral, but notice the parallels, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power (authority) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 4). Again it is a gathering for discipline, and the very same precious truths are taught. They are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and it is by His authority that the discipline is being carried out.

We can go further than this and say that not only is the first mention of an assembly in the NT in relation to the sin of believers, but the entire first epistle that so thoroughly deals with assembly order and function, I Corinthians, is an epistle of correction because of human failure in testimony. The fact that church truth is first mentioned in relation to failure is humbling to us. All of our testimony for God has been connected with an element of human failure. Yet, God has maintained testimony in the world to the name of the Lord Jesus in spite of human weakness and failure. This is encouraging to us. So, although Matthew 18 and I Corinthians are

linked with human failure, we do not reject them, but are glad of their clear teaching.

Having established the context of Matthew 18:20, we need now to look at what it reveals. We understand this text in the light of its context and in the light of the entire New Testament revelation of the church. This is the usual method of understanding Scripture. As an example, we understand that when the Lord said to Peter, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself" (John 14:3), He was referring to His coming to the air for His own, but how do we know this? By looking at John 14 in the light of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In the same way we look at Matthew 18:20 in the light of the Acts and the epistles.

"For where two or three are...", this is a present indicative active form of the verb 'to be'. We would say they are meeting. Then, coupled with the verb 'to be', the Lord Jesus uses the perfect participle "gathered" in the passive voice, and this immediately tells us that they were not the *actors* in the gathering but that *they were acted upon* to be so gathered. No wonder we can claim this to be the simplest expression of an assembly, for that is exactly what it is. In the text, there is the attraction of the Person of the Lord Jesus as the gathering Centre; there is the distinction of His name and the promise of His presence. If His presence can be claimed for this gathering, the smallest of assembly meetings, surely we are right to claim His presence whenever an assembly meets in His name!

What is an Assembly?

C. I. Schofield, in his well-known reference Bible, gives a brief definition of an assembly in a note on Philippians 1:1. It is an excellent statement and is quite amazing when we consider that he was educated as a lawyer and later became a Congregational minister. His definition

shows that he took it from the Word of God and not the denomination with which he was associated. He gives a brief definition which is adequate for most purposes.

I have composed a much more detailed description which is far too involved to commit to memory, but may be useful as a reference guide.

An assembly is a company of baptised believers (Acts 2:41), gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20; I Cor. 1:1-9; 5:4 etc.), who meet regularly in a particular locality according to the pattern found in the NT in Acts 2:41, 42, and developed fully in such epistles as I Corinthians and I Timothy. Such an assembly is a spiritual fellowship (I Cor. 10:16, 17), which is expressed visibly as they meet for the breaking of bread, prayer, collective testimony, the teaching of the Word of God and the preaching of the gospel. They have been gathered together by the Holy Spirit (Mark 14:13; Rom. 8:14); their sole authority is the Word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17), and they have the promise of Christ to be in their midst (Matt. 18:20). They are a residence of the Holy Spirit on earth, so they are a holy temple unto the Lord (I Cor. 3:15, 16). Such an assembly is guided by godly overseers and served by faithful deacons in both a temporal and spiritual ministry (I Tim. 3:1-16). The priesthood of all believers is exercised in worship, praise and prayer, and the gifts, given by the risen Head of the church (Eph. 4:8-13) have liberty to function under the control of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 14:23-40). There is a clear line of demarcation between the within and the without of an assembly and purity is maintained by a careful, compassionate and godly exercise of discipline (I Cor. 5:1-13).

This is a carefully written statement, but it claims no authority for itself. It is only the Word of God that has authority in the realm of testimony for God.

The Church of God at Corinth

I Corinthians was called by John R. Caldwell, "The Charter of the Church". Of course, he was referring to the local church, for this is the epistle of the local assembly. It is uniquely the epistle of the gathering together, the epistle of the Lordship and Headship of Christ, of the Lord the Spirit, and yet it is an epistle of correction.

There are a number of descriptive terms used for an assembly which help us to understand its order and functions. Six of them are found in the letters to Corinth.

1 The Church of God

It is called "The Church of God" (I Cor. 1:1, 2). This expression is found thirteen times in the NT and it refers only to a local assembly. Paul says, "I persecuted the church of God." Some have thought he was referring to believers generally, but this is most unlikely. There is no evidence to suggest that any other assembly than the assembly at Jerusalem was in existence at the time, even though other assemblies were formed at the time of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:31). The persecution headed by Paul drove the Jerusalem believers throughout Judæa, Samaria and Galilee, and some of them were hounded even as far as Damascus.

The 'church of God' tells us the purpose of an assembly. It is God's testimony collectively in the world. How humbling it is to think that God has chosen such a lowly instrument as a local assembly to be His testimony!

2 Tillage of God

'The tilled field of God' is used as a description of the assembly at Corinth (I Cor. 3:9). Much labour was put into that field, but God gave the increase. This expression describes the planting of an assembly and we believe this pattern for planting still prevails. The Gospel was preached (I Cor. 2:1-4), souls were saved (3:5-7), the

principles of gathering were taught (3:9, 10) and the assembly was formed. We learn from Acts 18:8 that when these people heard the Word of God they believed it and were baptised. This is always the order. Baptism is not the door to an assembly, but in God's blueprint it is seen to be before the door, and ideally, near the door.

3 Building of God

In the same verse (1 Cor. 3:9), the Corinthian assembly is called, 'a building of God'. It will not be difficult to see that the pattern of an assembly is emphasised in this section of the epistle. The builders are teachers, whose teaching is to build on the foundation already laid, and according to the divine pattern of the building. I recently saw a pamphlet that claimed that it is only the foundation that must be in accordance with the pattern, and it is the responsibility of each individual company as to how the structure is formed. This is totally unacceptable in the light of the fact that it is the structure that is the building of God, as well as being a temple of God and a house of God.

4 Temple of God

The assembly is 'a temple of God' because the Holy Spirit resides in it. Its holy character is because of His presence (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). At this point in the Corinthian epistle, a new section begins that deals with the purity of the assembly and continues to the end of chapter 7. The thought of a temple is likely linked with praise and worship. This is in keeping with Philippians 3:3, where redeemed spirits are moved upon by the Holy Spirit to produce worship.

5 Body of Christ

In 1 Corinthians 12:27, the assembly is seen as 'body of Christ'. There is no article here, for the context is that the assembly at Corinth is body-like, each member

vitality linked to each other member. The provision for an assembly through the spiritual gifts, according to all its spiritual needs is the subject of chapter 12. The assembly is seen as 'body of Christ' because each believer in it is needed in the same way that each member of the human body is needed for proper function.

A careful reading of I Corinthians 12 will also disclose the truth of 'the body' in its widest aspect (v. 13). The presence of the article in verse 13 points out to a greater degree the absence of it in verse 27. Verse 12 is a comparison. It is impossible to compare a thing with itself, therefore we must conclude that the first time 'the body' is mentioned in verse 12, it refers to the human body which is used as a simile of 'the Christ'. Note the comparison, 'so also is the Christ.' Verse 13 takes up the truth of 'the Christ', describing the spiritual body. It is very likely that verse 14 returns to the original statement at the beginning of verse 12, for it repeats the premise that there are many members in the body, that is, the human body. From what follows in verses 15-27, it is clear that Paul has introduced this whole subject of the members of the human body so that he can develop the relationship of one member to the other and apply this to the assembly at Corinth. This is the reason we say that an assembly is body-like in its functions, for this is clearly the teaching of verses 15-27. Therefore verse 13 is the spiritual body of Christ and the rest of the passage is dealing with the body-like character of an assembly.

It is confusing to say that each assembly is 'a body of Christ'. He does not have many bodies, and it is impossible to escape from this dilemma if we insist on adding our indefinite article to a Greek noun. An assembly is not 'a body of Christ', but *sōma Xristou*—body of Christ.

6 *Chaste Virgin*

"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ," Paul wrote to these same Corinthians (II Cor. 11:2). What a lovely descriptive term for an assembly; "espoused...as a chaste virgin." This word picture brings to the mind single-hearted love and devotion and a beautiful picture of purity. The jealousy he feels over them is a jealousy of God. This is collective and corresponds to the yearning of the Holy Spirit over the individual believer in James 4:5, where the purpose of His yearning is that the entire heart of the saint might be all for God.

7 *Little Flock*

Four other expressions are used for the assembly which can be linked to the six that are found in the Corinthian epistles. Acts 20:28 uses the diminutive of the word flock to describe the assembly at Ephesus. The large flock is seen in John 10:16, but an assembly is a little flock (I Pet. 5:1-4).

8 *House of God*

In I Timothy 3:15, the local assembly is not only called the church of God, but it is also a house of God. As the church of God, the emphasis is on being 'called out', but a house of God is the thought of being brought into the place of divine order and rule.

9 *Pillar and Ground of the Truth*

In this same verse it is also called the 'pillar and ground of the truth' which suggests that the assembly holds high the blessed name of the Lord Jesus and is set for the defence of the truths that relate to Christ as seen in verse 16.

10 *Golden Lampstand*

Finally, assemblies are seen as golden lampstands in

Revelation 1 to 3, each standing on its own golden base and responsible only to the Lord who walks in the midst of the churches.

The Pattern from Acts 2:41, 42

It must now be clear that the first assembly (Acts 2:41-42) is a pattern for every assembly formed since. There may be a reader who is saying that he feels this Jerusalem assembly is different because it was composed of Jews and proselytes. This matter can be settled simply when we point out that every one of the seven truths associated with this first assembly are enlarged upon in the epistle that deals specifically with assembly order, so that when Corinth needed correction, Paul took the pattern from Acts 2 and applied it to them. The apostles' doctrine is outlined in I Corinthians 15; the fellowship in chapter 10, the breaking of bread and the prayers in chapter 11. The apostles were present in the Jerusalem assembly, and the burden of teaching and preaching fell on them, but this does not reduce its value as a pattern.

Some have contended that there is no ground for presenting Acts 2:41, 42 as a progressive statement. To see the folly of their contention, we only need to attempt to reverse the order of these seven truths, which leaves us with no sense at all. The people who heard Peter preach that day believed the message, were baptised as believers, and were then added to the number in Jerusalem, who that very day had been formed into the first assembly. We will further develop this truth in chapter 11 of this book. It is sufficient to state here that the new believers were added to the one hundred and twenty that had already been formed into the assembly. It is very unlikely that all believers were present in Jerusalem that day. We know from the details of our Lord's ministry, and from I Corinthians 15:4-6, that there were many more than one hundred and twenty believers in the world at that time. There is no problem in this if we

rightly distinguish the body from a local assembly. All believers were that day placed in the body through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, even though they may not have been present, but only those present were in the assembly at Jerusalem. Verse 47 emphasises that new believers 'were added to them,' that is, those already formed together into an assembly.

In the fellowship of the local assembly they continued steadfastly, not occasionally, and they maintained the teaching divinely given to them through the apostles and met regularly on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). The preaching and teaching of the Word of God is expressed by the words, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." We say again that we believe this pattern is good for all time, to which we should not add and from which we should not subtract.

A word of warning to each of our own souls is necessary here. The assembly at Ephesus was commended by the Lord, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have this against thee, because thou hast left thy first love... repent...or I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place" (Rev. 2:2-5). Surely their order was correct and their functions were most scriptural. Thirty years earlier Paul had closed his epistle to them with the words, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (incorruptibly)" (Eph. 6:24). In contrast to this pure love, the Lord saw that which was hidden from every other eye, the heart was wrong. Let us take this solemn warning to our own hearts. Our outward performance may be perfectly in order, but the Lord says, "I try the hearts."

Because of the danger of a mere outward conformity,

there are those who say, "The externals are unimportant, only the inner reality counts." They may appeal to the words of the Lord to Samuel, "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. 16:7). We should notice that although Eliab was refused because he only had the outward appearance, David had both the outward appearance and the inward reality (v. 12). This should ever be our aim.

We have been speaking of the assembly as the church of God. It is the testimony for God in a dark and evil scene. Neither believers nor unbelievers can see the 'inner reality'. All any of us can see are the external signs, therefore there can be no testimony for God at all unless it can be seen in us. There is a terrible flaw in the modern reasoning that says, "I can do as I like, or dress as I please, or act in any way I want, for the external thing is unimportant, it is only the inner reality that counts." This is nonsense, but it is not new nonsense, for these were the exact words of Epicurus, the Greek philosopher (Acts 17:18). Let us make sure that the external order is according to the Word of God, but let us search our own hearts that the inner reality does truly correspond to our testimony (Psa. 139:23, 24)!

Chapter 3

Significant Distinctions between the Body and an Assembly

The subject that is before us in this chapter has engaged many minds for many years. What we say about it will not settle these issues for many, but we must leave the reader to examine the Word of God for himself and from it to determine the mind of God. We must ever be on guard that we retain a right spirit toward other believers whose conclusions about this subject may be different from our own. It is with a desire to be a help to believers that we examine the NT records about the distinctions between 'the body of Christ' and an assembly. What is believed about this has a great influence on practice.

The Problem Stated

Many times when believers attempt to teach assembly truth to people who may be complete strangers to it, they meet with a question phrased something like this, "You don't mean that you believe in a closed communion surely?" Although we know that 'closed communion' is a religious expression and is not found in the Bible, we well understand that the questioner has in mind reception to the Lord's supper. The NT certainly teaches that all believers should partake of the Lord's supper, and there is a right way for them to be able to enjoy this privilege, but without doubt the questioner means, "If I came as a stranger to your assembly, uncommended from an assembly where I habitually fellowship, would I be allowed to take part as an occasional visitor in the Lord's supper?" The scriptural

answer to this question is, No. The person then may say something like this, "If you fail to receive every member of the body of Christ, that makes you a sect." I have intentionally stated the matter as bluntly as possible, so that we may clearly understand the issues.

There is no such thing in the NT as receiving anyone to the Lord's supper. We receive believers to the fellowship of the assembly, which is never an occasional thing (Acts 2:42). In that fellowship, they enjoy all the privileges of the assembly, as well as taking their own share in its concerns and responsibilities. It is impossible to consider fellowship as being a common sharing in privileges, without an equal sharing in responsibilities. However, when we have said this, there is much left unsaid.

The flat statement, "If you refuse any member of 'the body of Christ' you are a sect," will *not* be accepted by most people who read the Bible. There are clear scriptural reasons why a person may well be a member of Christ's body and yet be unfit for an assembly. Most will agree that if a person who professes to be a Christian is living in immorality (I Cor. 5:11), or holds wrong doctrine regarding the Godhead, or the Person of Christ (I Tim. 1:20), he is unfit for church fellowship. This is a view held by most major denominations at the present time, or, at least, at some time in their history. Therefore, many qualify the statement by saying, "If a person is truly regenerated and is doctrinally and morally sound, then he should not be refused, even though he may only desire to participate in the Lord's supper on this one occasion, and to refuse him is unscriptural and sectarian."

Those who claim this, do so on the ground that there is one body and a local church should recognise the unity of the body and obey the exhortation, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). The ground for this kind of

teaching is given in many books and pamphlets. They say that if a person is in 'the body of Christ' and is sound in doctrine and walk, he automatically has the right to participate in the fellowship of an assembly at any time he may desire. This may have a very fine sentimental ring, but it is not based on the Word of God, for being in the body is not the same at all as being in an assembly.

By the help of God, with an open Bible, we would like to take up each of the points mentioned above. I have often read very carefully the writings of brethren who insist that all who are regenerated and are sound in life and doctrine should be welcomed at any time to break bread with an assembly. I have looked in vain in these writings for any guidelines that might be used by brethren who stand at the door of a meeting-place to determine if the visitors meet these minimum requirements. If a person unknown to them arrives and desires to break bread, can they really determine in a few minutes at the door if the person is truly regenerated? A recent survey in the United States estimated that more than 70% of Americans call themselves 'evangelical' and over 50% claim to have had some kind of a spiritual experience. In the first century, the assembly at Jerusalem doubted the reality of the conversion of Saul until they received evidence of it. I am aware that he had been known as a persecutor, but should we claim to be wiser or more discerning than the apostles and prophets who formed part of that assembly?

It requires time to know if a person is truly saved. The one and only standard given by the Lord Jesus was, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). Fruit is produced by growth and requires time. The context of this verse is related to false prophets, but the larger context of the chapter is that true judgment must be made by fruits, not by judging motives or thoughts, which are beyond our ability. The difficulty is compounded when we consider that neither of the other

two requirements about life and doctrine can be learned from a few moments' conversation.

Assembly reception is taken up in chapter 12, but to balance what has already been written, we should state here that godly elders will do their utmost to help people who show any signs of desiring to come into an assembly. Nor will they judge them by the degree of their knowledge, but will look for the spirit of a learner, and then will do all they can to teach and encourage such a person.

Distinctions between the Body and Assembly

It has been stated above that 'the body of Christ' and the assembly are distinct. If we compare them we will quickly see that there is first of all a difference as to who is in each of them. Only truly saved people are in the body, but while it is the teaching of assemblies that "all that believed were together" (Acts 2:44), and that no unregenerate person should be in an assembly, unsaved people have crept in. Then it would not be difficult to show that many who have truly been members of 'the body of Christ' were never in an assembly and, conversely, some have been in an assembly who were never in the body (Gal. 2:4). There is also a difference in the time of entrance into each, the way of coming in and the way we are maintained in each.

Similarities between the Body and Assembly

There are many similarities between the body and an assembly.

1 The Body

A. The church (Eph. 1:22)

B. The body (Eph. 4:12)

C. A holy temple (Eph. 2:21)

D. Habitation (Eph. 2:22)

E. The flock (John 10:16)

2 An Assembly

the church of God

body (I Cor. 12:27)

temple (I Cor. 3:16)

house (I Tim. 3:15)

little flock (Acts 20)

These are very important similarities and tell us plainly that an assembly is an expression of 'the body'. The truth of the one body is very precious. It is a major theme of the Ephesian and Colossian epistles. It is very closely linked to assembly truth. If we were asked to explain why an assembly should be united and manifest a oneness which is unique in all the relationships of men to their fellows, we would go to Scriptures which show the unity of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13). The fellowship of an assembly is an expression of a wider fellowship. It is in an assembly that the unity of the body is seen in practice.

Many have gone further than this and have said that an assembly is the facsimile, an exact copy of 'the body', or that it is a miniature, a microcosm, so that all that is true of one is true of the other, except that an assembly is on a very small scale. The Bible does not teach this at all.

Significant Distinctions

1 'The body' is spiritual and the truths related to it are positional; an assembly is geographical and the truths related to it are practical (Eph. 1:22, 23; 1 Cor. 1:1, 2).

2 We enter 'the body' at conversion, but the pattern for entering an assembly is that baptism follows conversion and then believers are added to the fellowship (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41, 42).

3 There is neither male nor female in 'the body' (Gal. 3:28), but in an assembly there are very clear distinctions between them (1 Cor. 11:1-16; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12-15).

4 We thank God that no believer can be separated from 'the body' (Rom. 8:38, 39), but it may be necessary to put a person away from an assembly (1 Cor. 5:11).

5 'The body' of the Ephesian letter is called by the Lord Jesus "My church" (Matt. 16:18). Nothing false can enter it, and Satan cannot prevail against it. An

assembly can have wolves creep into it (Acts 20:29), and Satan can corrupt it (II Cor. 11:1-3).

6 There is perfect unity in 'the body' (Eph. 4:4), but an assembly can be rent by schisms (I Cor. 3:3).

7 The bride will be presented, without fail, in faultless purity on the ground of the sacrifice of Christ (Eph. 5:25-27), but an assembly can be removed in judgment (Rev. 2:5).

8 The bride will be eternally the bride (Rev. 21:1, 2), but an assembly continues 'until He comes' (I Cor. 11:26; Rev. 2:25).

9 'The body' is never together at one place and will not be until we meet the Lord in the air (II Thess. 2:1), but an assembly should regularly be all together (I Cor. 14:23; Heb. 10:25).

10 The Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18), but Paul said that men are builders of an assembly and he himself was a masterbuilder (I Cor. 3:10).

Many other distinctions could be shown, but these are more than enough to emphasise the differences. There are conclusions to draw from these clear distinctions. First of all, we believe that many beloved brethren have clearly grasped the great truth of the one body, but have never seen the distinctions between it and an assembly. Men have been given responsibility to maintain the purity of an assembly, but the bride (a future aspect of the church) is kept in spotless purity through the virtue of Christ's blood. We are brought into 'the body' as totally unworthy sinners, whose only rights are eternal judgment from a holy God, but a believer is brought into the fellowship of an assembly when he gives evidence of a new life in Christ. It should be clear to anyone who has a grasp of the truth of fellowship, that an assembly receives a fellow-believer and that believer receives the assembly. The late Mr. Fisher Hunter referred to this as 'mutual reception'. To receive people

who do not receive the assembly is not fellowship, no matter what it might be called. Luke 5:10 describes James and John as being partners with Simon. They were in a business partnership. This word 'partners' has the same root as the word fellowship, suggesting to us that fellowship is a full working partnership. It is neither occasional nor half-hearted.

We mentioned above, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). This verse is often used to try to show that reception into 'the body' is all that is required for reception to an assembly. The context of this verse must be examined if we are to know its meaning. There were at least three assemblies in Rome (Rom. 16:5, 14 and 15). In those assemblies were Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 15:5-21), with very different backgrounds and conflicting dietary laws and habits. Many conflicts arose (vv. 1-7) over these differences. Paul is writing to people in these assemblies "to be likeminded one toward another" (v. 5). This is the context, and it often amazes us that brethren who are careful readers of the Word of God use this for assembly reception. The 'one another' of verse 7 surely must mean the same thing in this verse as the other times it is used in the same passage (Rom. 14:13, 20; 15:5, 7, 14). It means believers in the fellowship of an assembly in all the other cases. Can it have a different meaning here? This is another example of the need of always understanding a verse in its own context. The reception of Phoebe, described in Romans 16:2, is reception to an assembly and even the verb, 'to receive' is different from 15:7.

An illustration has often been used that we feel is erroneous. 'The body' has been likened to an orange or an apple which is divided up between a number of people. No one has the orange, but all have orange. This sounds good, and seems to be based on I Corinthians 12:27; but in the illustration, each one has a piece of the

orange, and if the pieces were put back together, the orange would be whole again. Does this really apply to 'the body of Christ' and assemblies? Is an assembly a piece of 'the body'? And if all assemblies were put together would you have 'the body'? In the next chapter the assembly is viewed as being a unique testimony for God in the world, and we reject the orange illustration, for the assembly is not part of anything, even though each one who is in the fellowship of an assembly recognises that he is a fellow-member of 'the body of Christ' with every other believer of this dispensation whether on earth or in heaven.

Chapter 4

A Singular Demonstration— Gathering unto His Name

This is the chapter where a young believer should begin to read this book. However, truth that touches the heart and moves the affections is never too simple or too familiar to the most spiritually mature of God's people. God grant that the writer and each reader may have a heart-appreciation of the blessed privilege of gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

An assembly is a unique testimony for God in the world. It is unique because there is nothing else that the NT recognises as being a collective testimony for God in this day. There are many great systems and organisations in the 'Christian world' about which much good could be said and also much that is not good, but if the NT is our only guide, there is only one true testimony for God in a collective sense. Some try to explain this by saying that the NT only describes primitive Christianity and it was God's intention that local churches should band together into organised systems that would be recognised by the nations of the earth, and thus have a greater impact for God. We should be very careful about telling God what His intentions are. He has given us the full revelation of His will in His Word and there is no such intention ever suggested. All the great institutions and organisations in Christendom do not have a line of Scripture to support their existence.

We have pointed out in previous chapters that there are only two aspects of the church in the NT, the spiritual body and a local assembly. But do not local

churches join together to form larger units or federations or organisations of some kind? They do, but the Bible doesn't support it. When a number of assemblies are being addressed or referred to in the N'T they are never called 'the church of' (anything), they are just called 'churches of the saints' or some other NT designation that applies to all such gatherings. We refer to this truth as the independence, or autonomy of the local church, but neither word is good enough. The assembly is not truly self-governing and is certainly never to be self-sufficient or self-directed, but each assembly is answerable to the Lord alone and not to any governing body or hierarchy outside of its own elderhood, which in turn have only the Word of God to guide them (Rev. 1:12 to 3:22). An assembly is not a democracy, ruled by the people, but a theocracy, where the rule of God is recognised.

Actually the Bible does describe a great religious system that develops during this age. In two of the parables in Matthew 13, it is seen to have phenomenal growth. In one parable, a mustard seed is sown by a man in his field. It grows into a great tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it (vv. 31, 32). The Lord Jesus tells us that the field is the world (v. 38), and the birds are the emissaries of Satan (v. 19). The great tree is a picture of Christendom. In the parable of the leaven, a woman hides it in three measures of meal until it is all leavened. The leaven causes bloat, a tremendous increase in size, while not adding any real value or spiritual weight. If leaven is unchecked by the oven, it makes the meal to be a great sour mass. Leaven is a principle of evil, both moral evil (I Cor. 5:6-8) and doctrinal evil (Gal. 5:9), and so a great system has grown up in the religious world, but the entire system is permeated with evil. However, we should take great care when we are speaking of 'the system' that we make a clear distinction between it and the many saints of God

for whom the Lord Jesus shed His blood that are still in it.

That Worthy Name

We now want to look at the positive side of the truth of gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing He would soon be returning to the place in heaven from which He had come, the Lord Jesus left guidance for His own during His absence. He left many spiritual legacies to His own, and none more precious than His own precious name. It is touching to read the words of Jeremiah, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." What words did he find that were so precious? "For I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of Hosts" (15:16). Similar words are recorded by David, Isaiah and Daniel. This was a great OT truth, for God said to Israel, "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord" (Deut. 28:10). The book of Deuteronomy is full of the truth that God had caused His name to be the distinguishing mark of the place where Israel gathered before the Lord (Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 16:2, 6, 7, 11). But this is OT truth; is there any parallel to it today? James wrote to humble believers, "Do not they blaspheme that excellent name that is called upon you?" (James 2:7, JND). We are called by the name that men blaspheme, but that name is 'worthy'. Most Bible margins express the inadequacy of the English language at this point by adding such adjectives as honoured, wonderful and beautiful; or by substituting words such as noble, glorious, excellent or fairest, for this is one name that cannot be exaggerated. Isaac Watts wrote,

"Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love and power,
That mortals ever knew,

That angels ever bore;
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set our Saviour forth.”

The name of the Lord Jesus Christ has in it all the matchless worth of His Person and work. It is impossible to separate that name from all He is and all He has done.

If you have read the second chapter of this book, you have noticed how strongly we have contended for the contextual interpretation of Matthew 18:20. The reasons behind this will now be obvious. “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them,” is most precious truth. It is valuable to see that our KJV has the word ‘in’ twice in this verse, but they are different words in Greek. “There am I in (*en*) the midst” is location and involves the pre-eminence of His place in the gathering. The first in, “in (unto—*eis*) My name” has great significance. The preposition *eis* means direction toward, and teaches that the Lord Jesus Himself is the great Attraction. We are drawn to Him as the gathering Centre. However, this thought of motion toward does not fully satisfy the meaning of *eis*. It can also be translated as ‘into’, for ‘into His name’ tells of all the authority of that name. By the authority of that name the gospel was preached (Acts 4:12), believers were baptised (Acts 10:48), the lame walked (Acts 3:16), believers were assured of forgiveness (Acts 10:43) and much more, for in the realm of authority, there is no name to compare with it (Phil. 2:9). Yet the KJV is correct in translating *eis* as ‘in’ for it also means to be ‘in the sphere of’ His name and to abide there.

His name has authority and it has attraction, for it is the gathering Centre for believers (Matt. 18:20; I Cor. 1:1-9; 5:4; Heb. 10:25; 13:3). Could there be one who loves Christ who would ever suggest that any other name has greater attraction? “Unto My name” speaks

of the distinction of His name. Rather than blurring testimony, it is the one unique name that unites all who truly own Him as Saviour and Lord. It is so distinct that it excludes every other name.

Christians have often taken names that were chosen because they honoured the memory of a great servant of Christ. Is there a servant whose name is worthy to be placed beside his Lord? God "gave unto Him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). Some have taken a name that honours a great teaching of the Bible such as believers' baptism, but is there any ordinance, truth or practice worthy to share the place that belongs alone to the One who said, "I am the truth"? Some have taken a name that stands for a form of church government (*presbuteros, episkopos*), but what elders or overseers are worthy to have their name displace the name of the Lord of the churches?

Some will think these are unfair charges. They will say, "These great religious systems do not deny the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they have just chosen a second name to distinguish them from other Christians." It was never the mind of the Lord Jesus that Christians should be so divided (John 17:22, 23), and it is the very idea of a second name that is such an evil thing. The Lord Jesus left His name for believers to be called by, and while He has been absent, many have taken second names for convenience, or as it suited their fancy, or to divide themselves from others who are merely Christians.

My full name and middle initial adds up to fifteen letters. I am often absent from home because of the work of the Lord, and my wife is required to sign the name that I have given to her to many papers where the space is not sufficient. How convenient if she were to adopt a second name with about six letters! She could tell me that she was not giving up the name she took from me many years ago, but merely using another name for convenience. Without carrying the illustration further,

let me ask, How does our absent Lord view the many names that have either been placed beside His name, or have displaced His name altogether? Is there really any name that is worthy to share the place of pre-eminent honour that we should give to His name alone? All second names are dishonouring to Him. In fact, any name that we take that we apply exclusively to ourselves as believers to distinguish us from other believers is the sin of sectarianism. The names brethren, Christians and believers belong equally to every child of God and should never be used in a sectarian sense. This was the error of the man in Corinth who in his positional pride said, "I am of Christ." Notice should be taken of the personal pronoun and of the way the name 'Christ' is used. This is the epistle where He is the **Lord Jesus Christ** and His Lordship is a major theme.

We cannot totally escape from the world putting names upon us, but let us deny them and take alone that name that is above every name, our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17).

One day, while travelling to a distant city, a man sat beside me whose conversation quickly showed that he was a professing believer. When I had told him how God had awakened and saved me, he gladly responded by recounting the wonderful story of God's dealings with him. There was very clear evidence to my mind and heart that we had the same Saviour and Lord. The time passed quickly as we talked together of the Lord Jesus and the value of His Person and work. I truly believe that the Lord Himself drew near and we could have repeated the words of two other travellers, "Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked with us by the way?" My companion was a very dear brother in the Lord and I felt my heart going out to him. We were one in Christ, and I detected that he was spiritually intelligent. Toward the end of our journey he asked, "And what are you?" Knowing well what he meant, I told him that I

was a believer, a Christian, once a lost sinner but now on my way to heaven.

Not having received the answer he wanted, he next said, "But to what do you belong?"

"I belong to the Lord Jesus," I answered.

"But don't you call yourself by some other name?"

"What name do you believe I should use other than His name?" I asked in turn.

He said, "Are you one of the Plymouth Brethren?"

"No," I answered, "Others may have called us by that name, but we never take it. I have never been in Plymouth, England, nor do I meet with Christians who ever had any historical link with the large assembly that met there in the early 1840s." I then explained to him that there had truly been a very large assembly there, and from it the gospel spread to all the region around Plymouth. The believers took no denominational name, but called one another 'brother' in their preaching or conversation, so the townspeople designated them as the brethren from Plymouth. "But," I said, "I believe it is as wrong to take that name as any other name in Christendom."

When he had told me the denomination to which he belonged; a denomination that can count many great spiritual men in their number in the past, and some still in the present; I explained to him that when we were talking together about our Lord Jesus Christ, we were one, no division of any kind existed between us, but now there was a wall. I was just a Christian, but he was a Presbyterian Christian. His response to this will explain the telling of the incident. "I never before saw the great evil of second names." God grant that each reader may see the evil in it!

A Word of Warning

It must be at this point that we distinguish between a cold formality and a living, vital appreciation. Being

correct in church order and name is an excellent thing, but it does not make me spiritual, and it certainly does not set me above other believers whose organisations I would not feel free to join. We have seen the most clear doctrinal position marked by deadness, and even more tragically, by a hardness that bears little likeness to the mind of Christ. A right scriptural position demands that I show a corresponding humility and godliness and a right spirit toward all who belong to Christ. In fact, the Lord accepts us on the very ground we take. Do we say we are careful to keep His Word in all things? Then this must be consistent and we must not only keep His Word in external practice, but in our inmost beings.

The words of the risen Christ to the church of Philadelphia are appropriate with which to close this chapter. To hear them as from His own lips will humble us and make us realise our total dependence upon His Word and His Spirit. "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My Name."

God grant that we may not deny any truth that relates to that unique name!

Chapter 5

A Supreme Declaration— The Lord's Supper

Even though I Corinthians was written to correct what was wrong in the assembly at Corinth, we thank God from our hearts for it. We are not glad that things were wrong, but rather that they were corrected. It is impossible to read of the problems at Corinth without being aware that had they not been corrected, there would soon have been no assembly there. One of the ways that Paul set them right was to teach them the priority that must ever be given to “the things that belong to the Lord” (I Cor. 7:32).

Seven things that belong to the Lord are prominent in the Corinthian letter: the name of the Lord (1:1-10), the table of the Lord (10:21), the death of the Lord (11:26, 27), the commandment of the Lord (14:37), the work of the Lord (15:58), the coming of the Lord (1:7) and the subject that is here occupying us, the supper of the Lord (11:20). Over against these ‘things of the Lord’ are set ‘the things of the world’, and the pre-eminence of the one over the other is a major theme of I Corinthians.

We often quote the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:33 to the unsaved, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” The context of this statement would teach us that it has a much wider interpretation than being a Gospel text. Whether it is serving a master (v. 24), securing possessions (v. 25), or seeking a kingdom (v. 33) the first things must be given first place. Paul commended the believers in Macedonia

because, when it came to giving to the Lord, they first gave themselves to the Lord (II Cor. 8:5). The church at Ephesus was strongly condemned by the Lord because they had left their first love (Rev. 2:4), and they were commanded to repent and do the first works (v. 5). The widow woman at Zarephath had only a handful of meal in a barrel between her and starvation, yet Elijah said to her, "But make me thereof a little cake first" (I Kings 17:13). She might have argued that she and her son would die if she obeyed, but she gave to God's prophet first, and afterward she and her son were fully supplied. The Corinthians were exhorted, "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him" (I Cor. 16:1). This is a divine principle, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God..."

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7) is a major part of this principle of divine priorities. From the form of expression that is used in this verse it should be very clear that it is not a partaking of food that is being described, but 'the breaking of bread' (Acts 2:42). In Acts 2:46, it was a taking of food as the words, "Did eat their meat (food) with gladness and singleness of heart" would indicate.

In Acts 20:6-12, the announced purpose of the gathering was "to break bread" (v. 7), and it is most likely that these disciples met at the first opportunity granted to them on the first day of the week. They remembered the Lord in the breaking of bread at the beginning of this long meeting, and after 'long preaching' (v. 9), they partook of a meal (v. 11). There are compelling reasons for saying that 'breaking bread' in verse 11 was a meal, for it is linked with 'eating food' as in Acts 2:46. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" when they made the Lord's supper a meal. Seeing he waited for an entire week to be with them for the 'breaking of bread' (vv. 6,

7), it seems best to say that verse 7 was the remembrance of the Lord, and verse 11 was the eating of a meal.

The breaking of bread is the term that is used when the simplicity of the remembrance of the death of the Lord Jesus is the subject. It is the Lord's supper when the dignity of the remembrance is prominent (I Cor. 11:20). The name of the Lord is an adjective only twice in the New Testament, first here in I Corinthians 11:20, and then in Revelation 1:10. It is significant that it is the Lord's Day and the Lord's supper that are so closely linked.

It has been suggested that we have a lovely illustration of this in Genesis 43:24, where Joseph ate with his brethren in his house in Egypt. The feast took character from Joseph, not from Egypt; so here, in I Corinthians, the supper takes character from the Lord Himself, not from anything related to this world or its systems.

It was while Judas was engaged in his plot with the leaders of the Jews that the Lord Jesus took bread and gave the Father thanks for it, thus thanking God for the bruising of His own body upon the cross. When He took the cup, He gave thanks for the shedding of His own precious blood, for He knew well the meaning of those simple emblems. In point of time, Paul's words to the Corinthians are the first record of what happened in that upper room, and Paul received the account from the Lord directly, apart from communication with the disciples who were with the Lord on that occasion (I Cor. 11:23-34). It is significant that while the account in Matthew 26:26 says, "And as they were eating, *Jesus* took bread;" when Paul is communicating it, he says, "The *Lord Jesus*...took bread." The disciples never addressed Him as Jesus, "Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13), and we should observe this same reverence.

The purpose of the institution is seen as being threefold. First the Lord said, "This do in remembrance

of Me.” All that relates to His blessed Person is involved in this remembrance. Then it is a proclamation, “Ye proclaim the Lord’s death till he come.” All the love and suffering and blessing that is involved in the death of our Lord is in this proclamation. The third truth expressed is the unity of the body of Christ. Although this unity is linked with the table of chapter 10 (v. 17), it is also linked with the bread and the cup of chapter 11.

“The bread which we break” (I Cor. 10:16), refers not to an official act by an elder who goes forward to the table to break the one loaf, but rather to a participation of each one who breaks the bread as an act of his own volition, thus acknowledging that I caused the agony and death of the Lord Jesus, “He was wounded for my transgressions.”

The emblems of bread and wine, though simple, were chosen by the Lord Himself and have great significance. However, they are just bread and wine and never can become more than emblems of His body bruised and His blood poured out. The error of Rome, that the emblems are transformed into His body and blood—transubstantiation—or the error of Lutheranism, that along with the emblems, we have His true body and blood—consubstantiation—should be utterly rejected. However, the real presence of the Lord is promised in this meeting of the assembly, as well as at every other assembly gathering.

Should we commemorate His Person and His work on rare occasions, or should He have the first place, the place of absolute priority in an assembly? To rephrase the question, Should the Lord have priority in four weeks of the year, or twelve weeks of the year, or should He have priority every week of the year? Of course, the next question might be, “Why not remember the Lord every day of every week?” The New Testament answers, “On the first day of the week...” (Acts 20:7). This is the reason that on the first day of the week, and at the very

first opportunity, giving priority to the remembrance of our Lord, we take the bread and the cup to proclaim the death of our Lord until He comes. Almost all modern scholars, even liberals, agree that it was the habit of early assemblies to remember the Lord each first day of the week, even though many of these scholars do not believe it is necessary for our day. We believe it is necessary that "In all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18).

The reader should be aware that when we serve the Lord by serving others, we are bringing glory to Him. To serve others is a major factor of devoted service (Gal. 6:6-10), but are 'others' the chief object of service, or does this belong to the Lord alone? There is one kind of service which we render to the Lord and not to others. It is the worship of redeemed spirits (Phil. 3:3; Heb. 9:14; Rom. 12:1), and is rendered unto God alone. This is a first thing, and it is a chief reason for which we have been saved (John 4:23, 24). It is a mistake to imagine that any other kind of service should be given higher priority, or even to precede worship. When the Lord Jesus has the first place in the heart of a believer, he will never think that to remember His Lord each first day of the week is too repetitive or should be replaced with any other kind of service.

The Lord's supper is never observed in the NT apart from a permanent assembly testimony. It should never be turned into a convenience for travellers, for it is a privilege of a permanently gathered assembly. It is the greatest expression of fellowship (I Cor. 10:16, 17), and gives character to every other meeting and every other function of an assembly in a similar sense in which the burnt offering of Leviticus 1 gave character to all the other offerings of the Levitical system.

We do not receive to the breaking of bread, but we receive to the fellowship of an assembly, and this fellowship is expressed in the breaking of bread.

There are five facts stressed in I Corinthians 11:

- 1 The Institution of the supper (v. 23, Luke 22:19).
- 2 The Injunction for it (v. 24).
- 3 The Intention of it (v. 26).
- 4 The Inclusion in it (vv. 18-22).
- 5 The Investigation for it (v. 28).

This is a solemn and holy responsibility, but it is a blessed privilege and the closest place to heaven we have ever known on earth.

The women of Galilee "Beheld the sepulchre and how His body was laid and they returned and prepared spices and ointments," for One that they believed was dead. How much more should we prepare to meet with a living Lord, and gather, in our baskets of first-fruits, precious things about Himself that we may present them in the place where He meets with his own!

It should be a terrible rebuke to those who teach a falling away doctrine that when the Corinthians came unprepared and dishonoured the Lord at the supper to such a degree that many were sick among them and many had fallen asleep because of the judging hand of the Lord, they did not die and perish eternally, but fell asleep. This term, 'sleep', when it is used for death, is only used for true believers. Yet, can we say that this was not serious? How solemn it is to go through a performance of partaking of the bread and drinking of the cup while failing to discern the Lord's body, which in this case refers to the very body in which He suffered, of which the bread so vividly speaks. It is still true "For if we judged ourselves, we should not be judged." We should see that this self-judgment was not to result in an absenting of themselves from the supper, but rather to eat in a spirit of having judged self. It can never be claimed that this means that only the individual has the right to say whether he can or cannot partake of the

supper. This is not assembly reception, but is rather the self-judgment of those who already formed part of the assembly at Corinth.

There is a remarkable parallel to these deaths in Corinth with Exodus 30:17-21, where the sons of Aaron are commanded to wash at the laver before entering the tabernacle "that they die not." The judgment of God on Israel is used by Paul in these chapters and applied to the Corinthians. The sins that brought sickness and death to some of them can be traced back to chapter 10:5-11 where Israel's sins are listed and the warning is given, "Neither be ye...as were some of them," and "These things happened unto them for ensamples" (v. 11). Paul is a contrast at the end of chapter 9, for he said, "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection" (v. 27). May we know the truth of this subjection!

The promise of His coming is connected to the Lord's supper. It is a blessed privilege that looks back to His cross and onward to His coming. Let us never be absent from it when it is physically possible to be present! It is the commandment of the Lord until He comes.

A Description of a Breaking of Bread

The following brief sketch has been written to attach to this chapter for anyone who has never seen a meeting for the breaking of bread.

The building is comfortable, but any evidence of religious forms or ritual are totally missing. A few clear verses of Scripture hang on the walls in plain frames. There is no religious altar, and the chairs are not arranged for an address to be given to an audience, but are formed around a simple table that stands in the middle, upon which has been placed a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. Toward the back of the room there are chairs that are separate from the circle where people may sit to look on.

The little company sits in silence, many have bowed heads while others are reading in their Bibles or glancing through the pages of a little book called "The Believers Hymnbook". As the appointed hour of the meeting arrives, a man arises and announces a hymn. He reads a verse or two of it and repeats the number. Without organ, piano or any musical accompaniment, the hymn is sung with deep feeling. A brief silence is followed by a man arising to address God. He does not make requests or present petitions, but instead he thanks God for the great privilege of being present at this simple gathering where a few believers have gathered to give God thanks for His Son. His prayer is totally thanksgiving and praise, full of the worth of the Lord Jesus Christ and thanksgiving to God for the redemptive work of the Saviour. Another hymn is sung, a hymn of worship; it continues the theme of the matchless worth of the Person of Christ and the value of His sacrifice at the cross.

As the meeting continues, several men give thanks one after the other; their theme is the same, but the watcher recognises that the tone of worship is rising and much praise and sweet incense is ascending to God for His Son. There are quiet expressions of appreciation as the thanksgiving is offered to God and a number of quiet 'amens' as each worshipper concludes his audible worship and sits down in his place.

None have gone forward to take a place of prominence, each brother who participates in spiritual worship rises at the chair where he has been sitting. There is no chairman, no programme has been announced, but each one who takes audible part has thoughts that perfectly dovetail with the thanksgiving that has been expressed by the others and the language of the hymns of worship. Christ is the theme, His Person and His work are extolled and God is worshipped in spirit and in truth. A spiritual onlooker would recognise that the

thanksgiving is not only for personal and collective blessings received, but much has been spoken of the delight of the Father in His unique Son, and Scriptures have been quoted in the worship that describe the perfections and excellencies of the Lord Jesus as the Father appreciates Him. God is worshipped for His attributes and Christ is exalted because of His worth, and humble thanksgiving is offered for the love that caused Him to give His all for unworthy sinners.

At this point in the meeting, a man arises and announces that He will give thanks for the bread. Simply and reverently, he thanks God for the loaf of bread which is such a fitting emblem of the body in which the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross. A man then goes forward to the table and breaks the loaf of bread and passes it around the circle. Each believer takes a small portion from the loaf and eats it.

When the bread is placed back upon the table, having passed from hand to hand around the circle, a man arises and in like manner gives God thanks for the cup of wine that is the emblem chosen by the Lord Jesus of His precious, shed blood. The cup is passed from hand to hand in the same way as the bread, each believer taking a small sip from the one cup. When it has been returned to the table, an offering is taken only of those who are gathered in the circle and it too is placed again on the table.

At this point in the meeting, a man arises and reads from the Scriptures and gives the sense of what has been read and makes practical application of the written truths. A hymn is sung, the meeting is closed with prayer, and the company arises to greet one another with a warm handshake and a few words of mutual love and care.

This kind of meeting takes place in thousands of locations each Lord's Day in almost every part of the world. It is the commemoration of the Lord's supper

instituted by the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed (I Cor. 11:23-30).

Chapter 6

A Sincere Devotion— What is Your Place of Worship?

How often when a Christian invites a neighbour to attend an assembly meeting, he hears the response, “Oh! but I have my own place of worship.” The purpose of this chapter is to answer from Scripture, “What is the true and scriptural place of worship?”

Around us in the religious world there are many so-called ‘places of worship’. There are times when we have been taken inside one of these and have been shown the various features of the building. Then the question has been asked, “Would you like to see the sanctuary?” and we are taken into a large auditorium where there is an altar, and other religious symbols which characterise such places. There are true children of God who regularly attend such ‘places of worship’ and believe that they are consecrated places, sanctuaries of God on earth.

God did have a sanctuary on earth. Hebrews 9:1 tells us, “Verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.” This verse refers to the tabernacle that Israel had in the wilderness (v. 2). The pattern for it was given by God to Moses (Heb. 3:2-5), and it was an earthly likeness to the true heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:23, 24). It was worldly, not in a bad moral sense, but simply in a physical sense, for it was made out of materials that came from this world (9:11). The materials were chosen by God. Every pin, cord, pillar, board, hanging, covering, vessel and piece of furniture in that tabernacle was a type of the glories

and beauties of Christ. All its service and ritual were typical of His Person and work. It was a marvellous parable, an earthly story with heavenly meaning. Hebrews 9:9 says, "Which was a parable for the time then present" (RV).

There was another 'worldly sanctuary' in the Old Testament that was even more attractive to the eye and of greater worldly value than the tabernacle. Solomon built it in Jerusalem, and for that temple the pattern was given by God to David, who in turn gave it to Solomon. The gold and silver in it at 1984 prices would make it worth 48.5 billion U.S. dollars. This is a recent estimate of Hebrew scholars in Israel. That beautiful temple was destroyed when Judah was taken captive to Babylon, but was rebuilt by the returning remnant under Zerubbabel, but not according to its former glory (Haggai 2:3). When He was here among men, the Lord Jesus called that temple 'My Father's house', even though it had been renovated by Herod.

There will be 'worldly sanctuaries' in the future. During the tribulation period, there will be a temple in which the abomination of desolation will be set up. In the millennial earth there will be the temple described in Ezekiel 41-44. This makes five sanctuaries of this earth, but the question is, Do we have a sanctuary today that we can call our place of worship?

One of the greatest truths found in the Hebrew Epistle is that the worldly sanctuary has been replaced. In fact, the truth of chapters 9 and 10 is that the entire system with which the worldly sanctuary was linked has been removed. The OT is seen in the book of Hebrews as being an outline sketch of divine truth which it could not fill in. "The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. 7:19). The words better, greater and higher often appear in this epistle, as the things of the old economy are compared to NT truth. These are

comparative words, but Hebrews is not saying that the NT revelation is only being compared to the old, but it is being contrasted. The word 'endless' is not a comparative and is one of the key words of Hebrews. There is finality in Christ, the OT sketch has become a finished picture in Him.

The priests of old had a way of drawing nigh to God, and this is described in Hebrews 9. The high priest of Israel, once a year, entered into the holiest through the veil on the great day of Atonement, but not without blood (9:2-8). It will be seen from the verse already quoted in Hebrews 7:19 that the bringing in of a better hope has made a new way by which we draw nigh to God, so it is important to see that this is the entire context in which the ninth chapter is set. There is a new way to enter the sanctuary, but is it the same veil and the same sanctuary? The answer is a simple no.

This is the subject of chapter 9. The old (worldly) sanctuary had ordinances of divine service. Related to the tabernacle were gold, silver, copper, blue, purple, scarlet, fine-twined linen and garments of glory and beauty. There were priceless gems, a table of showbread, frankincense, a golden lamp, incense beaten fine, altars of brass and of gold, and a copper laver. There was the blood of bulls and goats, calves and sheep and birds. There was the ashes of a red heifer and silver trumpets and rams' horns and timbrels and cymbals and harps. They were all shadows of that which was to come. The entire system has been removed, it was a parable for that time (9:9). It could never make those who came perfect (complete), even though it was all instituted by God. It was only until the time of setting things right (v. 10) that it had any value. This is the point toward which the Holy Spirit has been moving throughout the Hebrew letter. Everything has moved aside to make room for Christ. Verse 11 is emphatic, "But Christ having come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and

more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.” The last phrase of this verse says the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus is related to a greater tabernacle than Israel’s worldly sanctuary. His priestly service is not in a material sanctuary. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (v. 24).

Chapter 10 develops this great subject by describing the veil that effectively barred Israel’s access to God. It was a restrictive veil, and stands in contrast to the way that is now open, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; Let us draw near...” (10:19-22). The restrictive veil is gone, the way is now open through the death of our blessed Saviour. We should understand the words ‘through...His flesh’ as instrumental, that is, the veil is not His flesh, but it was through the suffering He endured in His flesh, that we are able to enter into the heavenly sanctuary. Is this holiest of all, which we enter through the blood of the Lord Jesus, the same place that Israel’s high priest entered on the day of atonement? Surely not, that was only a shadow. This is the spiritual sanctuary, where our High Priest ministers in unfailing service before the very throne of God.

The answer to the question, Where is our place of worship? is found here. We enter the true sanctuary with confidence through the blood of Jesus, not once a year, but a welcome is always assured to us. In His flesh He passed through the heavens and entered the heavenly sanctuary. By virtue of His blood we have the right to enter the spiritual, heavenly sanctuary, and it is the only place of spiritual worship, seeing the worldly sanctuary

has been removed (9:14). The word for serve in this verse is worship.

All of this has very practical teaching for us. All around us in Christendom there are many places that profess to be worldly sanctuaries with their altars, candles, beautiful curtains, a priesthood in religious vestments, inspiring music and rituals and forms related to a sanctuary on earth, but they are all only shadows. Christendom, from the sad days of the marriage of Christians to a pagan world (Rev. 2:12), has returned to the shadows. To whatever degree we attempt to restore the thought of a sanctuary on earth, we are returning to the shadows of Judaism, and in many cases it is a mixture of Judaism with the pagan world of religion. Christ has come, "In Him the shadows of the law are all fulfilled and now withdraw."

So, where do we worship? Spiritual worship in a collective sense is of the greatest importance to God. It is the presentation of a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Our place of worship is not on earth. We cannot point to a temple, tabernacle, shrine, sanctuary, 'church', chapel, hall or hut on earth and say, "This is our place of worship." Whatever we might call a building, we cannot make it a sanctuary of worship. It was conviction of this great truth that caused men of a past day to be very careful not to call a building by any name that would suggest we were making it a sanctuary on earth. 'Chapel', used by many well-intentioned believers, means a worldly sanctuary. In the United Kingdom this is normally the name that is given to the building where Catholics gather for their religious activities, where they have their altars, priesthood, images and candles. You may say that this is only a technicality, but all that is linked to the place where an assembly meets is our testimony before God and the world, and we cannot be too careful about conforming

our testimony to the Word of God. In any way that we return to the shadows we are turning from the great Reality, from Him who is the Substance. Let us not go back to shadows. 'The ministry of music' that plays such a great part in modern 'worship' is one of those shadows.

Lest anyone thinks that this is a denial of the real presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst of His own as they gather unto Him, the reading again of chapter 4 is suggested. The Lord Himself does deign to take His place in the midst of His own, but when we enter into His presence in worship, we are within the veil.

The writer to the Hebrews has been developing these truths in an orderly way. At this point (ch. 10), he has shown that the worldly sanctuary has been removed, Christ has come, we draw nigh to God through Him, into the spiritual sanctuary, and all of this is linked to an assembly. He exhorts believers, "Let us draw near...Let us hold fast...Let us consider one another," and then says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (v. 25).

There are four distinct truths in Hebrews 10:25. First of all, it is a description of an assembly. The exact expression, "The assembling of ourselves together", is only found here and in II Thessalonians 2:1. In this latter verse, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him," we are promised a blessed future gathering around our Lord Jesus Christ in the air. Is there a gathering 'unto Him' today? Yes, the verse we are now considering describes a present gathering together unto Him. You may be thinking that the last two words, 'unto Him' are not found in Hebrews 10:25, but the writer is not finished with his subject yet. He finishes it by saying, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach" (13:13).

The closest thought in English that we get to this expression is in the word 'epicentre'. It is usually used for the point on the earth's surface which is the very centre of the energy felt throughout the earth's crust in an earthquake, but it literally means a focal point or central point. The Lord Jesus is the focal point and the central point of an assembly gathering. It is truly a gathering together unto Him as the gathering Centre.

The second fact taught in Hebrews 10:25 is that there were those who had departed from the gathering Centre. It will be seen from what immediately follows that the writer is speaking directly about apostasy. The 'for' of verse 26 makes this very clear. No true believer can ever be an apostate, but to depart from the gathering Centre is to imitate the actions of apostasy.

The third and fourth facts taught in this verse are that believers are dependent on one another for fellowship, aid and mutual encouragement, and it is all in view of the day of His coming. As we see the day approaching, these truths will be particularly attacked, because they are very precious and we require help from God if we are to maintain them.

Have we gone beyond the general teaching of the Word of God to give this teaching from these closing chapters of Hebrews? We strongly believe in the law of proportionate mention, if we are to rightly interpret the Word of God. If this is so important, why is it not taught throughout the New Testament? The simple answer is that this is the entire newness of the New Testament and these are the very things emphasised throughout its pages.

What we have taught here was taught by the Lord Jesus to the woman in John 4. We 'look on' with joy as the faithful and true Witness leads the sinful woman to first see herself, and then, step by step leads her into the revelation of Himself. The seeking sinner says, "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet." She is led further

into the knowledge of Him and we hear her timidly say, "I know that Messiah cometh...". At this point the gracious Lord said, "I that speak unto thee am He."

It was to this newly-saved soul that the Lord Jesus revealed some of the highest truth about spiritual worship found in all the Bible. She had referred to Mount Gerizim as the place where her fathers had worshipped. The Lord Jesus said, "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father" (John 4:21). The temple stood in Jerusalem, the first assembly of the NT would meet in Jerusalem, the first breaking of bread would be there, yet, it was not in Jerusalem that men would worship. Where then? In the spiritual sanctuary. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23, 24). Truth so profound, and yet within the grasp of a soul newly saved!

The worldly sanctuary of Israel was a figure of Christ. It was incomplete and only a shadow of the great Reality who would come. All that was connected with it was of earthly substance, for an earthly people. It had beauty and glory which related to earth. It appealed to the eye, ear, smell and touch, but it has all been removed, for Christ has come. We now, with confidence, can enter the true spiritual sanctuary of which that other was only a worldly representation. We worship the living God in spirit and in truth, apart from temporal aid or form. As a New Testament priesthood, we enter within the veil, into the true spiritual sanctuary to offer our spiritual sacrifices to God. "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks (which makes confession) to His name" (Heb. 13:15).

In all that we have written about the spiritual worship of the New Testament priesthood, we have emphasised that nothing from earth can be an aid to spiritual worship, yet there are at least five elements of assembly practice which are physical in nature. The first two are related to Headship. Certainly, long hair and a covering veil on the head of the sister are physical elements (I Cor. 11:1-16). The third is related to baptism. It is very clear that water is a physical element. The last two are related to breaking bread, for the bread and the cup are again physical elements. It is very doubtful that hair, a covering veil, water, bread or wine can be called aids to spiritual worship. However, the main point about these physical things is that they have been chosen by the Lord Himself. This is His plan and as the Lord of the churches, He certainly has the right to exercise His Lordship. How different it is when men introduce things which have no authority from Him. Even in these physical elements chosen by the Lord, we have a great contrast to the forms and ritual of Judaism. Long hair, a veil, water, bread and wine are the simplest and most common of elements and the Lord has ordained them; thus they are His ordinances.

Chapter 7

A Sovereign Display— Headship in an Assembly

In chapter 6 of this book we were occupied with the spiritual nature of the worship of believers. It was taught that our sanctuary of worship is heavenly and spiritual and that we worship according to the teaching given by the Lord Jesus to the woman in John 4. We do not have a worldly sanctuary with any of the 'aids to worship' that are commonly found in religious places. The Holy Spirit moves upon redeemed spirits to produce a spiritual worship that ascends to God as sweet incense. Yet, at the close of that chapter, we pointed out that there are five physical elements, chosen by the Lord Himself, that are closely related to assembly practice. The first is a single element and the other four are two pairs of elements. The baptism of believers takes place in water. This water has no particular quality, it is merely water, but to the believer who thus identifies Himself with the death of his Lord, it is a symbol of death. Although it is only a very simple physical element, the water has great spiritual significance (Rom. 6:1-11).

The next two physical elements were chosen by the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal (I Cor. 11:23-34), and are also very simple, yet who can deny the deep spiritual meaning of the bread and cup at the Lord's supper? The last two physical elements are the covered head and the long hair of the sister in an assembly.

There are those who would not link these last two physical elements with the others. For them, the covered head of the woman is an insignificant and non-vital

truth in comparison to baptism and the Lord's supper. However, Paul, by the Spirit, clearly links them in I Corinthians 11. This chapter marks a new section of the epistle. He has been dealing with areas of personal liberty and giving spiritual principles to guide believers (chs. 7-9). Immediately as chapter 11 begins, he removes any thought of personal liberty, "Be ye imitators of me" (v. 1, RV), and this is an imperative. This same kind of language is seen in verses 2 and 16.

When children are given lessons, they often ask why. Their growing intelligence seeks answers and reasons. This is healthy and the wise parent displays patience and care in feeding this intellectual curiosity, yet, when spiritual children ask why, they are sometimes rebuked and seldom are they given satisfactory answers.

There are three kinds of 'why' in the spiritual realm:

1 The Why of Scriptural Mandate.

2 The Why of Spiritual Meaning.

3 The Why of Sincere Motive.

When I was a very young Christian, the first 'why' satisfied me. The Bible said it, that was enough. Simple obedience to the Word of God is a spiritual law, written by the Holy Spirit upon every true child of God. It is a very clear sign of divine life and the importance of it can never be overstated. However, if the believer stops here, he has missed so very much. We should never feel threatened by a second 'why'. It is the 'why' of spiritual meaning. Obedience is predicated on the why of Scriptural mandate, but appreciation and spiritual understanding can only come about through the answer to the why of spiritual meaning. The third kind of 'why' is the why of sincere motive. I should obey God because His Word commands me (John 13:34; 14:21; I Cor. 14:37; I John 2:7, 8; 5:2). I will obey intelligently when I understand the spiritual significance of what is commanded, and I will obey gladly and joyously when the right motive of love to Christ moves my heart.

We have to say sadly that there are those who believe the first why is all that is necessary, and would discourage the answers to any other why. This is a dangerous attitude and comes very close to an attempt to reach a practical sanctification by a legal system. This was the error of the man in Romans 7, who eventually made the discovery that legalism can never produce true spirituality.

When I was a young Christian, I was asked if I knew why women should cover their heads when the assembly met together. I knew the answer to the first 'why', the Word of God said so, but had to confess that I did not know the meaning of the covered head. The man who had asked the question was a true shepherd. That day he introduced me to one of the greatest truths in all of Scripture, the truth of the Headship of the Lord Jesus over all things. I learned then that I can only begin to appreciate divine revelation when I can enter into its spiritual meaning, and can never forget the impact of that lesson.

The importance of headship can be seen in the order of the teaching of I Corinthians 11. Paul deals with the disorder, that only heaven would detect in its full significance (v. 10), before he deals with a disorder that even the world condemns (vv. 21, 22).

I would like to apply the why of spiritual meaning to the physical elements, the covered head of the woman and her long hair. We should notice that there are two things in I Corinthians 11:1-16, and seeing they are distinct, each must have its own meaning. One of the greatest aids to this study is that this passage is exhaustive. It deals fully with the subject and gives in detail the spiritual meaning of both the veil, or covering, and the long hair.

The divine principle of Headship in a Man is a major theme of the Bible:

Gen. 1:26-28, Headship in Principle and Picture.

Eph. 1:19-23, Headship in a Person, its Purpose.
I Cor. 11:3-16, Headship in Practice.
Col. 2:10-19, Headship in Provision.
Heb. 2:8, 9, Headship in Prospect, its Power.

I Corinthians 11:3 is the key to understanding the practice of headship:

- 1 The Head of every man is Christ—no equality.
- 2 The head of the woman is the man—equality and subjection.
- 3 The Head of Christ is God—equality, yet subjection.

First principle—the man's uncovered head teaches that Christ is unveiled in the gathering (vv. 4 and 7).

Second principle—the woman's covered head teaches that the assembly is not the place to display the glory of men (vv. 5 and 7).

Third principle—the woman's long hair teaches the subjection of the assembly to the Headship of the Lord Jesus (vv. 6, 10, 15).

When the head of the woman is mentioned, we go back to verse 3 and learn that her head is symbolic of the man. When the head of the man is mentioned we go back to our key verse and learn that Christ is portrayed. This becomes very significant when we read in verse 7, "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God." Using verse 3 as the key, I understand that the uncovered head of the man is teaching that Christ is the image and glory of God and He alone is 'uncovered'—revealed in His glory when the assembly meets. No natural man should be on display there, no matter how great his gifts or his natural attainments. This is surely linked with the great principle of the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus (Col. 1:18) and is a powerful rebuke to the spirit of a Diotrephes (III John 9).

When we turn to the two coverings on the head of the

woman, we learn truth that is equally important. Paul is dealing here with headship; he is not at this point in the epistle dealing with the silence of the woman. He does this in 14:34. There was disorder in the assembly at Corinth and this is a corrective. In appealing to divine order, Paul goes back to creation. In the beginning, a man was given universal dominion over all the creatures of earth, whether they walked on the land, swam in the sea or flew in the sky. Man lost this dominion by his rebellion, but in Genesis 1:26-28, we have the truth of headship in principle. This can be proven from Psalm 8:3-9, Romans 5:14 and Hebrews 2:5-9.

This latter passage shows that Adam's sin did not change the purpose of God. It is in the eternal purpose that a Man shall have universal and eternal dominion (Eph. 1:10; 3:11). Ephesians 1:20-23 teaches that the Lord Jesus in His resurrection glory has been made Head over all things, and that He is Head to the church which is His body. Although the world He made is at present in rebellion against Him, His Headship will yet be recognised to the farthest reaches of the universe of God and every created intelligence will eventually bow willingly or unwillingly to His supreme authority (Phil. 2:10, 11; Col. 1:18-22). This teaching can scarcely be viewed by any believer as insignificant, and these are the truths that are portrayed for angels in the uncovered heads of brethren and the covered heads of sisters in an assembly.

The head of the woman which, according to verse 3, is symbolic of the man, is to be covered with a covering veil. Man is not to be displayed in an assembly, there is no place for glorying in the flesh. The covered head of the sister is a rebuke to any of us who would ever dare use an assembly gathering as a place to display self. The natural man is to be out of sight and the Man on display is the Man whom God has ordained shall have eternal dominion. While the Headship of the Lord Jesus is

denied by a sinful world, wherever an assembly meets and the covered heads of the sisters and the uncovered heads of the brethren are seen, the Headship of the Lord Jesus is displayed. The truth now seen in an assembly, and only there, will yet be displayed to a wondering universe (Psalm 72:5-17). So the covering veil on the head of the woman is signifying submission to the Lordship of Christ in an assembly. Her long hair signifies that she is in submission to the man (v. 3).

Let us be clear that the woman covers her head, and the emphasis is on the head not the hair. It is the Headship of the Lord Jesus that she is denying to any other than its rightful Owner. The veil is a covering down upon her head, it is not merely a covering for her hair which is her own glory (I Cor. 11:15). Although the veil will surely cover part of her hair, this is not its significance. In the covering of her head, man is being covered.

From verse 6 of this chapter, we learn that two coverings are being described. Some have mistakenly taken the words of verse 15, "Her hair is given her for (instead of) a covering," to mean that only one covering is in view—the long hair. A careful student will not make this mistake, for he will see that it is an entirely different word that is used for this natural veil (v. 15) from the word used for the extra veil (vv. 5, 6, 6, 7 and 13). Rather than being a covering down upon her head as in the former verses, verse 15 describes her hair, a covering that is round about her head.

Others have given significance to the extra veil, but have taught that the long hair is purely an optional thing. Neither of these contentions agrees with the words of verse 6. It can be paraphrased correctly like this, "For if the woman is not veiled, let her also cut off her hair, but seeing it is a shame for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her be veiled." The last phrase of verse 5 agrees with this, "...For that is even all

one as if she were shaven.” Do not leave out the word ‘also’. It is vital to the interpretation. The significance of this statement is that the veil is as important as the long hair, both alike are necessary and the argument is, if the woman will not veil her head she may just as well cut off her hair too.

The woman’s long hair is a sign of her submission to the man in God’s order for creation. It was given to her by nature and is her glory (v. 15). It is a sign that from the beginning of the creation it is the glory of the woman to be naturally veiled. This veil is her glory, not so much in the sense that it is her beauty, but that it veils her natural beauty with a suitable covering, given by God. Her long hair is a mark of submission in the created order and this is to her a glory, for it is the place divinely given to her, “The woman is the glory of the man” (v. 7b). The Holy Spirit now lifts this into the spiritual order so that the veiled head and long hair of the woman become a symbol of holy submission, signifying the submission of the entire assembly to Christ as Lord. Paul uses a similar argument in I Timothy 2:9-15.

In verse 10, the assembly at Corinth is seen as a classroom. God is the teacher, angels are the students and headship is the subject. In an assembly angels see holiness, divine order, headship and submission. The first time an angel is seen in ministry is in Genesis 16:9 where an angel tells Hagar to “Return to thy mistress and submit thyself...”. This first mention of an angel is in keeping with the law of first mention. Angels are still occupied with submission.

The sign on the head of the woman of her submission to authority goes back to creation (vv. 8, 9), but will be fully told out in the future pre-eminent glory of the Lord Jesus. Seeing that the head of the woman is the man, the coverings upon her head are saying that the entire assembly is submissive to the absolute authority of the Lord Jesus Christ now.

The word that is used for long hair in verse 15 originally had the meaning of healthy, or nourished. The word came to mean the length of the hair. It is not difficult to see the link in these two thoughts, healthy hair will grow. There is no room here for speculation as to the degree of longness. It should be as long as God causes it to grow. Its spiritual significance is so great that to understand the why of its spiritual meaning would make us desire to display the truth of the Headship and absolute pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus as fully as it is possible.

It may not be possible to prove to everyone's satisfaction that the scissors should never touch the hair of the woman, but this surely seems to be the plain sense of the Scripture, for the word 'shorn' means to cut off. When this has been denied there has been a progressive departure from the significance of the long hair. Cutting the hair in the front to make short bangs while leaving it long in the back is a clear departure from the sense of I Corinthians 11:6.

On this very delicate matter, I would like to make an appeal which I believe is very necessary. One young sister said that she felt it was hypocritical to 'put on a show' with long hair, God sees the heart and this is much more important. It was pointed out to her that the long hair is an object-lesson to angels (v. 10) and we have no reason to believe that angels can read hearts, nor can our fellow-believers or the world. It is a very serious matter to be a stumbling-block to others (I Cor. 8:12), and we should ever keep in mind that we are being watched by younger believers and being used as a pattern. Love to others will be displayed when we carry out the Word of God to the utmost of our ability.

Verse 16 has provided an easy explanation of all this to some readers of the Bible. According to them, Paul is saying, "If anyone does not agree with this, let him know that we have no such custom that demands long hair for

women and covered heads, and short hair for men and uncovered heads, so do as you please." No serious student of God's Word will accept this. This is the very thing Paul is not saying. He wants it to be known that what he has here taught the Corinthians has been taught and is practised in all the churches of God, that is, in all assemblies. This last verse will also emphasise the fact that the second veil, or the extra covering is a practice that should be obeyed in the churches, that is, when the church is gathered together (vv. 16-20).

The answer to the why of spiritual meaning is most significant. No spiritual mind would discount any of these physical elements. The water of baptism certainly has great significance. No spiritual person would try to dispense with the bread and the cup at the Lord's supper and we trust that none will judge as insignificant the spiritual meaning that is portrayed in the long hair and covered heads of the sisters in an assembly.

Chapter 8

Spiritual Dependence of an Assembly (1)

The Activities of the Holy Spirit in the Gathering and Government of an Assembly

It was not God's purpose that His people should ever be without spiritual power and divine guidance. The care of the Lord Jesus for His own was evident when He walked as a Man on earth, and before He went back to the Father, He promised a rich legacy to those who were left to represent Him on earth.

1 Legacies Left to His Own by the Lord

One of the most precious legacies is the authority of His name (Matt. 18:20; I Cor. 5:4). While He is absent, we have the great honour of bearing His name before the world. May God keep us from ever dishonouring that worthy name by which we are called (Jas. 2:7). It is that name that gives authority to the gathering together of a local assembly (I Cor. 5:4).

The promise of His presence continues until the end of the age (Matt. 18:20; 28:20). This is a blessed assurance that testimony will not die, but will be maintained by divine power to the very end.

He said in His High Priestly prayer to the Father, "I have given them Thy Word" (John 17:14). He put His divine stamp of approval on the New Testament before it was ever written (John 16:12-15). It is impossible to exaggerate the value of the Word of God to those who seek to bear testimony to His name in a dark and evil age.

But, He also gave the promise of His Spirit to abide

with us for ever, "For He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17). It was only after the Lord ascended that the Holy Spirit descended (John 7:39), and what would we do without His holy activities?

2 The Assembly Activities of the Spirit

An assembly is the residence of the Holy Spirit in the world and therefore it is a holy temple of God and a temple of worship and praise (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). In this chapter we will be occupied with His ministry in gathering, in glorifying Christ and in the government of an assembly. In the next chapter, we will look at His activities in gifting and in chapter 10 in guiding those He fits for service.

A. Pictures of the Spirit's Gathering Ministry

There are four lovely pictures in the Scriptures of the gathering ministry of the Holy Spirit. Each picture involves the ministry of an unnamed servant and illustrates the activity of the Holy Spirit in four spheres. He calls guests for the gospel supper (Luke 14:16-25). The parable in Matthew 22 describes servants of the king, but there is a contrast in Luke 14, there is one servant who gives the invitation and draws the guests in, in fact, he is able to compel them to come in, a blessed activity of the Holy Spirit.

He seeks a bride for the Son (Gen. 24). Scarcely can a more touching scene be found in all of Scripture than the account of the unnamed servant who went to the far country to seek a bride for the heir of the father. Those who appreciate the brides of Genesis will be well aware of the significance of this picture of the present activity of the Holy Spirit in finding the bride, bestowing upon her the earnest of the coming inheritance, escorting her across the desert, while he fills her heart with the glories of Isaac, and finally bringing her to the glad day of marriage. Blessed activities of the Holy Spirit!

He leads to communion at the table (Mark 14:12). The disciples were to meet a man bearing a pitcher of water and follow him to the house; when he went in, they followed. The large upper room furnished, is called by the Lord, "My guest-chamber". In that room, the disciples sat at the table with their Lord, and it was there that He instituted the remembrance of Himself. This is a wonderful illustration of how the Holy Spirit gathers believers to the Lord Jesus in an assembly.

He provides for labourers in the field (Ruth 2:4-7). Again we do not know the name of the servant, just that he was over the reapers and allowed Ruth to glean in the field. This is a wonderful picture of the present ministry of the Holy Spirit over all who labour for God in the great harvest field, seeking to gather sheaves for the honour of our heavenly kinsman Redeemer.

In Matthew 18:20, the Holy Spirit is the unnamed Servant who gathers believers to the name of the Lord Jesus. This verse uses the perfect participle 'gathered' in the passive voice, suggesting that the two or three did not gather themselves together, but were gathered through the activity of another. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

B. Priority of the Spirit's Glorifying Ministry

"He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:14). It is true that when the Lord said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall not speak of Himself" (v. 13), He was referring to the words the Spirit would speak, which were the words of God, and yet, from verse 14, we can clearly teach that the activity of the Holy Spirit in this age is not to draw attention to Himself, but to the glories of the Lord Jesus. Those who speak and make much of the work of the Spirit, often say little or nothing of the glories of the Lord Jesus. This cannot be truly the work of the Holy Spirit whose great priority is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them

unto us.

C. Principles of the Spirit's Guiding Ministry

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). The guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit is constant. I cannot accept His guidance when the saints are gathered together, unless I know what it means to be led by Him in all my ways. This is not a mysterious inner voice as many suggest. It is to allow the Holy Spirit to apply the written Word of God to my heart and life. He is the great Teacher, but He has but one language, and it is the language of the Word of God written, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13).

D. Preservation through the Spirit's Governing Ministry

This is the present ministry of the Holy Spirit that will occupy us in this chapter. The government of a local assembly is a very special activity of the Holy Spirit; "The Holy Spirit hath made you overseers" (Acts 20:17-38; I Tim. 3:1-16; Titus 1:5-9).

E. Provision through the Spirit's Gifting Ministry

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (I Cor., 12:4-11, 28-31). The gifting ministry of the Holy Spirit will occupy us in the next chapter.

3 The Rule of the House

An assembly is a house of God (I Tim. 3:15), and God will not have a disorderly house. The NT gives us clear features of the divine rule:

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ pre-eminent (Col. 1:18).
- B. The sole authority of the Word (I Cor. 14:37).
- C. The presiding of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 14).
- D. Godly guides esteemed and obeyed (I Thess. 5:12).

It is this feature of godly guides that we want to examine:

The Elderhood

The calling and fitting of elders is a particular work of the Holy Spirit, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Paul says, "But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care in the heart of Titus for you" (II Cor. 8:16). This latter verse gives us a key as to how the Holy Spirit 'makes overseers'. He puts an earnest care in their hearts for the people of God. It takes the heart of a shepherd to feed, guide, care and protect the little flock, and only the Holy Spirit can prepare such a heart.

The preparation takes time, for overseers are also called elders, that is, they are mature in spiritual things. Natural age does not produce an overseer, but time is necessary in the school of God to bring a man to this maturity. The name, elder, tells of their maturity, overseer tells of their responsibility, for they see over the needs of the little flock, which is the expression used to describe an assembly (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2). They visit among the sheep to meet their spiritual needs. The word overseer has both these meanings, one who sees over and one who visits (I Tim. 3:1).

They are also called pastors or under-shepherds (Eph. 4:11). This describes their shepherd care (I Pet. 5:2). Peter is careful to say that the shepherds are among the flock, knowing their trials and needs, not isolated from them, nor lording it over the charge allotted to them, but being examples to the flock (vv. 2, 3).

Elders often function as deacons (I Tim. 3:8-13). There is a body of elders in each assembly, but there is not a permanent body of deacons. The seven men chosen for deacon work in Acts 6 were soon involved in

work, other than the material care of tables. Any believer in an assembly, brother or sister, who meets the spiritual requirements of I Timothy 3:8-13, can function in a practical deacon capacity. It literally means to do a particular service for God or His people, involving the practical, material things such as caring for the building where the saints meet. However, it also involves spiritual service such as teaching or preaching in which, of course, sisters would not be involved (I Cor. 14:34). We should not try to compare the worth of practical against spiritual service; if done for the Lord Jesus, both alike are of tremendous worth in the sight of God.

The word deacon is more often used in the NT of doing spiritual rather than practical service. Paul and Apollos were deacons through whom the Corinthians were saved (I Cor. 3:5). Paul was a deacon of the mystery of the church (Col. 1:25), and a deacon of the gospel (Eph. 3:7). The word deacon is used to describe the service of Timothy, Epaphras, Tychicus, and even the ministry of angels. It is correct to say that all elders function as deacons, but certainly all deacons are not elders.

When elders are described in relation to their accountability, they are called stewards (Titus 1:7). They have been entrusted with a precious charge, the care of the local assembly that belongs to the Lord and is so precious to Him. They will be called to account for their stewardship when the Lord will return (Luke 12:41-44; I Cor. 4:1).

Spiritual Requirements for Elders

The requirements for elders are given to us in two parallel passages (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). A careful reading of these requirements will show that these features should be seen in every believer, but they are a 'must' for elders (I Tim. 3:2).

Perhaps the designated features are plain enough

without any explanation, but four of them in the Timothy passage have given some people difficulty. "To be blameless" (v. 2) means to have no valid charge that can be laid against the elder from believers, or the world.

"The husband of one wife" (v. 2) means that the elder has a moral character beyond reproach. He is a one-woman man, not ever giving any cause to believe that he desires any other woman. It does not mean if the wife of an elder dies that he cannot remarry, but it must be a marriage in the Lord.

"Apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2), has been a bone of contention with some. It does not have to be interpreted that the elder must be a very gifted teacher, for many of the most godly elders cannot make this claim. If Paul had wanted to say, gifted to teach, it seems to me he would have said it plainly. The words he uses indicate a readiness to teach when it is needed, or an ability to recognise the need of teaching and a readiness to meet the need. This could be privately, or in the assembly meetings, and I would suggest that many elders see the need and seek to meet it by inviting men who are gifted teachers to visit the assembly. This fits the description, "a lover of good men" (Titus 1:8, KJV).

"Ruleth well his own house" (v. 4), means while his children are under his roof. When they are grown and gone, they are no longer part of the household over which he rules.

One long sentence in the Titus passage has great significance, "For the overseer must be blameless, as God's steward; not selfwilled, not soon angry, no brawler, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good, soberminded, just, holy, temperate, holding to the faithful Word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7-9, RV). What a description this

is, and yet, I know many men who fill it well. Thank God for all such men of God.

The authority of elders does not reside in themselves as men, but in the Word of God that they live as examples and teach by precepts (Heb. 13:7, 8; I Pet. 5:1-4).

The functions of the elderhood are described for us in the following ways. They rule for God in the assembly where the Holy Spirit has raised them up. There is no such thing as a district overseer (I Tim. 3:4, 5; 5:17; I Thess. 5:12). They are spiritual guides (Heb. 13:7); they are shepherds (I Pet. 5:1-4), and they are to do nothing by partiality (I Tim. 5:21).

The Scripture has much to say about the attitude of believers toward elders. They are to be recognised (I Thess. 5:12), acknowledged (I Cor. 16:18), esteemed (I Thess. 5:12), submitted to (I Cor. 16:15, 16) and obeyed (Heb. 13:17). They are never elected by a popular vote, for it is impossible to make a man an elder by any human act. However, the word used in Titus 1:5 does make it clear that men who had the qualifications and were doing the work were "pointed out" by Titus to the believers. This was not a making of elders, but an acknowledging or recognising of them.

Because they are in the public eye, they are open to criticism and to attack by those who may wrongly be envious of them. Special protection is afforded to them. No charge is to be accepted for investigation against them unless it is in the mouth of two or three witnesses (I Tim. 5:17-21).

Those who have been faithful to God in their stewardship of feeding, guarding, shepherding and guiding the little flock will receive a reward in the presence of their Lord (Heb. 13:17); "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Pet. 5:4).

Chapter 9

Spiritual Dependence of an Assembly (2)

The Gifts that are Given

The NT gives us four lists of the gifts that have been given to believers, assemblies, and the body, to maintain testimony for God through the centuries. The first list describes gifts given to saints by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:4-11). All the gifts in the two lists that are found in this chapter had some element of the supernatural in their function. This is not a denial that all spiritual gifts, or more correctly, spirituals, are supernatural. The Corinthian gifts were also supernatural in function. Most of them were sign gifts that were temporary. Those that are still in existence, function in a different form today (I Cor. 13:8-13). These sign gifts passed away, not because testimonies failed and the Lord withdrew them in discipline, as some have contended, but because they were intended to be temporary and were inferior in value. This will be like blasphemy to the followers of the charismatic movement, but it is the Holy Spirit that tells us in what way they were inferior and why they ceased.

We should test the above statements by Scripture. The sign gifts were inferior because they were only of partial value. As an example, a NT prophet was able to stand up in an assembly and speak words from God that exactly suited the need of the hour. He did not read from Scripture, but spoke the words of God with his lips. The gifts of knowledge and wisdom were similar. Whereas in our time, we turn to the written Word for answers to questions and problems, these early assemblies looked to men with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom. However, in these three gifts, there was not a full revelation of the

mind of God. It was in part, a partial revelation of His mind. It suited the need of the hour, but new words were needed for each occasion. When the entire revelation of the mind of God was given in His written Word, this partial wisdom and knowledge and words from the prophets became redundant and ceased (I Cor. 13:8-10). This is the literal meaning of the words, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect (complete) is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." If it had been His will, God could have continued this kind of communication, but it was His will that something better should be given—His full revelation in the Scriptures of truth.

Secondly, the sign gifts were inferior because they were marks of testimonies in their infancy. Paul made this clear when he wrote about these gifts, "When I was a child (an infant in arms), I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Cor. 13:11). The RV reading makes this even plainer, "Now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." It is not a mark of advanced spirituality to desire sign gifts, or to profess to have them, it is a mark of infancy.

There are those who will discount this use of I Corinthians 13, and will point to the language of verse 12 as referring to heaven, and future glory. Even if this verse has a future interpretation, this does not detract from what has been written above. In verse 11, Paul uses language about the present, "Now that I am become a man," whereas in verse 12, he seems to be speaking of the future when he says, "But then shall I know." The reasons for doing this seem to be quite clear in the chapter. The full revelation of the mind of God in His Word is a wonderful improvement over the partial word of the prophets, and the partial knowledge of the gift of knowledge, but there is also something ahead that is

even greater, when I will leave earth for glory and stand in His presence "And know even as also I have been known" (v. 12, RV).

Some even see verse 12 as the completed revelation of God's mind in the completed Scriptures, but it seems to me the above explanation better fits the language of this verse.

The second list, in I Corinthians 12:28-31, is not a list of gifts given to men by the Holy Spirit, as the first list, but are gifted men given to the assembly at Corinth. Truly, they came behind in no gift.

Romans 12:3-8, gives a list of activities of gifted believers. These believers are to give themselves to the particular service that has been entrusted to them through the measure of grace God has given them to exercise their gifts. The gift of prophecy still appears in this list, but the other six activities are functioning today, and all are greatly needed.

The five gifts listed in Ephesians 4:4-11 are men who were given by the Lord Jesus to the body. The apostles and prophets are in this list, and it is in this epistle that we have the statement, "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner Stone" (Eph. 2:20). It is a mistake to think of them as part of the foundation, rather, they were engaged in the laying of the foundation (I Cor. 3:11).

This is the only time the gift of the evangelist is listed, and the reason for this is quite obvious, for the evangelist is active in the work of bringing people into the body.

It seems better to view the pastors and teachers as being distinct gifts to the body. The closer link between them in the language of the verse can be explained by the function of these gifted men. I scarcely think that a teacher can be of much value if he does not have a shepherd heart to care for saints, but there are men who have a great shepherd's heart who do not have great

ability to teach.

From what has been said thus far, it will be clear that there are three categories of gifts:

- 1 Foundational—apostles and prophets.
- 2 Temporary—sign gifts.
- 3 Permanent—evangelists, pastors and teachers.

I have found that it is helpful to compare the four lists of gifts that are found in I Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4:

<i>I Corinthians 12</i>		<i>Romans 12</i>	<i>Ephesians 4</i>
Wisdom	Apostles	Prophecy	Apostles
Knowledge	Prophets	Service	Prophets
Faith	Teachers	Teaching	Evangelists
Healing	Miracles	Exhortations	Pastors
Miracles	Healers	Giving	Teachers
Prophecy	Helps	Rule	
Discernment	Government	Showing mercy	
Tongues	Tongues		
Interpreting			

One reason for producing these lists is to show how the sign gifts disappeared as NT days passed, until they became a thing of the past. When a loved one is sick, it would be wonderful to have the gift of healing, but it is wise to remember that even when such gifts were functioning, it was not always God's mind to heal. Epaphroditus, so highly esteemed by Paul, and so loved by the Philippian assembly, was sick nigh unto death, and recovered without the function of the healing gift (Phil. 2:25-30). Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick, and there was no miraculous healing, even though Paul was in need of his companionship (II Tim. 4:20). Paul had a thorn in the flesh which appears to have been a physical malady. He besought the Lord three times that it might be taken away from him, but received the answer, "My

grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Cor. 12:9). Those who insist that sin and sickness in the life of a believer are to be treated alike and put away, and it is always the mind of God to heal, have never examined these words of Paul. They are attempting to remove from the hand of the Lord the very means that he has so often used to teach us and to refine us. Although the gift of healing is not functioning today, and those who profess to have it do not live longer lives with less physical problems than other people, yet, it is still true to this very hour that "if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (I John 5:14). God just knows so much more than we do, and knows what is best for us, but it is still true, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa. 84:11).

The Corinthian chapters that deal with gifts and their functions are of great value to us. They tell us for instance how to test the value of gifts. The first test is given in I Corinthians 12, and asks the question, To what degree is God glorified in the gift? The second test is given in chapter 13, and asks the question, To what degree is love exercised in the gift? The third test is the great subject of chapter 14, To what degree is the church edified by the gift?

There has never been a gift given that is so great that there is not full room to exercise it within the sphere that the Word of God decrees. The gifts function in an assembly, (I Cor. 14:19). The gift of the teacher may function in a number of assemblies in which he is encouraged to exercise it. The work of the evangelist is toward the world (II Tim. 4:5), but always in relation to the local church (see Acts 13 to 15).

We have seen that gifts are given by God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are likely given at conversion. Timothy's gift was given to him through a

prophetic utterance. He was singled out to receive it, very likely at the time of his conversion, and at a later time, the elders recognised the work of God that had been done in its bestowal, and gladly gave him their commendation (I Tim. 4:14; Acts 16:2). The laying on of Paul's hands (II Tim. 1:6) may refer to a recognition of the gift, an identification with Timothy in the use of his gift, and this would take us also to the Acts 16 passage at the time of his commendation from Lystra. There are others who believe that apostolic instrumentality may have been involved in the giving of the gift. I have no problem with this, for we have no apostles today, and yet the gifts are still being given; and as with Paul and others in the New Testament, their bestowal can be traced right back to conversion. It is a good practice to exercise any gift given at the very beginning of Christian experience. Of course, the young believer should exercise his gift according to his own level of experience and under the guidance of older brethren.

Some have used I Corinthians 12:31 as evidence that a believer can desire a gift and even pray for its bestowal, "Covet earnestly the best gifts." Once again, the study of the context will help us in understanding this statement. Just preceding it is a list of gifted men given to an assembly. I suggest that this is not a coveting of a best gift for myself, but the coveting of gifted men to be raised up in an assembly.

Do all have a gift? There are at least four gifts that all Christians can have. There is the gift of helps (I Cor. 12:28). We know many beloved saints who have this gift to a marked degree. There is the gift of showing mercy (Rom. 12:8), and this is surely a gift of God's grace. There is the gift of serving others (Rom. 12:7), and the gift of giving (Rom. 12:8). It is a timely exhortation that we do not neglect these gifts.

The Word of God and some experience in the work of God have taught us that no man is a judge of his own

gift. "A man's gift maketh room for him" (Prov. 18:16), so often quoted in this connection, really has nothing to do with it. Solomon is really saying that a gift given as a bribe will open opportunities for the giver. It is easy to understand how this verse has been quoted so often with the meaning that a man with a gift does not have to make opportunities for himself, because his gift will be recognised by godly elder brethren. A man who has a gift to be used for the blessing of God's people will not need to invite himself for meetings, he will be asked by responsible elders and encouraged to minister to the saints. "Let the prophets speak two or three and let the others discern" (I Cor. 14:29, RV), that is, others of the same kind. The practice that applied to the functioning of the prophetic gift applies today in the function of any gift that is for the edification of an assembly. It is edification that is the main theme of this chapter. There is no man that can be a greater problem to believers than a good man who is attempting a work for which he has no divine fitness, for few would want to be harsh on a good man.

It is from I Corinthians 14 that we learn much about the order of meetings and how the gifts function by the Holy Spirit's control and power. I find it is very touching that in Corinth, the believers met together in the name of the Lord Jesus and their meetings had three ingredients. They sang with the spirit and with the understanding, they prayed in the same manner, and they listened to ministry from the Word of God that would build them up (v. 14). At least, this is what they should have been doing. It sounds very familiar, for we are still practising this order.

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things

may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (I Pet. 4:10, 11).

Chapter 10

Spiritual Dependence of an Assembly (3)

The Holy Spirit's Guidance in Service

The precious truth of the priesthood of all believers was recovered in the days of the Reformation. Awakened from the error of the Roman priesthood, Martin Luther wrote, "All Christians are altogether priests, he who says otherwise says it without the Word of God, on no authority but the sayings and customs of men." With such light from Scripture, how tragic that in the Protestant systems a professional ministerialism has generally been substituted for priestcraft and the clergy/laity system is as firmly entrenched in Christendom as ever! How careful we should be to avoid, like a plague, every form of professionalism and officialism in the things of God! It seems to be an easy snare for our feet.

Of course, we should be quick to point out that Martin Luther had in mind that believers have a right to draw near to God through the Lord Jesus apart from any human mediator, such as the priests of Rome. He appreciated the truth, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). We thank God that he knew this truth, but it is unlikely that he saw that the holy priesthood of the NT is drawing near to God, not only on behalf of myself, but on behalf of others. Whatever he may have understood, we should understand the true significance of holy priesthood.

A Definition of New Testament Priesthood

In the OT there was a priestly family, but in the NT all

believers form part of the holy priesthood and are a kingdom of priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Yet, there is much to learn from the pattern of Aaron and his sons about NT priesthood. It was the intention of God that Israel should be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:4-6). Three of the four statements about our holy priesthood in I Peter 2 come from Exodus 19. Israel’s national priesthood was conditional (Ex. 19:5), but Israel failed to hear God’s voice, and keep His covenant, resulting in the divine choice of the tribe of Levi, and the separating of one family in it to the priesthood (Ex. 28:1).

Israel’s high priest is described for us, in Hebrews 5:1, in language that is very helpful to our understanding of priesthood.

- 1 He was a man,
- 2 Taken from among men,
- 3 Appointed for men,
- 4 In things pertaining to God,
- 5 That he might offer gifts and sacrifices.

Hebrews 5:1 adds that the sacrifices offered were for sins, both his own and the sins of the people. The great contrast between these many offerings for sins and the work of our Great High Priest is a major theme of Hebrews. Thank God, our Lord Jesus had no need to offer for His own sins (7:27), for He had none. He offered one sacrifice for sins for ever (10:12), so the continual offerings by Israel’s priests were only a shadow of that one offering that has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The contrasts are great, yet we learn much about priestly function from the priesthood of Aaron and his sons.

We are a holy and royal priesthood by birthright privilege (I Pet. 2:5-9), and we have a vital link to the Great High Priest who ministers in holy perfection before the very throne of God. The birthright of priesthood includes all who are born of God in this age,

both brethren and sisters, the venerable elder and the youngest believer. As holy and royal priests, we have the holy privilege of entering within the veil (Heb. 10:19-22). This is the sanctuary of our priestly service.

“Within the holiest of all,
Cleansed by His precious blood,
Before Thy throne Thy children fall
And worship Thee, our God.”

James G. Deck

The Collective Character of Priesthood

We can thank God that, as Martin Luther understood, we always have access to God within the veil when we come as children to the Father and bow our knees in the secret of His presence. However, priesthood involves much more than this. According to the definition given to us in Hebrews 5:1, it is a service “for men, in things pertaining to God.” It is a function toward God primarily, in the offering up of “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 2:5). This function of priesthood is always described in the NT in a collective sense. A believer is never called a priest in the singular, but collectively we are a priesthood. We do not deny the individual approach to God on the ground of the precious shed blood of Christ, but we are stressing the truth of collective priestly function as being distinct from priestly privilege. When we gather as an assembly, the ones who audibly take part, whether it is as petitioners in prayer, or as worshippers in the sacrifice of praise, are praying or praising as the voice of the assembled company. Brethren are functioning in their priesthood, as they are led intelligently by the Holy Spirit, and are performing a service “for men in things pertaining to God.” They are putting into practice the great truth that all believers are part of the holy priesthood of the NT.

This is the reason that any restrictions placed by men on prayer or praise are interfering with the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit over the functions of priesthood. It is literally impossible to carry out NT priesthood in a place where one man is the designated pastor or minister. This becomes a major problem if the Spirit is moving the hearts of believers in worship and one man is functioning as the priest. There is no room for priesthood to function under such conditions. Is it any wonder that such strong language is used by the Lord about the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which simply means rulers over the laity. The Lord says, "Which thing I hate" (Rev. 2:15). Surely an exercised believer cannot associate himself with a thing that the Lord hates!

As we know, "God is not the author of confusion," and He moves on the priesthood in keeping with His own Word, that is, He would never move a sister to rise up in audible worship. There was much disorder in Corinth, and I Corinthians 14:23 to 33 is written to correct some of the disorder, but verse 26 is a statement of how the assembly functioned, "Every one of you hath a Psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." If we can prove nothing else from this verse, we can surely show that one man was not the one voice of the assembly.

The Distinction between Gift and Priesthood

As we have seen in chapter 9, deacon work can be either of a practical nature or spiritual, but by far the most deacon work described in the NT is spiritual. This deacon service involves the exercise of gift. It may be the labours of the evangelist or the teacher, and includes aspects of the work of shepherds in their tender care of the sheep of the flock. Deacon work corresponds to the OT levitical service and involves a divine call and fitness

to a particular work. It is the exercise of a divinely given gift.

For some reason deacon work has been confused in the minds of some with the thought of priesthood. NT priesthood is not linked to gift at all. It is the birthright privilege of all who are saved. It is not a lack of gift that restricts priestly function; it is the absence of a heart that is warm toward Christ. It is true that some men are public men and find it much easier to express themselves in an assembly meeting than others. A man may feel keenly his own inadequacies and believe that others can take part in prayer or praise far better than he, yet he may be enjoying in his own soul true communion with God. His audible expression of thanks may be sweeter to God and more stirring to the souls of the saints than the long and learned thanksgiving of the other. It takes a heart that appreciates Christ to worship; a spirit on which the Holy Spirit has moved to produce true worship to God for His Son (Phil. 3:3). This has nothing to do with gift.

The Link between Priestly and Levitical Service

Even a casual reading of such chapters as Numbers 3 and 4 will convince us that priestly service has priority over levitical service. In fact, levitical service never functioned by itself. A clear lesson is in this for us. Brethren who are responsible for the preaching of the gospel as part of an assembly gospel testimony are functioning in levitical service. Have they also exercised their priestly function? It is doubtful that a man should ever preach or teach who has not shown a consistent exercise as to his priesthood. Some are willing and ready to preach whose voice is never raised to God in "the sacrifice of praise" at the breaking of bread. We believe this is unscriptural.

In the prayer meeting that precedes a gospel meeting, we are often impressed at the number of brethren who

take part intelligently in intercession for the unsaved. This is commendable, but it is tragic that so few of these voices are ever heard at the breaking of bread. This is a strong evidence of our spiritual poverty and of the lack of a spirit of worship among us. How often, on the other hand, has it thrilled our hearts to hear a simple, heart-warming expression of thanksgiving to God by one who may not be long saved, but is ready to offer according to his own appreciation of Christ.

The Sacrifices of New Testament Priesthood

Again, we draw our illustrations from the OT. "None shall appear before me empty" (Ex. 23:15), and "They shall not appear before the Lord empty" (Deut. 16:16), are commands that have clear application to us. Our presentation to God as a holy priesthood must first involve the offering of our *persons*, as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service" (spiritual worship, Rom. 12:1, RV margin). This verse is collective as well as individual and contains some of the main expressions relating to priesthood in the NT, such as, "sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" and "present". All other offerings are based on this offering of ourselves. We are often moved as we sing the words written by Isaac Watts:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my heart, my life, my all!"

When we have presented our persons, the offering of our *praise* will follow (Heb. 13:15). It is to be offered continually and is "the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (v. 15). It is not the seed of our lips, but rather the fruit, which suggests nurture, development, careful picking and the selection of the best to offer as precious

thoughts concerning the Lord Jesus. Throughout the week, the Holy Spirit, if we give place to Him, will do a work of cultivation in the heart until fully-developed fruit is offered as praise to God. It is a tragedy if we wait until we are gathered together to gather our thoughts about Him, perhaps from the hymns that are being sung, or the expressions of others. Concerning such a practice in the Jewish economy, Malachi wrote, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me, saith the Lord" (3:8).

While we should appreciate the most simple expression of thanksgiving, God expects that those who have the ability to appreciate Christ, and enter into the glories and excellencies of His Person and work should be able to rise higher in worship than only to thank God for the blessing of sins forgiven, and the assurance of eternal life. It is not a very high level of worship to be occupied with anything we have received. The worth of the Person of Christ and God's delight in Him and His work is a far higher level of true worship, and agrees with the activity of the Holy Spirit in this age, "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you" (John 16:14).

When our persons and our praise have been offered, then there will be joy in the offering of our *possessions* (Heb. 13:16). This is the subject of chapter 21 of this book.

The offering of our *prayers* collectively is also priestly function. Again, we need to distinguish between entering into the presence of our Father as His children, and coming before Him collectively in the assembly prayer meeting. Both are a great privilege, but they are distinct. Time is a factor in both privileges, but in an opposite sense. There is no substitute for time spent alone with God, and much time in His presence is a sore lack that should cause all of us to bow in confession. However, when we meet in an assembly prayer meeting,

we should pray briefly and to the point. Our prayer should have a distinct burden and not be a long rambling over many things. Prayers that last more than five minutes must be indeed in the Spirit, or they will weary the saints and cause their ears to be shut against the voice. If there are few brethren in an assembly prayer meeting, it is better to pray more than once, than to pray long, rambling prayers. It is likely that more would participate in prayer if a few brethren did not pray so long and ask God about every need in the one prayer. Others would be encouraged to pray for the things that have not as yet been mentioned. The longest prayer in the Bible is much shorter than the average assembly prayer of some brethren. The Lord did not commend long public prayers (Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47). There are times when we forget the words of the wise man, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. 5:2).

The true meaning of prayer is a vast subject that cannot be taken up in this work. B.F. Westcott has written, "True prayer, the prayer that must be answered, is the personal recognition and acceptance of the divine will" (John 14:7; I John 5:14).

God grant that these considerations may exercise us to enter more fully into the great privileges of NT priesthood and thus bring glory to God.

Chapter 11

Assembly Gospel Testimony

Each of the three times that the Lord commissioned His own to bear the glad gospel tidings to a sinful world, there was a particular emphasis on one aspect of the great evangel. In Mark 16:15, 16, He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." The emphasis was preach and baptise believers. In Matthew 28:19-20, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age." (RV). The emphasis was, make disciples, baptise and teach them, and the promise of His abiding presence. In Acts 1:8, the Lord said, "But ye shall receive power...and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." The emphasis is on power given for witness. The gospel testimony of an assembly should have all the ingredients of these three statements. The Lord did not commission anyone to only go and tell people how to be saved. It involved much more.

1 The Mandate

"Go ye," preach, baptise, teach and witness. There is a common factor in all the three statements mentioned above. The commission was to 'all the world,' 'to every creature,' 'to all nations' and 'to the uttermost parts of the earth.' The full commission to be followed by an

assembly is to reach out to an entire world of lost sinners.

Every assembly believer is exhorted to live the gospel, witness to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus, and speak (gossip) the gospel to every creature. Evangelists herald the gospel. They proclaim it according to special ability which the risen Lord has given to them (Eph. 4:11). This is the divine methodology. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). There is a power and blessing in the preached word that is lacking in a personal discussion or a Bible study. These latter activities are very valuable in making contact with people, and making them aware of gospel truth, but there is in the public heralding of the gospel that which the Spirit uses to bring about conviction and conversion. God can work without the preaching, yet He chose this as His major method.

2 The Messenger

The Lord told Ananias when he inquired about Saul of Tarsus, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Paul's calling and commission were unique, but what a privilege in some small way to be a chosen vessel to bear His name!

The messenger is more important than his preaching. It may take a few hours to prepare a message to preach, but it takes a lifetime to prepare 'a man sent from God.' E.M. Bounds wrote many years ago, "Men are always looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men." More elaborate methods, and complex machinery is a human effort to overcome our own powerlessness to do a real work for eternity in the souls of men. God is looking for men and women who will live holy lives and preach holy words from God. God said to Ezekiel, "Thou shalt hear the word at My mouth and warn them from Me" (33:7).

The preparation of the messenger's heart is a much

deeper work than the preparing of his message. A heart full of Christ will overflow in messages that reach the hearts of others. The spirit of the messenger must be moved upon by the Holy Spirit to produce on his lips words from God. He must be trained, but God's school is the best place for his spiritual education. His joy in Christ, his compassion for souls, his grasp of eternity, his zeal for the gospel and his exhausting labours in the field are marks of the true messenger. It is in the presence of God on his knees with an open Book in his hand that the messenger is prepared to be "The Lord's messenger in the Lord's message" (Haggai 1:13).

3 The Might

It was out of the belly of the great fish that Jonah prayed, "Salvation is of the Lord." God often brings his servants to the lowest place of their history to show them the same truth. It is learned very early in gospel work, but it is relearned time and again throughout a lifetime of labour for God. Whenever we are not willing to wait for God to do His work, we will produce the spurious work of mere men that may do far more damage to souls and the testimony than all the good we ever accomplished.

Before souls are saved, they are convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). We cannot bring this about through emotional appeals and frightening stories. When souls are saved, they are born of God (John 1:13). It is "not of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." John 3:6 says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." True believers are a divine workmanship (Eph. 2:10), and are as distinctly the work of God as the placing of the sun in the heaven. We should be in terror of putting our hand to a work which only God can do. There comes a time in the dealing of God with a soul when men must stand aside and God alone do His own work. Oh for the grace and the wisdom and some restraint on the flesh to

allow God to do His work!

Our complete confidence should be in the power of the preached word applied to hearts in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. "For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword..." (Heb. 4:12).

There are times in our gospel efforts that the power is lacking. This is not a time to invent new methods and machinery. God's delays are tests of faith and sent for our blessing. I have learned a small thing in forty years of gospel preaching; there are times of visitation from God. We cannot work up these times or bring them down. "Salvation is of the Lord;" but it is our responsibility to labour faithfully in the great harvest field and leave the results with God.

4 The Motives

Paul is a remarkable example of a truly devoted bondservant of Christ. II Corinthians 5 describes three motives that moved him in his service.

A. He longed to be well-pleasing to his Lord so that when he stood before Him at the judgment seat of Christ, he would win his Lord's approval (vv. 9, 10).

B. He deeply loved the souls of men and knowing the terror of the Lord, he sought to persuade men (v. 11).

C. The love of Christ constrained him to love in return (v. 14).

To constrain means to press upon. It is the word that is used of the pressing crowds on the day the woman with the issue of blood was healed (Mark 5:27). The love of Christ pressed upon him with a power that caused him to love in return.

It is good to remind our hearts that when the gospel is preached, the glory of God is involved (I Tim. 1:11). Paul told his converts, it was "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (II Cor. 4:4, RV). We love to see results from all preaching and believe it should be so, but we should not

forget that God is glorified, and His beloved Son is glorified when the gospel is preached, and this is true even when visible fruit is not seen. This should encourage assemblies to continue their gospel meetings on Lord's Day evening, even though results may be small.

5 The Models

The Lord Jesus is the true pattern for seeking the lost. He travelled through Samaria and sat on the well of Sychar, weary, yet waiting for the sinful woman whose eternal blessing He desired (John 4:4). It was after her conversion that the Lord said to His disciples, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work" (v. 34). Then, lifting up His eyes on the fields in that valley between the mountains, He said, "Look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together" (vv. 35, 36). His mind must have gone back to the words of the Psalm of the Ascent, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psa. 126:5, 6). We look forward to that day when "The tears of the sower and the song of the reaper shall mingle together in joy by and by."

Paul's labours in the gospel are a pattern to be imitated. He laboured to exhaustion, willing to be the smallest part of the offering up to God of the souls he won (Phil. 2:16, 17). He had a debt he never could repay and lived his life in devotion to the Lord to whom he owed his all (Rom. 1:14).

Timothy is called by Paul, "God's servant in the gospel of Christ" (I Thess. 3:2). God may have put this book into the hand of a young man who He is preparing for this noble and holy work. No calling could be more

honourable than to be a lowly messenger of a crucified and risen Saviour and Lord. It was to Timothy that Paul wrote his last words. He was about to go out and lay his head on the executioner's block. Listen to his final exhortation, "Preach the word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine... Watch thou in all things, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (II Tim. 4:3, 5). Timothy is a worthy example for all of us who labour as servants of God in the gospel. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. 11:30).

The models that are given to us in the NT were wholly consecrated to the Lord for the work of the gospel. There seems to be no middle ground between a consuming passion for the lost and absolute indifference. The Lord hates lukewarmness (Rev. 3:16). More souls are lost through indifference than through false teaching.

6 The Message

Nothing more important can be said about the message than Paul's words to Timothy, "Preach the Word" (II Tim. 4:2).

Messages are prepared in the closet of prayer and at the desk of diligent study. The source book for all living and preaching is the Bible. It is only truth that has searched my own heart, stirred my own spirit or thrilled my own soul that will move the hearers. If I have not enjoyed the gospel I am preaching, it will not be enjoyable to any who hear me. Many seem to preach with no joy in their soul. The warnings must be plain and the entreaties tender, but the message of the gospel should always be preached from a heart that is enraptured with Christ.

Read the Word with the gospel in mind to find subjects. Study the Word diligently to know your subject well. Use simple texts, and there are hundreds of plain gospel verses in the Bible, so do not attempt to find

the gospel in a verse that does not mean what you are preaching from it. Have a message that is distinct and easy to recall, so that a listener could easily tell afterwards the message that was preached. One point well made is better than a hundred points that are not clear. "This one thing I know" is far better than "These many things I dabble in." Be simple, be pointed, be brief. Study the best way to simply state a truth. Never use a larger word, when a smaller one is better. Preach to reach each hearer. Never address a blank sea of faces; always speak directly to individual hearts. Preach the Word and testify to your own understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Christ Jesus, the Lord.

Look for illustrations in your personal experiences. They are to a message like windows to a house, letting in the light. When using illustrations from other sources, be sure of your facts. But remember, a string of stories, no matter how well they are tied together, is not a gospel message.

There should be some understanding of the spirit of the age, for although there is but one gospel message, it needs to be applied to each hearer according to his background, former knowledge and life experience. There is ample Scripture to show that gospel preaching must suit the need of the hearers. Compare Paul's preaching in Acts 13 with his preaching on Mars Hill in Acts 17.

There is a final test to make before a message is preached. The gospel is man's ruin and God's remedy. Check every message by the plain test, Does this message tell about sin and the blood? I am not suggesting that every message must be about the blood, but every message should direct sinners to Christ and His work. The sinner should never be directed to do anything, but always to look to the Saviour who has done all the work to save.

7 The Methods

There are people who give courses in soul-winning and begin with their chosen method. The Lord told the disciples, "I will make you fishers of men." This is His prerogative and He alone can do it. There are three rules for fishing: keep out of sight, keep further out of sight and keep still further out of sight. And yet, there are many lessons to be learned in the work of the gospel. I went to the work of the Lord with a veteran that was recognised as being one of the wisest soul-winners of our time. Almost everyone has a speciality. His speciality was the souls of men and he laboured over them day and night with unflagging zeal and energy. Many a young man dear Lorne McBain helped, but none as much as I, for I worked with him for many years in the gospel, serving as a son with a father. He taught me much, some of it I would have learned eventually, and some of it, I would never have learned. For this reason, I have deep compassion for many a younger man who has never had this kind of personal training.

Souls are not programmed robots, each is an individual with their own background, problems and degree of knowledge. When personal witnessing is being done, be a good listener, find out the person's thoughts and problems, and use great patience to allow him ample opportunity to express himself. One of the most common mistakes we make is to launch into our prepared sermon without ever discovering the need of the person to whom we are speaking.

If you ask, "Are you a Christian?" and the person answers in the affirmative, yet is only a nominal Christian, you are put in the position of having to contradict him. This is a poor start for any conversation. Rather, ask a question, such as, "Do you believe it is possible for a person to know that he has eternal life?" This will tell you much about the person. If he professes to have eternal life, you can ask him how he knows he

has it, and this will open up a discussion that is positive. A negative start usually ends abruptly.

In this day of earth-shaking events, there are people to whom the question, "Do you believe that the Lord Jesus will come back again?" is most appropriate. Or you can lead up to His coming again by speaking of events that the Bible has foretold. Many people have been stirred by reading such books as Hal Lindsay's "Late Great Planet Earth". You will not agree with all that the author is associated with, but do not miss the opportunity to take advantage of this opening. Always build on the positive knowledge the person possesses, rather than engaging in an argument about where he is wrong.

Testify with joy in your own salvation. Learn from your own mistakes. If you have failed in a conversation, examine the causes of failure and apply the lessons learned to the next person with similar problems.

In opposing cults, it is most effective to point out that the gospel we are preaching is "The faith once for all delivered to the saints." It is truly the faith of our fathers, and does not exclusively belong to us, but along with all true believers down through the centuries, we belong to it.

All effective witnesses make opportunities. The late Oliver Smith of Iowa was in a restaurant for a meal. He said to the waitress, "I am a happy man," and he meant it and looked it, but she did not rise to the bait, so when she returned to the table, he said, "Do you want to know why I am so happy?" We cannot all be like such men, but we can learn lessons from them.

Each assembly has the world for a parish, but there is an area about which there is particular responsibility. Of the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad" (I Thess. 1:8). This is true of assemblies today. They have a primary

responsibility for their immediate area, but also have been instrumental in the support of work far afield in their homeland and on the mission fields of the world.

Every assembly should be gospel-minded. It is desirable that every assembly have a series of gospel meetings in their own area at least once in two years. There are places where no special gospel effort has been held for many years. There is no substitute for the nightly preaching of the gospel. "Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29). There are assemblies who have large numbers among them who were saved in such special gospel efforts, but are not practising this old method of series of gospel meetings, in fact, many of them have even abandoned the gospel meeting on Lord's Day evening. They have substituted a family Bible hour where they confess that they cannot 'preach at' the people who attend. Summer camps seem to be their gospel work, but these are no substitute for preaching that awakens sinners and brings them under conviction and to true repentance before God. Many of us humbly thank God that we were not brought up in a place where they have abandoned nightly preaching, or we would still be on the way to hell, or already there. Never abandon the gospel meeting or the gospel series. There are no shortcuts or easy methods to do work that will stand for eternity.

If, in the goodness of God, you have the great privilege of helping a seeking, troubled soul, there is a primary lesson that none can afford to be without: wait for God. Do not make the mistake of denying to the Holy Spirit His prerogative to open blinded eyes and to cause the light of the gospel to dawn on a dark soul (II Cor. 4:4). Direct him to what has been done by the Lord Jesus on the cross; never direct him to do anything such as asking the Lord into his life or heart. We cannot tell a soul how to believe, and it is only utter confusion to

attempt to do it. The Bible never does. We can tell him Who to believe and give him the Word of God and wait for God to show him His salvation.

Some seem to think that it is a disaster to see a troubled soul go home unsaved. Many a time, we have been led to leave a soul that is at the very door of salvation. When the one who is trying to help him leaves, the person is cast on God. It is often the final coming down that he needed, to stop looking to himself or others. Many a person has looked to Christ within a few moments after the preacher left. Never underrate the value of a good gospel tract left in the hand of a troubled person.

God did not intend that we should just sit in a gospel hall with an open door, waiting for people to come to us. It is excellent to have a suitable place, that is becoming to the gospel, to which people can be invited, but the commission is "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." God has richly blessed this reaching out, and there are numerous ways to do it: summer open-air meetings; gospel tents; door to door visitation, speaking to the people and leaving a tract, and a booth at a fair or a shopping mall that is attractive and will draw people.

It is still true that one of the most effective ways to reach out with the gospel is by children's efforts. Many of our brethren have children's meetings each morning, while they are preaching the gospel each evening in a gospel tent. The efforts made in outlying districts to reach children through Sunday schools and children's special meetings have eventually led to the forming of a number of assemblies. This kind of work is not of secondary value. It is the work of the Lord and should be given primary importance and our whole-hearted support.

When children's work is being done, the Word of God should be spoken with the need of the hearers in mind.

There is much to support this from Scripture. Paul's preaching to the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch, Pisidia (Acts 13:13-41), was vastly different from his preaching to the learned pagans in Athens (Acts 17:22-34). It was the same Christ, the same gospel, the same preacher, but the hearers were different. Philip was a wise man to preach Christ to the Samaritans (Acts 8:4), but to preach Jesus to the Ethiopian (v. 35). The difference again is in the hearer. So when we speak to children, we must speak in language they can understand, to arrest their attention and fasten truth on their minds.

There are many examples from Scripture of the importance of getting God's Word into young hearts (Gen. 7:1; Deut. 4:9, 10; 6:6-9; 11:8-22; Matt. 18:1-6). Although Paul was never a father of natural children, he had a host of spiritual children, and knew the value of getting the Word of God before the very young. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15).

Chapter 12

Reception to an Assembly

Scarcely any subject that relates to assembly practice has caused greater controversy than the subject of reception. We must recognise that the final responsibility for adherence to the Word of God rests upon each assembly individually. We cannot teach that an assembly is answerable to the Lord in all other matters and then claim that in this matter, they are answerable to other assemblies. At the same time, we believe that those who seek to obey God's Word and seek the fellowship of other like-minded assemblies will not knowingly disregard other assemblies in their reception. A flagrant case of this disregard would be the reception to an assembly of a person who is known to have been put away from another assembly for a scriptural cause and is still under the discipline.

Throughout this book, we have often referred to assembly reception. The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the various aspects of the subject. As assemblies, we practise reception in at least five forms:

1 Initial reception of believers who have never been in an assembly (Acts 2:42, 47 etc.).

2 Reception of believers who have moved their residence and of necessity must move to another assembly (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; II Cor. 3:1).

3 Reception of believers who come as visitors to spend a short time in an assembly that is not their home assembly (Rom. 16:2).

4 Reception of restored believers back into an assembly from which they have been put away in discipline (II Cor. 2:5-11).

5 Reception of teachers and their teaching (Acts 18:27).

The elderhood of an assembly has as its authority the Word of God. We should be careful to practise and teach the principle that in the house of God, which is the term used for an assembly in I Timothy 3:15, God rules by His Word and His Spirit. There is no other authority than God's Word and no other rule than that which God has ordained, therefore the elders act for the assembly. It is the assembly that receives and puts away. This can be seen from the first assembly (Acts 2:41-47) which is a pattern for every assembly formed since. Those who were saved were added to the assembly that came into being that day, and, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and (the) fellowship, and in (the) breaking of bread and in (the) prayers." Later in the chapter, the Lord added to them such as were being saved (v. 47).

The first point that we are emphasising is that initial reception is not to the breaking of bread, but to the assembly. The Lord's supper is one of the greatest privileges of assembly fellowship. It is the Lord's supper and not the 'Father's table' of Luke 15, as some would suggest. A careful reading of I Corinthians will establish the significance of the things of the Lord that are taught in it (see chapter 5 of this book). Neither is it the table of the peace offering of Leviticus 3, which is clearly linked with the sinner's appreciation of reconciliation, and is enjoyed by most believers as soon as they are saved.

The second point that we need to emphasise is that reception must be mutual or it cannot be called fellowship. It cannot be accounted as according to the NT pattern to receive anyone who is not willing to receive the assembly, its teachings and practices. Fellowship and reception are mutually experienced and enjoyed. This mutual reception has a very practical application. Among other things, an assembly is a

testimony to the fact that sectarianism is wrong. The person who 'receives' the assembly is receiving this truth. He cannot very well be still professing this if he returns to his denominational church.

Why is there any need for such teaching? "If all believers are in the body of Christ, then all believers should be welcome to any assembly," say some. If these are the sentiments of any reader, we urge that at this point he return to chapter 3 and carefully take note of the clear distinctions between the spiritual body and a local assembly. Many who follow a form of reception that is based on their belief in the one body are careful to point out that they only receive those who are clean in life and pure in doctrine, and who are not under discipline in their home assembly. As has been pointed out in chapter 3, there remains a deep mystery as to how assembly elders will know if a person who is a complete stranger to them, meets these requirements. We believe that the Scriptures speak very clearly on this subject and we should allow them to speak for themselves.

In the NT, assemblies are planted; they have geographical location; they are formed of a number of believers in a given locality who meet regularly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as a testimony for God. There is no suggestion that they meet by accident or happenstance. There is nothing occasional about their collective testimony (I Cor. 1:1-3; 3:6-11). This may be so obvious to all that we could miss the importance of it. All will agree that no assembly could exist if it were only supported by people who occasionally meet together. Those who 'continue steadfastly' in assembly fellowship are obeying the Word of God. Is there then a double standard? Is the Word of God incumbent on some and not on others? No. It has the same authority over all believers. Then surely it cannot be proclaimed as a correct teaching or practice that anyone can go or come from assemblies according to some irregular pattern

that may be convenient to them?

The answer often given to such questions is that while in NT days we have ideal conditions, and believers are all seen as in the fellowship of an assembly, today it is very different, and believers are divided and scattered throughout many organisations and systems. There is an inference in this answer that we cannot use the standard of the NT, or a suggestion that it was not intended to be applied in a day of confusion, or even worse, that it is not sufficient for our circumstances. If we do not have the NT as our absolute authority, then to what will we appeal? The simple answer is that there is no authority to which we can go if in some way God's Word cannot be applied. We believe it is all-sufficient for all time, to the very end of the age. However, it will not be sufficient for those who would willingly move back into the very denominational systems from which God has in grace called us out.

But should we not make a difference between those who have been taught and refused the teaching and those who have never been taught? Yes, we should use great patience and gentleness and seek to teach by practice and precept those who will hear the Word of God. Where there is a desire to learn, there is the room (or seat) of the unlearned, where they may be taught and have the privilege of witnessing 'the whole church' gathered together. The purpose of this is that they may receive the truth of gathering and that the assembly may receive them, as was the happy outcome of the case in I Corinthians 14:23-25. Anything that is for mere convenience or occasional in character is unknown in the NT.

Initial Reception

The first assembly, which was at Jerusalem, was richly blessed. Apostles and prophets were numbered among that early company, and of this assembly it was written

that their witness was with great power, and great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33). Under such circumstances, surely they would not make a mistake in reception! Yet, a man came to their assembly of whom they were afraid, whom they would not receive until they had independent confirmation of the reality of his conversion and the resulting change in his life. Of course, Saul of Tarsus had been a leader in persecution, and well might they distrust him, but he had been saved for several years when he first came to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17-19). Their caution surely is a loud warning to us. This is a day of shallow profession and much departure from the faith. It hardly seems possible that any of us today can be so confident in our own discernment that we can afford to be careless in reception. All the ingredients of initial reception can be found in this passage (Acts 9:23-30), so we use it, in spite of the fact that it was a former persecutor who was being received. There was the recounting of the story of conversion, and a clear understanding that as a believer he had been baptised. An investigation was made into his manner of life since conversion, and then he was happily received and was with them at Jerusalem. This is still the pattern.

The Seat of the Unlearned

It has been said that the only Scripture for a back seat is I Corinthians 14:16, "Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?" Then we are told that the correct interpretation of this verse is that the man was unlearned in the tongue that was being spoken and it has nothing to do with being in or out of the fellowship of an assembly. I do not believe that this is the only Scripture for a back seat, nor do I believe that this is the correct interpretation of the verse.

It is not unusual in this epistle for Paul to introduce a

subject without fully developing it until later. An example is the participation by sisters in assembly meetings. He introduces this in 11:5, but does not tell us until 14:34 that women are forbidden to speak publicly. I believe we have a similar case with the unlearned. The subject is introduced at 14:16 and explained in verses 23-25. In the hypothetical case described in these latter verses, the unlearned is linked with another class called unbelievers. Neither were in the assembly, for the 'whole church' was already gathered before they came in. In fact, it was not known by the church to what class these men belonged until they were 'judged by all' (v. 24). The happy result was that at least one man, who is searched thoroughly by the whole company, falls on his face and acknowledges that God is in them of a truth.

What is the meaning of 'unlearned' in verse 16? If it means that he is unlearned in the tongue then he is distinguished from the rest of the assembly by the fact that while they understood the tongue being spoken, he did not. But did the rest of the assembly understand the tongue being spoken when a brother 'blessed the Lord with the spirit'? A careful reading of verses 2, 4, 6, 9, 11 and 19 of the chapter will be very helpful in showing that no one understood the tongue (v. 2). In fact the man who spoke it did not understand it (v. 14). This was a great pity, for the man in the 'room' of the unlearned did not understand the tongue and he needed to be instructed. I suggest that he was not only unlearned in the tongue, which would not really have distinguished him from the others, but he was unlearned regarding the presence of God among His people (v. 25). This is the sense found in verses 23-25 where he is linked with the unbeliever and is not a part of 'the whole church'.

It is very important to understand that 'unlearned' does not suggest that an arbitrary degree of knowledge is the door to the assembly. What the 'unlearned' must learn to be ready for fellowship is that "God is in you of a

truth" (I Cor. 14:25). This is the same sense in which the presence of the Lord was known in the midst of Israel (Ex. 40:34, 35), putting approval upon the pattern by His presence. Therefore, it is not some level of doctrinal knowledge that is required, - but we should look for evidence of a teachable spirit.

The 'back seat' is not based on this one verse of Scripture. I Corinthians 5:11-13 teaches that there is a 'within' and a 'without' to the assembly. Fellowship is a spiritual truth, yet it has a visible representation when the assembly meets. We seek to show this by a circle and a distinction between those who are in the assembly and those who are not in the fellowship.

Some have asked, "Why is the back seat only in evidence at the Lord's supper?" The reason for this is found in I Corinthians 10:16, 17, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The Lord's supper is the expression of the communion (fellowship) of believers. It is a meeting when all believers participate in the one loaf and partake of the cup. This is the reason that the cup is mentioned first in this passage. The shed blood of Christ is the ground of all fellowship with God and with one another. The partaking of the cup and of the bread are the significant expressions of a unity that has been purchased by the sufferings and death of our Lord. Verse 16 links that cup to His own blood shed, and to be consistent in our interpretation, we must see that it is His literal body that is referred to at the close of the verse as 'the body of Christ'. Verse 17 introduces a second significance of the bread. The one loaf is an expression of the one spiritual body of Christ. The assembly then, is a visible expression of a wider fellowship which is spiritual. In that wider fellowship there are only those who truly are members of Christ. It is in keeping with these great truths that we practise a

principle of being 'within' the fellowship of an assembly, or being 'outside' of it.

The expression, 'the back seat' is not very accurate. The location is immaterial so long as there is a clear line of demarcation between the 'within' and the 'without' of an assembly. Many of us have remembered the Lord in places where the 'back seat' was at the front of the building.

The Reception of Visitors and New Residents

There is a practice which is quite general among us that has led to misunderstanding. It is traditional for letters of commendation to be read only at the Lord's supper, and this has led many to think that the assembly receives to the supper. This is not true. The assembly receives to the fellowship and this includes a sharing in the privileges as well as the responsibilities. We suggest that letters of commendation could be read at a prayer meeting just as well as at a breaking of bread meeting. This would be particularly true when the one being received is a brother who may be participating in prayer or teaching and is unknown to the believers.

Letters of commendation were generally used in apostolic days, for it was an exception that Paul did not need a letter to commend him to the Corinthians (II Cor. 3:1-3), but there is no suggestion that these letters were like an admission ticket to break bread. Believers who were visiting another assembly, or moved their residences were commended to the fellowship of the receiving assembly, and as in the case of Phoebe (Rom. 16:1, 2), they were received to the hearts and the homes of the saints as well. Letters of commendation are correctly patterned after this scriptural example.

As a visitor to the assemblies in Rome, Phoebe was to be helped by the saints. There is a distinction between a visitor and a person who comes to reside. When Aquila and Priscilla came to Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19, 24-28),

they were to be a help to the assembly. We are using wisdom when we see this distinction between a visitor and a person who comes to reside. More care needs to be taken in the reception of a believer who comes to help an assembly, to make certain that their 'help' is truly a blessing.

It would be a great blessing if Romans 14:1 and 15:7 were never used on such a letter of commendation. They have nothing to do with being received into the fellowship of an assembly either initially or as a visitor. Their contexts show that they refer to the hearts of God's people being opened to all who are in the fellowship, even though their backgrounds may be as extremely different as the background of Jews and Gentiles.

A letter of commendation is not a mere courtesy, but a clear necessity where a person is unknown to a receiving assembly (I Cor. 16:10; II Cor. 8:22; Col. 4:10; Acts 18:27 etc.). This procedure would have been totally unnecessary if the person applying for fellowship in a receiving assembly had only to confess that he loved the Lord. It has happened that a visitor has found himself in a position where it was not possible to obtain a letter prior to leaving on a trip. An early contact with the elders of the receiving assembly will give time for them to consider the reception of the visitor. Even though a letter of commendation is the normal NT order for reception, there are circumstances where the personal commendation and knowledge of other respected believers can be used for guidance. There is usually some simple way in which the problem can be resolved, but a letter is a safeguard against such a problem arising.

The Reception of a Disciplined Person

There is not full agreement as to the identity of the man in II Corinthians 2:6-8. Some believe he was the same man that was put away in I Corinthians 5, but others believe the description is of a different man. However,

the teaching of II Corinthians 2:2-11 is clear teaching to guide us in the reception of a person who has been under discipline. The assembly put him away (v. 6) and the assembly receives him back, forgiving him, comforting him, confirming their love to him, "Lest...he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (vv. 7, 8). Chapters 18 to 20 of this book take up in detail the subjects of discipline and restoration.

The Reception of Teachers

Even a casual reading of the Acts and Epistles will show the care that was taken in commending a teacher. Shepherds in an assembly have a responsibility as God's stewards to not only provide guidance and spiritual food for the little flock, but also to guard them against anything that would hurt them in any way. It would be a poor shepherd who would allow the flock to eat poisonous weeds because at the same time they were receiving some good food.

The letters written to commend Apollos (Acts 18:27) are very significant. His own conduct would soon have commended him to the brethren in Achaia, but the letters saved them and him from this time-lapse. Those who argue from Acts 9:26-29 that the slowness in receiving Saul was entirely due to the fact that he was a persecutor, cannot apply this argument to Apollos. If reception was automatic, why the letters?

Paul's commendations of Timothy to the assembly at Corinth (I Cor. 4:17; 16:10, 11) were written to assure them of the character of the servant and his teaching. This was necessary in that day, even for a man of God like Timothy. How much more in our day! Further evidence can be seen of the care that is needed in the reception of a teacher in Paul's words to the Philippians (Phil. 2:19-23) and to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 3:1, 2).

We have shown in this chapter from the permanent character of an assembly and the use of letters of

commendation in the New Testament that care in reception should be practised. In seeking to carry out the Word of God we need much grace and, in our day, responsible brethren need much wisdom from God, and the prayers and support of all who are in assembly fellowship.

Chapter 13

Fellowship between Assemblies

Before we look at the subject of fellowship between assemblies, we need to answer a question that has arisen in the minds of every thinking Christian, How important is a pattern? or, Does a precept have more authority than a pattern? In our introduction, we looked at principles of interpretation and saw that God has given to us a positive pattern to guide us in assembly practice.

When we claim that the pattern is positive, we are saying that it gives positive guidance about what we should do without listing all the things that we should not do. An analogy can be taken from a blueprint for a building which gives positive instruction as to the materials, dimensions and specifications of the building, without telling the builder what he must not do. If it is not in the blueprint, the builder will not do it, if he is truly working to please the architect and the investors. It is this kind of pattern we have for assemblies in the NT.

All Spirit-taught students of Scripture are aware that not only does the Bible give us plain precepts, but it also gives us patterns for our guidance. For instance, we are not only told doctrinally that in God's work of salvation, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10), but we are given the precept, "Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Eph. 5:8, 9). However, God never gives His truth only in the form of a list of regulations, but He gives us living examples of it, so we read, "Walk in love, *even as Christ*

also loved us" (Eph. 5:2, RV). Lest there are any doubters, Peter says, "For hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (I Pet. 2:21). So in His revelation of truth, God gives us doctrine, precept and pattern, and there is agreement between them. This is the principle of a positive pattern and God has supremely given His pattern in His own Son and to a lesser degree in all who are patterned after Him, so that Paul could write, "Those things which ye have both learned and heard and seen in me, these things do; and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9).

The above must seem rudimentary to many readers, but we tend to take far too much for granted. We think people know principles such as this, but there is a great need to give a restatement of fundamental principles that underlie our understanding of Scripture. Much of assembly practice is given to us by godly pattern in the NT.

"This do in remembrance of Me" (I Cor. 11:24), is a precept from the Lord, but, "On the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7), is a NT pattern. There is no difficulty in seeing the agreement between the precept and the pattern, and when such agreement is obvious, the pattern is just as important as the precept.

In this matter of fellowship between assemblies, we have NT precept and pattern for our guidance.

In the beginning there was only one assembly. This church of God in Jerusalem was a pattern for order and function, but until there were other assemblies, there could be no pattern for fellowship between them. About the time of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, assemblies began to multiply (Acts 9:31). It cannot be too strongly stated that no confederation or organisation of assemblies can be found in the NT. Never are a group of local churches joined together to form 'The national church

of Judæa', or 'The state church of Rome' or 'The united church of Macedonia'. If we believe in the principle of a pattern given to us for our guidance, these considerations will carry great weight. Never are a group of assemblies organised together and called 'The church of anything'. Again, we say, an assembly is not part of a church, or part of a fellowship, or part of a federation; an individual assembly is uniquely God's testimony in its own local area, thus the expression, 'the local church'. This expression is perfectly in keeping with the NT pattern.

Local churches did have fellowship with one another, but seldom is this truth taught.

The Basis of Fellowship between Assemblies

The order of the spread of the gospel was foretold by the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:8). From Jerusalem, the gospel spread to Judæa, and then beyond the bounds of Judaism, to Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Paul was saved "near Damascus" (Acts 9:3), but was received into the assembly at Jerusalem (vv. 26-28). When the Jews attempted to kill him, the brethren escorted him to Cæsarea and sent him on to Tarsus (v. 30). Acts 11:25 picks up the story of Paul, as Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought him to Antioch where he assembled with the believers for a year "and taught much people" (v. 26).

The believers in Antioch felt a very close kinship with the believers in Jerusalem. It was persecution in Jerusalem, following the death of Stephen that had caused Christians to come to Antioch. At first, the gospel was preached to Jews only, but "Some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:20, 21). The preachers had come from Jerusalem, and the tidings of fruit in the gospel went

back "to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem" (v. 22). Their interest was so great that immediately they sent Barnabas, "Who when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad" (v. 23).

When the assembly in Antioch heard of a great famine that had afflicted the believers in Judæa, "Every man, according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Jerusalem: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (vv. 29, 30).

This was an expression of fellowship. It was not commanded. There was no organisational requirement. It was an expression of appreciation to the assembly that had brought them the gospel and had sent beloved brethren to teach them the truth of God. The bond was formed because of devotion to the same Lord and appreciation and practice of the same truths. In this first mention of fellowship between assemblies, we believe we have a clear pattern.

From the assembly at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were commended to the work unto which the Lord had called them (Acts 13:2). This first missionary journey took them far north to Antioch in Pisidia, and to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Souls were saved and assemblies planted and taught (Acts 14:21-23). From that fruitful journey, they returned to Antioch, "And when they had come and gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (v. 27). The messengers went out from the assembly in Antioch and returned to it with tidings of their work and how God had blessed them, and a bond of love was formed between the commending assembly and the new assemblies that had been formed.

In the next chapter, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem at the expense of the church in Antioch (Acts 15:3). They were received by the church in Jerusalem

and "Declared all things that God had done with them" (v. 4). A very serious problem had arisen, threatening the carrying out of the commission to preach the gospel to a Gentile world. The Judaisers, who had come from Jerusalem to Antioch, said, "Except ye be circumcised... ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1), and men of the same mind in Jerusalem said, "That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (v. 5). If such men had prevailed, the Christian gospel would have been reduced to a means of getting Gentiles to become Jews. Christianity could have become a mere sect of Judaism.

Now, let us see how fellowship between assemblies operates. The elders in the assembly at Jerusalem had responsibility for the assembly there, not for assemblies in Syria, Pisidia or Lycaonia. Many point out that apostles were present in the church at Jerusalem and this is true, but even then, this is a pattern which we still follow, and we do not have apostles. The reason the assembly in Jerusalem must consider this matter was because, as their letter stated, "Forasmuch as *certain which went out from us* have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment" (v. 24). The men who troubled these other assemblies went out from Jerusalem and were answerable to the Jerusalem elders for their conduct. It is also true that Barnabas had been sent to Antioch from the assembly in Jerusalem, and Paul himself had first been in fellowship there. This answers every question about "the authority of the Jerusalem council", as it has been called. It was not a council of churches, but it was elders in one assembly acting in a responsible way about those who had gone out from them. The decisions that were made there certainly did affect Gentile churches, but only because the workers had come from Jerusalem, and the responsibility of an assembly does not cease

when a worker has been commended to a distant field of labour. We should keep this in mind when we hear men claim that they are serving the Lord and are not answerable to elders anywhere.

This is still our practice. Men are commended to carry the gospel far afield. The fellowship of the home assembly is expressed in prayerful, persistent and practical support, and when a new assembly is formed in the distant place, there is a bond of fellowship and mutual interest. Those who know the history of assemblies in Northern Ireland, North America and almost every other land where assemblies are found, know that this is the way fellowship was established. The workers were known, the work was followed with keen interest, the same truths were taught and practised and the fellowship was maintained by mutual love and care. It was men from Scotland who came to America and brought much blessing with them as they preached the gospel, baptised believers and taught the principles of gathering that they had very recently learned from Scripture.

Fellowship between assemblies is based on the means by which the gospel is spread, and this is in accord with the words of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:8). Fellowship is also based on a mutual love and interest, and finally it is based on the fact that we believe the same truth and practise a godly simplicity as we gather according to the NT pattern, but it is not based on organisational affiliation.

Extent of Fellowship between Assemblies

“With all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, both theirs and ours” was the language used by Paul to describe the extent of fellowship between assemblies in I Corinthians 1:1-3. It is correct to remember that Lordship in this church epistle is linked to assembly principles. As Paul and his

fellow-workers carried the gospel further afield, the link with the original assembly at Jerusalem was not ignored. When great hardships later came on the saints in Jerusalem, the assemblies in Macedonia and Achaia voluntarily took it upon themselves, with Paul's encouragement, to send help. Paul, himself, was one of the couriers of the gift (Acts 20:22; II Cor. 8:19) which was received gladly at Jerusalem (Acts 21:17). Such mutual love and care were the spiritual manifestation of true fellowship.

The fellowship between assemblies was fostered by those who carried the gospel (II Cor. 8:18), as well as those who were particularly gifted to teach the saints, such as Aquila or Apollos (Acts 18:27). It was also expressed by the letters of commendation that were given to visiting believers as they travelled. These letters carried greetings between assemblies and expressed mutual care and love to all saints. Such letters were not only a necessity, but a means by which fellowship was strengthened. Thank God that this simple order still prevails.

Assemblies far from Jerusalem did follow the pattern of the original assembly. Many of Paul's letters express the thought of a common pattern and even a great desire to be like the original pattern. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "As I teach everywhere in every church" (4:17), "And so ordain I in all churches" (7:17), "We have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (11:16), "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (14:33), "Let your women keep silence in the churches" (14:34) and "As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye" (16:1).

When Paul wrote to the young assembly at Thessalonica, he said, "Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord" (I Thess. 1:6). This order is significant, for they first saw the Lord Jesus in His servant and were led

to know Him personally through Paul. The chief point is that this was not a pattern for individual practice, but as the context shows, it was a pattern for the assembly, and they in turn became "An ensample to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (v. 7).

In the second chapter of this epistle, they are again commended, "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus: for ye also suffered like things of your own countrymen" (v. 14). Paul is not merely saying that as Judæan saints had suffered, so had the Thessalonians; the likeness was in the way they endured the suffering and remained faithful and true to what they had been taught. Paul wrote, "For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord" (3:8). Again, it was the following of a pattern which shows that the fellowship between assemblies was based on common practice and was not limited by geographical, ethnic or social bounds, but extended to wherever such an assembly met.

Paul had never seen the believers in Colosse face to face (Col. 2:1), yet he wrote to them, "For though I be absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2:5). The two words he uses are military terms. 'Order' means the orderly rank of the soldiers, and 'steadfastness' is the close phalanx in battle when shield is joined to shield and spears overlap to present a solid wall of defence or attack. How did Paul know this of the Colossians when he had never seen them? The simple answer is that they were following a pattern of teaching which was practised in all assemblies of the saints.

This kind of blessed imitation is still practised, and humbly we thank God. Circling this earth and almost to the farthest reaches of its northern and southern limits, believers still gather in local assembly capacity to carry out teaching that is common to all who gather unto the

name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the extent of the fellowship between assemblies. It is not organisational, nor governed by human institutions or legislations, it is a fellowship of heart and mind, seeking, according to the measure of our understanding and ability, to be guided alone by the Word of God.

Assemblies have many unofficial links. People travel much more than in past generations and communication between assemblies in the homeland and foreign lands keeps believers aware of the work of the Lord in areas far removed in miles. Not only is there correspondence between assemblies, but a number of assembly magazines inform believers about assemblies around the world and keep them in touch with gospel work and blessing. These magazines also give information about conferences and special meetings, as well as teaching truth which, as in NT days, is common to each scriptural assembly.

Limits of Fellowship between Assemblies

Godly elders will do all that is in their power to promote true fellowship in the assembly where God has placed them, and to maintain fellowship with other assemblies for mutual help, but they are accountable to God, not to another assembly, or to a group of assemblies for the conduct of the assembly.

When the elders met in Jerusalem, we insisted that their responsibility was for brethren from their own assembly, not for distant Gentile assemblies (Acts 15). In Revelation 1, 2 and 3 there is a beautiful picture of the independence of assemblies that also shows their interdependence. John turned to see the voice that spake to him, "And being turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands, one like unto the Son of Man" (1:12, RV). He learned that these seven lampstands were the seven churches of Asia Minor to whom the Lord addressed Himself in chapters 2 and 3 (1:20). Each had the same construction, pure gold—no

alloy. Each had their own golden base, and were not like the candlestick in the tabernacle in the OT with its one base and a main stock and six branches.

The Lord Jesus Himself walked in the midst of the seven lampstands, so that each of them shed light on Him from man's view, but of course, "He shed His blessed beams divine" on each of them. They had a common centre, so that each had the same connection to the Lord in the midst. This was their link to each other as well, it was through the Lord in the midst. A good analogy is to think of a spoked wheel, with each spoke radiating from the hub and yet no tyre on the wheel. There was no connection between one lampstand and another except through the Lord in the midst. The Lord gave a searching inspection to each of these assemblies, but never charged one for another's sin or failure. Each had their own accounting to do to Him in Person. So it is with assemblies still.

Each assembly is an individual testimony, standing on its own golden base, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). One assembly is not responsible for the conduct of another and should not interfere in the government of another assembly. No assembly held a place of greater nearness or authority than any other, for all had the same connection to the Lord Himself. Perhaps the place where the picture most vividly portrays NT truth is in the connection between the lampstands. Men are forever attempting to put a tyre around the outside, linking one company to another to form something bigger, better, more united, "so the world will know we are not so small after all," are reasons often expressed. All such human attempts at organisation are departures from Scripture and would merely make us another sectarian group with our own form of organisation. Beware of all such efforts to take a common name, other than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, or join together under

some kind of common denominator!

This effort to organise produced denominations in the first place, and assemblies are a protest against this system in whatever form it takes.

A young believer may well ask, But how am I to identify a scriptural assembly? Many years ago, I heard a dear friend use the following illustration. He had been invited to a Christian's home for dinner and was being given directions as to how to find the house. It was in a town where there were no numbers on the houses, so the Christian said that his house had a green roof, white siding, a brown front door and black shutters. When my friend found the correct street he saw several houses with white siding and one with a green roof, but there were no black shutters or brown door. As he slowly drove down the street he came to a house with a green roof, white siding, a brown door and black shutters and was certain that he had found the right one. This is a very simple, but very adequate explanation of how to identify a true assembly.

There are varying degrees of conformity to the Word of God. How can we determine what degree of conformity is necessary? How can we know when God recognises that a lampstand is burning in a particular place? The wonderful thing is that the Lord has never invited us to do any such judging. Thank God He has not, for we would make some terrible blunders. The responsibility of each believer is to earnestly seek to be personally conformed to the Word of God, and, if possible, to be in an assembly that follows the pattern that God has given.

But, the question persists, what about companies that do not conform to the pattern as God has taught us? Rarely is there any opportunity to instruct them more perfectly, for, in many cases, it is not a case of never having been taught, but of having departed from truth once held dear. Some have gone so far as to contend that

this departure is progress. They profess to be motivated by love in their fellowship with much that is unscriptural. It is serious departure from an assembly pattern to practise interdenominational affiliations and to bring into professed assemblies the errors of denominations such as installing a local pastor. (See chapter 9.) However, it makes a very poor spiritual diet to feed on departure and failure. We should leave them with the Lord and not involve ourselves in their departure, for, in this very context of assembly fellowship, we are warned about being partakers of other men's sins (I Tim. 5:22).

Chapter 14

Ministry of Women in the Two Testaments

Women occupy a prominent place in sacred history. If we are to appreciate the ministry of women in the NT records, we need to take a look at the great women of the OT, and to look at women of the Bible in contrast to the status of women in the pagan world. In fact, the NT elevates women to a place they never held in Jewish society.

1 Great Women of the Old Testament

Death had just been pronounced on man and the creation over which he had been given dominion, yet Adam, by faith, called his wife, "Eve...the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). In that dark hour of the fall, Adam must have grasped the significance of the promise of God that the One who would bruise Satan's head would come into the world through a woman. She was the instrument through whom the great drama of redemption would be accomplished. Yet, the woman is to have a place of subjection. Two reasons are given in I Timothy 2:11: the woman was not the first to be created, and the woman was the first in the transgression (vv. 13, 14). If these facts are linked with what follows in verse 15 of the same chapter, it is easy to see why many believe that the salvation of the woman is her role in bringing into the world the promised Deliverer. The "woman shall be saved through The Childbearing" (v. 15, RV), for to her this great honour was given, to bring the Saviour into the world.

Genesis has been called the book of four great men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, but it is also the

book of four great women: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. Sarah in particular shows how God uses human instruments for His own glory. God waited until the 'deadness of Sarah's womb' seemed to make the promise impossible and then, "The Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken" (Gen. 21:1). Out of human weakness, God still performs His mighty works.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was smitten with leprosy when she and Aaron spoke against Moses. He cried to God for her and the leprosy was cleansed, and well he might pray for her, for he owed her his life and usefulness. It was she, likely, who stood guard over the baby Moses in the bulrushes, and when he was discovered by the daughter of Pharaoh, it was Miriam's quick thinking in suggesting her mother as his nurse that allowed Moses to be raised by his own mother to be Israel's deliverer and one of God's noblest servants. How much hinged on the intelligence and wisdom of a young maid! Miriam is called a prophetess and led the women of Israel in the great redemption song on the wilderness side of the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20, 21).

Judges 4 and 5 record the history of two valiant women. It was a dark day for Israel when not a man could be found to deliver the nation from the heel of the oppressor, for Jabin, the Canaanite king had ground them under his tyranny for twenty years. Sisera, the commander of his forces had nine hundred chariots of iron to assist his army in holding Israel in virtual slavery. Deborah, a prophetess, who was a judge, was raised up by God to stir up Barak to muster the tribes of Israel and lead them to battle against the united armies of the Canaanite nations. He insisted that Deborah accompany him to the battle. She consented to go, but foretold that when the Lord gave them victory, it would not be to the honour of Barak, for God would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. As Sisera fled from the battle, Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, enticed him to turn into her tent

where she drove a tent-pin through his brain as he lay asleep on the ground.

Huldah, the prophetess, was asked by King Josiah and the high priest of Israel concerning the Word of God which had been found in the house of the Lord (II Kings 22:13-20). Even Isaiah speaks of a prophetess in favourable language (Isa. 8:1), but in the days of Nehemiah, there was a prophetess called Noadiah who was an enemy of God and the remnant.

The reason for dwelling on these events must be obvious; they are exceptions to the rule. In the OT Jewish women held a place of dignity and responsibility in the home where they ruled the domestic affairs of the family. The description of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10-28 leaves no question that she had honour and respect from her husband and family, and "Her price was far above rubies" (v. 10). She was not a prophetess, nor a judge, and certainly not a commander of armies or a slayer of mighty warriors. The general tenor of the OT supports the view that a woman held a prominent place in the home, subject to her husband, occupying herself with the needs of her household and training her children to be a blessing to God and His people. This is the reason that in the listing of the kings of Israel and Judah, the mothers are named, for great and godly women produced kings of like kind, and tragically, the opposite was also true.

Deborah and Jael are exceptions then, and it was in a day of darkness and departure from God that they were used of God in a public way. Even in the OT, this was not a pattern to be followed by women who professed godliness (I Pet. 3:1-7).

In the days of Israel, men had no pre-eminence in devotion to God. Women took Nazarite vows as well as men (Num. 6:2); God revealed Himself to women as in the case of Hagar (Gen. 16:8), Sarah (Gen. 18:19) and Samson's mother (Judges 13:3-25). The writer to the

Hebrews writes of "Women who received their dead raised to life again" (Heb. 11:35), a clear reference to the godly widow of Zarephath who God commanded to sustain the prophet Elijah (I Kings 17:8-24). 'Time would fail us' to tell of the godly Hannah, the faithful Ruth, the restored Naomi and the courageous Esther.

Special mention must be made of four women whose names appear in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 1:1-16. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba were mightily honoured to be a vital link in that long procession of events that eventually brought the Saviour into the world.

2 Glimpses of the Greek and Roman World

There is a great contrast between the Lord's treatment of women, and the status they received in the Greek and Roman world. The teachings of the Lord Jesus so elevated the lot of women that the change is often referred to as being revolutionary. Greek society treated its women with much higher respect than the pagan nations around them, but they had absolutely no public privileges, lived in the seclusion of the domestic quarters of the home, and were considered by their husbands to be scarcely above a faithful slave. Among a people known for their great poets, writers, painters and architects, "not one woman was distinguished in the fields of literature, art or science" (Edersheim). There is good evidence of the great intelligence of Greek women and many of them were self-educated, but outside of the home they held no positions of distinction.

The laws of Rome gave a husband despotic rule over his wife and household, but in practice, the women of Rome achieved a status in the world unknown among the Greeks. Women participated freely in religious activities, often had influence over officials of state, and excelled their Greek counterparts in public scandal and immorality.

Among the Jews, the woman held a place of dignity and high honour in the home, and children were looked upon as being a heritage from the Lord, but the public sphere, outside of the home, belonged exclusively to her husband. The woman's public life was her religious life, yet even there she was excluded from any activities that were not led by her husband or the males of the family. The Rabbis did not teach the inferiority of women, but in practice, they refused to give females the same education as males, and they thought that most religious subjects were beyond the mental capabilities of women (Edersheim).

3 Gallant Women of the Gospel Records

The attitude of the Lord Jesus toward women elevated them far above their status in Greek, Roman or Jewish society. He taught them high spiritual truth, He accepted their ministry toward Him and sent them to witness for Him. It has often been noted that not once in the Gospels does a woman abuse the Lord, or even reject Him. He was "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The mother to whom He was subject as a child, watched His actions, listened to His words and stored them in her heart (Luke 2:51). In His public ministry, He and His disciples were ministered to by women (Luke 8:3); women stood by His cross (John 19:25), and a woman lingered at His tomb and was given the great honour of being the first to see the resurrected Lord (Mark 16:9).

His mother, Mary, was one of God's most honoured servants. She is wrongly worshipped by the Roman Church, but many Christians have gone to the opposite extreme and scarcely ever mention her. Mary was a part of the first promise God ever gave of the coming Saviour (Gen. 3:15); she was a sign to the whole house of Israel (Isa. 7:14), and yet she was one of the most humble of God's servants. When Gabriel called her "highly favoured...she was greatly troubled at his saying" (Luke

1:26-29). Her response was, "Behold the bondmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word" (v. 38, RV). How shocked she would be to know that religion has designated her the Queen of Heaven!

Mary was given a service more difficult to perform than that which was entrusted to any servant of God except the Lord Jesus Himself. Virgins do not give birth. Who would understand or believe her story? Even the just Joseph was minded to privately seclude her until a visit from an angel enlightened him (Matt. 1:19, 20). The Lord Jesus bore this stigma from unbelievers all His days; they said, "We were not born of fornication" (John 8:41). It is difficult for us, in this day of permissiveness, to be able to grasp the enormity of the burden that was placed on Mary. Only her cousin Elisabeth understood (Luke 1:39).

Mary's service can never be duplicated. She was God's chosen instrument for the miraculous conception of the Son of God. How amazing to the humble young woman were the words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35, RV).

Mary's understanding of the divine plan and purpose was unequalled by any other person in her day. God used a servant that He had instructed. She knew that the great promises concerning David's house, Heir, throne and kingdom were all to be fulfilled in the Babe she carried in her womb and nursed as an infant. Her great anthem of praise (Luke 1:46-55) expresses a great depth of spiritual understanding. She stood at the cross and understood its meaning while a sword pierced through her tender heart, but she was not found at the grave, rather she is found in the upper room, waiting for the promise of the Spirit (Acts 1:14).

However, the Gospel records are almost silent about any public activity of Mary after the Lord entered on

His public ministry. Only twice during those years are her words recorded. At the marriage in Cana of Galilee, she said to the Lord, "They have no wine," which prompted the Lord's words, "Woman (a term of respect) what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:3, 4). These words illustrate that He was engaged in divine work and could not be under the control of a woman, even though she was His mother.

The second event was when Mary sought the Lord among the crowds who listened to His words. When He was told that His mother and brethren were seeking Him, He answered, "Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother" (Mark 3:31-35). Mark records this event at the beginning of the Lord's public ministry showing the supremacy of spiritual relationships over natural ones.

To balance what may appear to be a neglect of Mary, we need to return to the cross and behold the suffering Saviour saying to the disciple that He loved, "Behold thy mother" (John 19:25-27).

The Lord Jesus did what the Rabbis would not do, He taught spiritual truth on the highest plane to women. In the home in Bethany, "Mary also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word" (Luke 10:39). The "also" shows that Martha also sat at His feet. However, it was Mary who grasped the meaning of the Lord's words regarding His death and anointed His body for the burial beforehand (John 12:7). She also understood the great promise of His resurrection (John 11:20-44), and in keeping with her spiritual understanding did not join the other women at the tomb with prepared spices (Luke 24:1). Of all who heard the Lord foretell His death and resurrection, Mary may have been the only one who understood.

The Lord Jesus, sitting on Jacob's well, held a long spiritual discourse with a Samaritan woman. The

Rabbinical writings state, "A man should not address any woman in a public place, not even his own wife" (Edersheim). To teach any woman, particularly a Samaritan woman, was totally contrary to Jewish practice. To this poor sinful woman the Lord revealed her sin, and then, in wondrous grace, revealed Himself. Then, to this new-born soul, the Lord from heaven taught the highest truth regarding spiritual worship that is found in all the pages of Scripture. The Lord surely gave clear evidence that He believed that women have great intelligence and are capable of understanding the highest spiritual truths.

Nothing in the Gospel records is more touching and tender than that the Lord Jesus had His daily needs met by women. Deacon service has a very wide meaning in the NT, from the care of material goods (Acts 6:1-6) to the declaring of the wondrous truth of the one body (Eph. 3:7). Deacon service in the Gospels is rendered either by angels (Matt. 4:11), or by women (Matt. 8:15; Luke 8:3; 10:40). This ministry was performed by Peter's wife's mother (Matt. 8:15), Martha (Luke 10:40) and, "Certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance" (Luke 8:2, 3).

Each of the synoptic Gospels mentions these women (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 8:3). Five names are listed: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary and Salome, but each writer says there were many others. In each list the name of Mary Magdalene stands first. In every list of the twelve, Peter's name is first. Mary Magdalene may not have contributed the most to the common purse of the Lord and His disciples, but the Lord alone knows how to rightly evaluate giving. It is likely that Mary Magdalene, like the widow who gave her two mites to the Lord (Luke 21:2), gave that which

cost her the most.

This is the dear woman who remained at the tomb, weeping, when the disciples had returned to their own home. From the dazzling sight of two angels in white, she is drawn by love to turn herself back and see Jesus standing, though she did not recognise Him. As a true sheep, she heard His voice and He called "His own by name." To His, "Mary," she responded, "Rabboni." The Lord sent her to His brethren with a wondrous message, "I have seen the Lord, and He has spoken unto me" (see John 20:10-19).

Much more could be written of the women of the Gospels, from Anna, the aged prophetess, "Who spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Israel" (Luke 2:38), to the women who stood at the cross (John 19:25). In all the devotion of these women, each was engaged in what can rightly be called, the woman's sphere of service. Anna's speaking was person to person and the other women in the NT who were called upon by the Lord to testify for Him, did so on the personal level. It was the work of women to prepare spices, to anoint a body for burial, and as they were engaged in their own work, they were honoured to be the first to see the resurrected Lord. Even then, they were not told to be heralds to the world of that great event, but they were sent to the disciples. This agrees with the fact that the Lord did not include a woman among the twelve, nor was a woman chosen, in Acts 1, to replace the fallen Judas. When Paul lists the witnesses to the resurrection, he omits the women entirely. Unless a person is ready to deny inspiration, he can scarcely ascribe this omission to any prejudice on Paul's part. The sphere of the woman's work is vital, she serves the Lord in ways that no other can do or will do, but even in the Gospels, her sphere is a woman's sphere, not a public sphere.

Chapter 15

1 Godly Women of the Early Assemblies

A. Women in the Book of Acts

The wonderful book that records the Lord's commission to the apostles, the birth of the church, the planting of the first assembly in Jerusalem and the spread of the gospel throughout Judæa, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the Roman Empire, begins with men and women in an upper room in Jerusalem. There is some reason to believe that this room was in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. The women present in that room continued in prayer with the apostles (Acts 1:14), but when Peter addressed the problem of the need to appoint an apostle to fill the gap left in the twelve, he addressed the males who were present (vv 15, 16). This is in keeping with the fact that the Lord had chosen twelve men to be His disciples, all the writers of the NT were men and, when assemblies were formed, all the elders were men.

In the blessing that immediately followed the day of Pentecost, "Believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (5:14). When Saul of Tarsus arose as a leading persecutor of the saints, "He made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (8:3). It has been the long history of testimony that many of the most courageous of persecuted and martyred saints have been women.

Dorcas means 'gazelle', and she likely fitted her name and was possessed of gentleness, humility and grace. She was renowned for her liberality (Acts 9:36-42). She is the only woman in the NT who is called a disciple, but we

need not draw any other inference from this than that she faithfully followed her Lord. All believers, men and women, were called disciples in the early days of the Acts (9:26). Tabitha, or Dorcas, was "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." Even her death was to the glory of God and resulted in many being saved (v. 42).

Lydia was the first convert in Europe (Acts 16:14, 15). Out of millions of Europeans who have been saved, the first was a noble woman who, although a native of Thyatira in Asia, had a home in Philippi because of the business she conducted there. She opened her home to the apostles, and her household was saved following her own conversion. It is possible that some of the women who went with her to pray at the river-side were among the first converts at Philippi, for women were prominent in the work there (Phil. 4:2, 3).

In Thessalonica, chief women were saved, and in Berea, honourable women (Acts 17:4, 12). The prominent women of these towns had great influence on their respective communities and shared in the suffering that came upon these new believers.

At the close of Acts 17, Damaris is alone named among those who believed the message at Athens. She must have been of note among believers.

The gospel work in Corinth is first linked with a godly couple (Acts 18:2, 3) whose names appear six times in the NT, and four of these times, Priscilla is mentioned first. Aquila was a Jew from Pontus, but the couple were in Rome when the edict was made by Claudius Caesar to expel all the Jews from that city, A.D. 49. This expulsion was very likely linked with a Christian persecution, so this godly couple were already believers and had suffered for their faith when they met Paul in Corinth. He stayed with them and worked with them in their trade. It may have been at this time that they endangered their lives for his sake (Rom. 16:3).

When Paul left Corinth, they accompanied him as far as Ephesus. They were still at Ephesus and an assembly met in their home at the time that Paul wrote I Corinthians (16:19). Apollos, a Jew, mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus not long after Aquila and Priscilla made their residence there. His powerful appeals in the synagogue caused Aquila and Priscilla to take him home where "they expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:24-28). The order of the names is "Aquila and Priscilla". When it came to teaching, Priscilla did not "usurp authority over the man" (see I Tim. 2:12), yet, in the home sphere, she and her husband did teach the mighty Apollos.

When Luke writes of this couple, he uses the diminutive 'Priscilla', but when Paul writes about her, he calls her 'Prisca'—the lady, and "She may well have been a lady of high rank" (Wm. Ramsay).

At the end of his life, Paul saluted this couple, and named Prisca first (II Tim. 4:19). It seems they had returned to Rome after the death of Claudius (Rom. 16:3, 4), and had then again taken up residence in Ephesus. Their numerous travels, in days when journeys were difficult, were on behalf of the needs of assemblies. No higher commendation could be given than Paul's words about them, "Salute Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who have for my sake laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (Rom. 16:3, 4). All of us should take note that the name of Prisca coming first did not engender any resentment in Aquila.

The daughters of Philip, who prophesied, have been the subjects of much speculation (Acts 21:9). The statement about them is very brief and gives no authority for suggesting that they exercised their gifts publicly. When God gave a message to Paul regarding his arrest and suffering at Jerusalem, it did not come

through these women, even though Paul was staying in their home. God sent Agabus from Judæa to convey His prophetic word to Paul. This indicates that these gifted women exercised their gift within the domestic sphere, not in the sphere of a local church.

B. Women in the Epistles

There are twenty-six names in Romans 16 and eight of them are women. We have already seen the importance of the renowned Prisca and Aquila. The “much labour” bestowed on the saints by Mary (v. 6), was likely in the sphere of the home. All such labour, done so diligently by many women until our day will receive great reward in the Day of Christ.

There is divided opinion about the gender of Junia. The name is used in the accusative form and could have come from Junias (masc.) or Junia (fem.). The weight of opinion seems to fall on the side that she was a woman. Then there is a problem. Was she an apostle? “The expression, ‘of note among the apostles’ could as well mean that she was well known by apostles, as that she was a well-known apostle” (Ryrie). It would not be good interpretation to judge that the latter is meant, for nowhere do we find a female apostle, and a passage open to two meanings should never be used to decide a major question.

Tryphena and Tryphosa are pagan names, but the women who bore them were trophies of grace and laboured in the Lord. Both these names are found on inscriptions related to the imperial household.

The beloved Persis must have been a notable servant of Christ. She is given extra commendation for her ‘much labour’.

The ‘mother of Rufus’ is called by Paul, ‘my mother’. This is not to be taken in a natural sense, but what an honour for a woman to be looked upon like a mother by the great apostle to the Gentiles!

Phoebe deserves attention (Rom. 16:1, 2). She was a deaconess, a servant of the church at Cenchrea. The word 'succourer' meant a person of high office who was the protector of lesser persons. Such positions were common among the Greeks, but there is no suggestion that Paul had official position in mind when he so commended this deaconess. He commends service that she performed, not position that she held. Deacon service covers a wide range of labour that is both practical and spiritual, and Phoebe's service to Paul is likely the best clue to the nature of it.

Euodia and Syntyche had laboured with Paul. He wrote, they "contended along with me in the glad tidings" (JND), with Clement and other labourers (Phil. 4:2, 3). This has been the experience of many of us who have done new work in the gospel.

Two more women must be mentioned before closing this section. They were special instruments in the hand of God for the training and moulding of a life that would be for the glory of God. Timothy, the man of God, owed a tremendous debt to his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (II Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15). What an honour to be a mother and grandmother who have such a moulding influence on young lives! No service in all the tasks given by God to His people can have a higher rating, and yet many in our day disdain it as being beneath them.

Many dear women will feel as they read this that they have failed in their greatest work of moulding lives, but let it be remembered that in this, as well as in all other service for God, it is faithfulness that will be judged and not success.

2 Guidance for Women who Serve the Lord

Christians in Contrast to the Present Age

Not a line of Scripture can be found to support the

radical women's liberation movement. God did not create man superior to woman, but He did put a difference between them, "Male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27). Each has their own sphere and each excels in that sphere. For instance, a man could not have brought the Saviour into the world, and a man cannot do many of the tasks which God in His great wisdom has given to women.

Christians believe in a very practical kind of righteousness. Equal pay for equal work is a righteous principle and we should pray that righteousness will prevail in our land. A man should count it a privilege to help his wife, when it is possible, to perform domestic work. This is not beneath the dignity of any man, and should be within the bounds of his love for his wife. However, it should be noted that the present Equal Rights Amendment proponents blame the Bible for 'their degraded status'. Children in school are being subjected to books that show no particular role for mother and father. In these school texts, mothers go out to the business world, leaving the fathers to stay at home and keep house, or vice versa, so long as there is no particular role model. The absence of true role models may be permanently harmful to a child's development.

It can be proven that many women are more intelligent than their husbands and perhaps can do better in the highly competitive world of business. It is not intelligence, or superiority of one sex over another that we are writing about, it is God's plan for His creation.

The charge of sexism against the Bible has gone so far that the National Council of Churches have experimented in producing a text of 'scripture' where God is called He (or She) and Father (or Mother). The Scripture that comes to mind is, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth...and the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created" (Gen. 6:5, 7).

Paul wrote, "Train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be soberminded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:4, 5, RV).

The Grace of Subjection

The teaching of Scripture elevates women to a very high plane, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). When love like this reigns in a home, it will not be difficult for the wife to be subject to her own husband. "As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (v. 24). Subjection is not inferiority; for if this were true, the subjection of the Man, Christ Jesus, to His Father would involve the blasphemous suggestion that He is inferior in the Godhead.

Christian women of our acquaintance throughout the world do not contest the teaching of Scripture that the woman is to be subject to her husband in the home, or that she takes a place of subjection in an assembly. They believe the Bible and bow humbly to its teaching. *It is not necessary to write this as a corrective*, but rather as an explanation of assembly practice.

The Silence of Women in an Assembly

Three passages in the NT must be considered: I Corinthians 11:3-5, 14:34, 35 and I Timothy 2:8-15. Many have found a problem in Paul's statement, "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head" (I Cor. 11:5). Some have said that Paul is giving authority for a woman to audibly take part in prayer and to prophesy in the church of God at Corinth. To get around his prohibition, that women are to be silent in the church (14:34), they claim that Paul is not prohibiting normal

participation in church, but is forbidding women to 'chatter' among themselves in a meeting. This is very interesting, for it illustrates how it is possible to read personal interpretations into Scripture. The very first evidence against this interpretation is to read the next verse, "But if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is a shame for a woman to speak in an assembly" (JND). Is the wife to ask her husband about the content of the chatter? To 'chatter' means to talk incessantly and foolishly. Is this what the wife asks her husband about, or does she ask for information?

The word for 'speak' in verse 34 is very common in the NT. In fact, it is used twenty-four times in this very chapter. Not here, or anywhere in the NT is it used for 'chatter'.

Others have contended that Paul changed his mind between chapters 11 and 14 of this letter, or that he gives permission for women to speak in the church and then after consideration, he withdrew it. It is impossible to reconcile these views with inspiration.

Another view is that this was not participation in the church, but praying and prophesying in some other sphere. If this interpretation is correct, it would mean that the words of 11:16, "We have no such custom, neither the churches of God," refer to the church, but not when it is meeting. Therefore, the angels looking on (v. 10) are not really viewing the divine order in the gathering. It would seem to this writer that the place for a woman to display her subjection is when men are present in the gathering! This interpretation suggests that a woman could lead in prayer in public, or prophesy in public, if it is not a church meeting. What kind of a meeting would this be? All public testimony is in relation to an assembly. It is evident that if this is the meaning, a woman should cover her head at all times, lest she have cause to pray or speak a word, and that a

man should never cover his head for the same reasons. This explanation, though it is espoused by able men, is not tenable.

The easiest way to understand I Corinthians 11:5 is that Paul is here dealing with the head covering, whereas in chapter 14, he is dealing with the silence of sisters. There were many things to correct in this epistle and he handles each in its own order. The confusion in Corinth was of such a nature that we are not strained at all in our thinking to believe that sisters were taking part audibly in prayer and in ecstatic utterances. There is no doubt that they also took part in tongues, which is seen as a waste of precious time in chapter 14:2, 4, 6, 9, 11 and 14.

The prohibition in I Corinthians 14:34, 35 is clear and easy to understand, unless we come to it with preconceived ideas. Women are to be silent in the church, "It is not permitted unto them to speak, but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law" (RV). Women have other equally important spheres of activity. Spiritual privilege for male and female is identical (Gal. 3:28), but spiritual activity is not.

The Timothy passage greatly strengthens the interpretation that has been given for the Corinthian passage. "I will therefore that men—the males—pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting" (I Tim. 2:8). The corresponding statement is that, "In like manner that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety, not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly raiment, but which becometh women professing godliness" (vv. 9, 10, RV). Paul limits audible participation in public prayers to males. A careful reading of chapters 2 and 3 of I Timothy will show that public prayers are church prayers. We know that this is a church letter from two things, first, the general content of the letter and second, the plain statement of chapter 3:15 that it is written to

teach "How men ought to behave themselves in the house of God which is the church of God."

Paul then says, "I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (I Tim. 2:12, RV). These plain words scarcely require any explanation, however, we must follow the law of context here. It is the woman in her relationship to the believing man that is in mind, not her relationship to children or other women. Women are far better suited than men to teach younger children and very likely they are better equipped to teach Sunday school classes of girls and young women.

In Titus 2:3-5, older women are commanded to teach younger women. The subjects to be taught are domestic, and as in all teaching, the pattern is lived before the words are spoken. This does not give any authority for a woman to have ministry meetings for women, but it does give her responsibility to teach privately about subjects where the teaching is best given by another woman.

A brief summary of such a long subject is necessary. Women have been chosen by God as instruments in His hand from the dawn of time. The greatest event of history was brought about through a woman when the incarnation took place. The Scripture is full of the devoted service of godly women. The Lord Jesus healed, saved, taught and blessed them. He received the aid of women and they were outstanding in their devotion to Him. The NT abounds with the godly, selfless service of women of God, but it was not in the sphere of public preaching or teaching. It involves being fellow-helpers in the work of the gospel and in many other areas of Christian service in missionary lands and in the home field.

Chapter 16

Assembly Singing

The Bible contains many lovely hymns and songs. The NT is silent about the use of a musical instrument, but it has much to say about the singing of believers.

No one will deny that most of the popular songs of the world quickly fade and are forgotten. Believers have a new song. It is not new in the sense that we need to learn it, although it is true that at conversion a new song is put into our hearts, but it is new in the sense that it is always new and will never grow old. We have learned heaven's song while we are still on earth; it will be new for ever (Rev. 5:9).

Even though the NT is silent about the use of instruments of music, it is not silent about the accompaniments of our song. A number of accompaniments are described.

Singing with Gladness—James 5:13

"Is any cheerful? let him sing praise" (RV). It can be learned from Scripture and is a fact of everyday life that people are known by their song. No song is recorded during the days of Israel's enslavement in Egypt. As soon as they had planted their feet on the wilderness side of the Red Sea, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord" (Ex. 15:1). Redemption's song can only be appreciated by those who know the value of the blood.

It would be impossible to fully estimate the value of the testimony of a saint in the joy of God's salvation. It was the song that came from the inner prison in Philippi that was such a testimony to the jailer and his family.

Under circumstances that gave no cause for song, Paul and Silas, with torn backs, and cruelly bound feet, sang an anthem of praise to God at midnight (Acts 16:25).

As in all things that are good and holy, the Lord Jesus is the great example. Matthew 26:30 says, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out unto the Mount of Olives." I have every reason to believe that the Lord sang with His disciples before going out to Gethsemane, and this must touch the coldest heart. He also sang after the cross (Heb. 2:12).

The world's songs are very different. Musical trends are like barometers that indicate the pressures felt by society, and we learn much about the moral climate from the music of any given period. Even a casual, second-hand acquaintance with the lyrics of the past twenty years will be revealing. Such words as "Where do you go when you come to the end of the road?" and "Is that all there is?" will show that to live for time and this world leaves an empty void in the heart. The lyrics that are not tragic are morally corrupt, tearing at the foundations of marriage and the home and all that has been for man's richest blessing through the ages. Much has been written about the conscious and subliminal effects of this kind of propaganda on the psyche. Add to this the hypnotic influence of long exposure to the pulsating beat of rock music at the high volume level that is so attractive to young people and the result is the yielding of the will to the effects of the music. The effects of this have been thoroughly documented and the evidence is that it produces physical responses which may lead to immoral actions.

Young people need examples. Their models are the people they admire. If a young person is attracted by the sound of rock music, then it cannot be long until they become acquainted with the performing artists and groups. The fans of these performers have a vast store of knowledge about the intimate details of their lives. The

use of mind-altering drugs, fornication, adultery and homosexuality are major ingredients of these lives, and these elements are often exploited by press agents who know it will add to the popularity of the stars. Is it any wonder that Satan is able to convince so many people that enslavement to sin is a glorious freedom? Paul and Silas were more free in the Philippian dungeon than the most 'liberated' of these poor souls.

'Sacred music' is a very different subject, but we must all be aware that a person does not need to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit to enjoy Handel's "Messiah" or Bach's "Magnificat". The song that delights the heart of God comes from our joy in Christ. Christians have every reason to sing with gladness unto the Lord. This would be a good thing to keep in mind in our assembly singing. One of the definitions that has been given for joy is 'when the heart sings.' This delights the heart of God.

"O Lord, we know it matters not,
How sweet the song may be,
No heart but of the Spirit taught,
Makes melody to Thee."

Singing with Grace, Colossians 3:14-17

A joyful heart is only one cause for a song. Colossians 3 suggests that a peaceful heart sings as well. If joy is when the heart sings, peace has been described as when the heart sits down. Colossians 3:14 is the divine solution to the problems that are described in verse 13, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." The solution is, "Let the peace of Christ rule (arbitrate, umpire) in your hearts" (v. 15). A wrong spirit toward another believer robs that person of our fellowship, but it can rob the Lord of our song and rob our own hearts of peace.

The peace of Christ arbitrates (v. 15), the Word of Christ resides (v. 16) and the name of the Lord Jesus

constrains and restrains. It is instructive to notice that verses 15 and 16 speak of the name of Christ, but verse 17 gives Him His title, Lord Jesus. When we have appreciated His Lordship, His Word is dwelling in us, and His peace is the umpire of our hearts, we will then be able to “sing with grace in our hearts unto God” (v. 17, RV).

Singing with Gratitude, Ephesians 5:18-20

Gratitude is a sense of thankfulness for blessings received. When these are the blessings of divine grace, they are freely given—gratis; but it is also true that gratitude in the heart of a believer arises spontaneously—freely, without conscious effort. In Ephesians 5:18-20, this is the result of being filled with the Spirit of God and is in contrast to the effects of being filled with wine.

This is not the place to discourse on the great truth of the Spirit’s infilling. However, it should be understood from verse 17 that this is the will of God for all believers. A correct English equivalent to the verb tense of verse 18 is, “Being filled, be ye filled.” It is a state of spiritual being and may be far removed from the highly emotional state that is commonly taught among ‘charismatics’ as being the filling by the Spirit. Colossians 3:14-17 uses almost identical language in the parallel passage, and teaches that it is allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly in us.

When the Holy Spirit is in total control, there will be “A speaking to one another,” that is, speaking words of divine truth which give spiritual help. There should be a period at this point in verse 19. Again, we compare the Colossian passage where “Teaching and admonishing one another” corresponds to the “Speaking to one another.” In both passages, the ‘singing’ is distinct from this ‘speaking’. The speaking is for the ears of fellow believers, the singing is for the ears of God. In Colossians, as we noted above, the singing is “With

grace in your hearts to the Lord.” In Ephesians, the singing is “Making melody in (with, RV) your heart to the Lord.” This is the very opposite from the great ‘Ministry of Music’ which is so popular among so many evangelicals, where human talents are used in music and song for the pleasing of the ears of the congregation. We should take notice of the fact that in the four lists of spiritual gifts given to us in the NT there is not a word about a gift of singing or a gift of music. The use and control of such talents must look elsewhere for their authority. The law of a positive pattern will not allow me to say that the silence of Scripture gives licence.

A few years ago, in a well-known Christian journal, known for its careful exposition of Scripture, there were a series of articles on the ‘Ministry of Music’. The notable thing about these well-written articles was that in contrast to the usual appeal to Scripture at every point of teaching, there was not a single verse of Scripture used as authority. The authors were too familiar with the Word of God to attempt to wrongly apply Scripture.

The word for ‘melody’ in Ephesians 5:19 is the normal Greek word that would be used for accompanied singing. The music or orchestration that is described is made in the heart. This is one organ that the Spirit of God does tune. When an assembly meets and sings together, it is correct to understand that the Holy Spirit is the grand Conductor, drawing each heart into the melody of praise in such a way that it is true “Melody with your heart to the Lord.”

The Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs must be distinct from each other, or they would scarcely be listed separately. The Psalms are inspired, the hymns are praise to God and the songs are the recounting of events in spiritual history that draw out praise to God. Believers still sing these three forms of praise.

Singing with Guidance, I Corinthians 14:14-17

We have looked at joyful, peaceful and thankful hearts. We are now going to look at understanding hearts. We can learn from I Corinthians 14:15 that our song should not be merely an emotional response without intelligent meaning. The Greek word *psallō*, that we have already looked at in Ephesians 5:19, is used here again and we are told that the singing is accompanied by the Holy Spirit and by the understanding of the singer. This verse is describing assembly singing, and any other accompaniments are not found in the NT. In our discussion on the rules of interpretation, we stated that the argument from silence is the poorest of all, for the Scriptures give us a positive pattern to follow. An assembly is 'a building of God' (I Cor. 3:9) and He has given the blueprint to be followed by a builder who must be wise in his work, and "Take heed how he buildeth thereupon." In the light of this teaching it is impossible to understand how anyone can say that it is only the foundation that God has given and the structure can be built according to the builder's own preference.

It is often said that the OT approved the use of musical instruments in divine service. The OT also approved animal sacrifice, but this would scarcely be used as an argument for their use in the NT. All the rituals of Judaism were shadows that have passed away because Christ, who is the true Antitype, has come. See chapter 6 on the contrast between the shadows and the Substance.

It is also important that while instruments were used in the levitical system, they were never used within the holiest. It is this word for sanctuary that is used of a NT assembly (I Cor. 3:16, 17). It is not the outer court, but the inner sanctuary.

The Colossian and Ephesian passages about singing emphasise the Godward side of true melody and it is made in the heart. The use of musical instruments in the

home cannot be spoken against, but it is still true that true melody to God comes, not from instruments, but from our hearts. This puts the importance on that which pleases the ear of God and this is where it ought to be.

Singing in Glory, Revelation 5:9

It must be clear to every reader that this song of heaven fills the courts above when the Lamb is in the midst of the throne (v. 6). This is a scene still future. There are special occasions of song in heavenly and earthly millennial scenes (Rev. 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-6), but it seems that Revelation 5 describes an eternal song to the Lamb in which all the redeemed will join for ever. Since we are to sing the eternal song that will never grow old, how careful we should be that our lips are never employed in songs that are unworthy of the Lamb.

It is the conviction of the writer that musical instruments should not have a place in assemblies. The use of instruments in church gatherings was unknown through seventeen centuries, so it is a comparatively recent innovation.

Chapter 17

Traditions

The word 'tradition' often has a bad meaning in the NT. The Lord told the Pharisees in Matthew 15:3, "Ye transgress the commandment of God because of your traditions." To this may be added the words of Mark 7:8, "Ye leave the commandment of God and hold fast the traditions of men." A vast amount of spoken and written teaching from the rabbis of Israel had grown around the OT through the centuries so that, in volume, it far exceeded the Scriptures. The tragedy is that it was considered to be at least as authoritative as the Scriptures, and the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees that they had even replaced Scripture by tradition.

We know of no man in NT days who was better acquainted with the evil effect of these traditions of the elders than Paul. He told Herod Agrippa II, "After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). Writing to the Galatians he said, "I advanced in the Jew's religion beyond many of my own age...being more exceeding zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14, RV). And yet, this is the very man who, at least on three occasions, used this same word 'traditions' to refer to the teaching of the apostles, his own preaching and writing, and the pattern of living which he gave to his converts.

I Corinthians 11:2, "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye...hold fast the traditions even as I delivered them to you" (RV). These traditions refer to the apostles' teaching as the context will plainly show. This handing over of teaching to the Corinthians is described in Paul's words to Timothy, "The things that thou hast learned of

me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). This handing over of truth is still effective and this is certainly good tradition.

In II Thessalonians 2:15, Paul exhorts, "Stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." His teaching when among them and his letter to them—I Thessalonians—are called traditions in a very good sense. In the next chapter, these traditions are spoken of as not only being oral and written teaching, but also the teaching by the example that he showed them when he was among them (3:6-12).

In recent years, we have often heard the charge made that assemblies have many traditions which are merely human regulations or practices, not based on Scripture and having very little appeal or meaning to rising generations. I have listened carefully to those who have made these charges and have listed the items which are said to be merely 'the traditions of the brethren'.

There are many believers who have genuine questions about assembly practices and we should not consider their questions as 'attacks against the truth'. We should answer them. What follows is an attempt to answer at least some of these questions.

1 Where did we get the name Gospel Hall?

Many early evangelists, who saw local assemblies planted, had a clear understanding of the difference between a local assembly and the building where they met. They had been taught of God that the sanctuaries of modern religion are borrowed from Judaism or paganism. They understood the great principle of spiritual worship within the heavenly sanctuary (see chapter 6). They wished to avoid the mistake of Christendom in calling religious buildings by names that suggest that they are consecrated sanctuaries of

worship. They preached the gospel first and last and never abandoned the work of evangelism. It was a very logical thing to attach the name gospel to the places where it was preached.

The reader will likely say at this point, "But I have no objection to the use of gospel, it is this name 'hall' that I wonder about. Isn't that a second name, and should we be known as people who belong to the Gospel hall?" This is a question that is worth serious consideration. The latter part of it can be answered in the words of the late Mr. Stutte of Sarnia, Canada. When the men of the foundry where he was employed, said, "Stutte belongs to the Gospel hall," he corrected them in this way. "I belong to the Lord Jesus, I meet with other believers who belong to the Lord Jesus, and the Gospel hall belongs to us." This simple logic needs no additions.

'Hall' is not a name. If this statement sounds strange, it is only because we have not really considered the word. House is not a name; barn is not a name; factory is not a name; the same could be said of shop, store, warehouse, auditorium or garage. These are words that describe the use of a structure. Hall is a word like this. It was the usual descriptive word for a building where people congregated. It still has this meaning, so that we have such well-known places as Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall and Massey Hall in Toronto, Canada.

Although this is a defence of the use of the word 'hall', we should keep this in proper perspective. The name of a building is not a vital matter, but care should be taken that we do not fall into the mistake of giving the building where we meet an unscriptural name. Fellowship between assemblies is not based on the name given to buildings. There are still numerous houses or schools used as a meeting place around the world. The name on the building is not of paramount importance, but we should be well enough taught to never call it by a name that suggests that we think of it as a sanctuary in this

world.

Many well-meaning believers have chosen the name 'chapel' because they believe it is better than 'hall'. However, the name 'chapel' comes from the cape or 'chapelle' of St. Martin of Tours, France's patron saint. His cape was believed to have healing powers and was enshrined in a sanctuary for posterity. The popularity of the name 'chapel' in North America suggests that few who use it know its meaning or etymology. It is not normally used by assemblies in the United Kingdom for the obvious reason that the place where the Roman mass is said is usually called 'the chapel'. So we designate the building as a 'hall' where the gospel is preached.

2 Why do we observe the Lord's Supper early on the first day of the week?

There are those who say that this surely is a tradition of men, for the Scriptures do not specify a time for the supper, and besides, suppers are in the evening. Our answer involves the great principle of first things. This principle goes back to the first commandment regarding the three times in the year when Israel was to appear before the Lord. As they were camped at Mount Sinai (Ex. 23:14-17), the Lord commanded, "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God" (v. 19). This principle of firstfruits included the first of the ripe fruits and even their firstborn sons as well as the first of their oxen and sheep (Ex. 22:29, 30).

This principle of divine priority is brought into the NT. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," has often been used as a Gospel text, and although the application is good, we should understand that the interpretation in the context of Matthew 6:33 is the choice between serving two masters—between securing material things for self and time, or seeking a kingdom for God's glory

and for eternity.

The Lord Jesus charged the church at Ephesus with leaving their first love. Many seem to think that this is the love for Christ that we knew first as new-born believers, but it is the love that has first place in our hearts, rather than the love we first had. The first place, the pre-eminence in our hearts and lives and assemblies belongs to the Lord Jesus.

Those who have learned the significance of spiritual worship will know that in contrast to all other service it is pre-eminently Godward, it is giving God the firstfruits of our redeemed spirits. This is the thought of Hebrews 13:15, "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." We do not only worship on the first day of the week, but we do, as did the early assemblies, give to the Lord the firstfruits.

Paul was in haste when he arrived in Troas in Acts 20:6-12. He remained there for seven days and met with the assembly on the first day of the week for the specific purpose of breaking bread with them. We should take note of two things: first, the presence of the apostle did not change their practice; and second, their primary purpose in gathering was not to hear Paul, but to break bread. They did not change the day, even though this would have been a great convenience to Paul and his company. This may be concluded from Paul's intention to depart on the morrow, so he had arrived on a Monday and left the following Monday (vv. 7, 13, 14).

It is also quite clear that the breaking of bread took place on the evening of the first day. Some have concluded then that we should also break bread in the evening and spend the daylight hours in other service for the Lord. In Troas, they broke bread as soon as they could do it, for they did not have a day free from work. Intelligent reading of the Word of God teaches us that priestly service has the priority over levitical service,

that the one is never without the other, but that which is Godward has first place. Therefore we give to the breaking of bread meeting the first place, not in some slavish obedience to the clock, but because in our hearts nothing else should precede or have priority over spiritual worship.

In I Corinthians 16:1-3, Paul gives instruction that the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem was to be stored up ahead of time and given on the first day of the week. Paul had given the same instructions to the assemblies at Lystra, Derbe, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia. It was not just a peculiar instruction to Corinth (16:1).

Whether it is the presentation of our persons, our praise or our purse, the principle ever is, God first.

3 Why are chairs placed in a circle at the Lord's Supper?

Many years ago, when we were attempting to teach a number of new converts the truth of assembly gathering, the subject of the placing of chairs in a circle for the breaking of bread meeting, or for a prayer meeting, was raised. Where was the Scripture to support this practice? I had to acknowledge that I had no answer. Between that meeting and the next one, I read my Bible on my knees, and God used this experience as a great blessing to my soul.

There is an expression in the NT that occurs many times. It is '*en mesoō*' and is the thought of a centre with a circle drawn or gathered around. It is generally translated 'in the midst', and is found in the description of the Lord Jesus in the midst of the doctors when He was twelve, or standing in the midst of the throng who gathered for the baptism of John, or in the midst on the cross, or in the midst of the throne as the Lamb freshly slain. It is the expression used in the lovely verse, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name,

there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). In such a company, the Lord is in the midst with a gathering around Him.

The thought of being gathered around Him does not require a geometric circle, but it is clear that when we place the chairs in the position that is customary on the Lord’s Day morning, we are expressing the truth that He is ‘*en mesoō*’—in the midst as He has promised. We should also state at this point that we have given the spiritual significance of placing the chairs at the Lord’s supper, but the Lord is as much in the midst at every other meeting of an assembly, so we are not attempting to make this a legislation. However, when a meeting is held for teaching or preaching, our attention is on the man who is addressing the company, so we face him. At the Lord’s supper, we are occupied with the emblems and Him of whom they speak, so we face them. In a circle, there is no place of prominence except the centre. Even unusually gifted brethren who are present are put in a place of equality with others in the circle.

4 What Scriptural authority is there for a back seat?

We have dealt much more fully with this subject in chapter 12 of this book where I Corinthians 14:15-25 is interpreted in its own context.

There is a simple reason why ‘the back seat’ is only in evidence at the Lord’s supper. It is the only gathering of an assembly where all must participate. This cannot even be said of a prayer meeting in the same sense, for while all should be praying silently while the one is praying audibly, yet there is no necessity for all to publicly participate. This word ‘participate’ is an excellent equivalent for the word communion in I Corinthians 10:16, 17.

The expression ‘back seat’ is common but not very accurate. The location is immaterial, so long as there is a

clear line of demarcation between the 'within' and 'without' of the assembly. We should not cavil at an expression and miss a great spiritual truth. The 'seat of the unlearned' is not a tradition of brethren, but a clearly taught NT practice.

5 Why do we dress up for meeting?

In assemblies, people dress in a particular way for 'meetings'. Women wear dresses and hats, and men wear shirts, ties and normally business suits. Is this not a mere tradition of men?

How should a person dress for a meeting? If the Lord looks on the heart, and outward appearances cannot deceive Him, does it really make any difference how a person is dressed? Did not the Lord say, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly, they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15)? This is a line of questioning and reasoning that is often heard and we must face the issues and answer from Scripture alone.

When we gather as an assembly we are coming to meet with the Lord Himself and our very appearance should show our reverence. If we were called to meet with a dignitary of this world we would not dress in the clothes we use for house-cleaning or gardening. I see this as valid reasoning, but the warning needs to be sounded that we should not be more occupied with an outward appearance than an inward reality. However, I believe there are clear Scriptures that deal with the subject of our appearance. The women are told that their dress must be characterised by modesty and discretion (I Tim. 2:9). Older women are told to teach younger women about such matters (Tit. 2:3-5). The older woman must be an example to all in the realm of personal and domestic behaviour.

A clear statement regarding the appearance of men is "Be not conformed to this age" (Rom. 12:2). We have

seen a day when dirt and rags were worn as if they were medals for courage, not by those who must wear rags in their poverty, but by those who could appear properly dressed. It has been said by such people that God looks at their heart and knows what they really are, but the fallacy of this reasoning is that outward appearance is testimony and men cannot see our hearts, they can only see the exterior.

On the other side of this balance is the fact that neither men or women should attempt to draw undue attention to themselves. We are a testimony to our absent Lord and should ever seek to draw the attention of others to Him. In fact, we should so dress that we can forget our appearance altogether. This would save us from the extremes of odd dress or ostentatious dress.

There are believers in many places who because of poverty may not be able 'to dress' as many do who are not under their severe restrictions. This is a good opportunity for those who are able to show their liberality, but no matter what our means may be, our dress should never be the display of position or wealth.

There are clear prohibitions against the wearing around the neck, wrist or in the ears the ornaments of pearls, gold or costly decorations that are common to modern society (I Tim. 2:9; I Pet. 3:3). There are clear Scriptures for the uncovered head of the man, his short hair, and the covered head of the woman and her long hair, that should settle the matter for every exercised believer (I Cor. 11:2-16).

Nothing has been said about colour, or shape, or particular styles. The Bible lays down the principles of modesty and discretion and these are principles which every believer can understand. We should not attend meetings in clothes that the worldling reserves for his sports, and we should never cause by our appearance a distraction from the Person who has deigned to take His place in the midst of the company.

Clothes should not blur our personal identity as a man or woman. In the beginning God created male and female, and the present unisex owes its origin to human sin and rebellion. What a privilege to be a silent testimony to God in a godless age by our very appearance!

6 Isn't it only tradition that makes us talk about a 'meeting'?

Where do we get the authority for our various kinds of meetings?

Fortunately, this is a question that can be briefly answered. In our 'meetings' we meet with the Lord and one another. Seven times in I Corinthians we have the expression, "When ye are gathered together" and added to this is the expression 'in church' or in assembly ten times. At the meetings of the Corinthian assembly, we learn in chapter 14 that they sang hymns, expressed prayer to God and spoke God's Word to the gathered people. This is a simple order, but we still follow it.

It is likely true that early assemblies did not have the free time to meet frequently as we are able to do, so that one coming together may have been used for several or even all the kinds of meetings described. This does not take away from the fact that seven kinds of meetings are found in the NT. The breaking of bread meeting had paramount importance, and the prayer meeting was a regular practice (Acts 2:42). The meeting for edification (I Cor. 14) is authority for a teaching ministry to believers or for the Bible Readings. The elders' meeting was the only segregated meeting and is described in Acts 20:17-38. The meeting to report labours in the gospel in distant parts is described in Acts 14:26-28; and the separate meeting for discipline is found in I Corinthians 5:4. This makes six, and the seventh is an activity that goes out from the assembly, the gospel publicly proclaimed in all the region around (I Thess. 1:8). A few

Scriptures have been referred to, but many more could be called upon for support of these seven meetings.

The Sunday school is part of the gospel testimony of an assembly. We have no Scripture to describe it, but we do have principles for its operation. "Thou and thy house" and "Thou shalt tell thy children" are principles that have not passed away. It may be that to speak to the young is the most important of all the service that can ever be done in the gospel. Rather than being a secondary job that anyone can handle, it is the very foundation of all gospel work.

A comparison between Acts 13 and 17 will reveal the same man preaching in a very different way. It was the same gospel, the same Christ, but yet such a great contrast. The explanation is that the listeners were from totally different backgrounds. As a wise soul-winner, Paul preached to reach each one of his hearers and he preached to meet their needs. For this reason we must suit our message to our hearers, so that children must have lessons they can understand. It would be wrong to say that the Sunday school is an assembly meeting and yet if we practise wrong things in dealing with the children and through the Sunday school effort they are saved, as many have been, how can we tell them it was alright to use an unscriptural method in the Sunday school, but now we must confess it was wrong and we do not want them to follow the example that we set?

7 Isn't it only tradition to use the KJV for assembly Scripture reading?

I suppose the most honest answer to this question is that it is a tradition. Perhaps the question should be, "Is it a good tradition or a bad one?" There are a few versions in English which are more literally accurate, such as the "New Translation" by John Nelson Darby. However, there are English versions that have been published within the last thirty years that are distinctly inferior to

the KJV. In fact, it is generally confessed that for beauty of language, nothing compares to the 1611 English Bible. Just as the Septuagint was the accepted Greek translation of the OT in the days when our Lord walked the streets and lanes of Judæa, so the KJV is the accepted English Bible today. It is trustworthy as a translation and it saves from much confusion in public reading and quotation of Scripture. "God is not the Author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33).

There are good translations which are a help in personal study, but in assembly gatherings, we will save many problems by consistently using the KJV. (See bibliography for list of reliable translations.)

8 Why must we cling to Thee, Thou, Thy and Thine when addressing God?

The general argument is that the KJV uses Elizabethan English which today is archaic. The KJV does use forms of seventeenth-century English, which have long ceased to be used. However, the reverential forms of address to God continued for several centuries after Elizabethan English had ceased to be used, so these particular forms are not archaic. The Revised Standard Version of 1952, produced by liberal scholarship retained 'Thee, Thou and Thy' in addressing God. Even the New English Bible, published in 1961 (the NT) and 1963 (the OT), which has come under much criticism by conservative scholars, retains these forms in addressing God. The Charles B. Williams NT dropped the reverential form as far back as 1937, but this was an exception and had very little influence on how pronouns were used in prayer. It has been the popular paraphrase known as the Living Bible, which began to be published in 1962 and was completed in 1970, which has made a great impact on forms of address to God. The fact that it is a paraphrase has no direct bearing on our subject, but the warning that follows is of vital importance to all who use a

paraphrase of any kind. A paraphrase is not a critical translation. It attempts to interpret Scripture, rather than just to translate it, as the preface to the 1971 edition of the Living Bible freely confesses. This may create serious problems, for the interpretation may be incorrect and yet the reader may believe that he is reading the Word of God. Remember, a paraphrase is a commentary and its value is limited by this fact. I have serious doubts about paraphrasing the text of Scripture. The possibilities of misunderstanding are too great. People read a paraphrase as the Holy Bible and this can be very misleading.

The English language does contain reverential and respectful forms of the second person pronoun which allow us to show reverence in speaking to God. It has been a very long tradition that these reverential forms are used in prayer. In a day of irreverence, how good to display in every way that we can that "He (God) is not a man as I am" (Job 9:32).

There are many other factors that do bear on this subject. It is not a primary scriptural reason, but we should consider the many men and women who fear God above many who are grieved by this familiar form of address to God. It is the very opposite of the attitude that was displayed by men such as Moses and Joshua who took their shoes off their feet when they came into the presence of God (Ex. 3:5; Josh. 5:15). Even though the way into God's presence has been opened for us through the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, and we can draw near with confidence, yet, we should ever be characterised by the fear of the Lord, and never use familiarity in His presence.

There are other charges about practices which some say are merely the traditions of men: the silence of sisters (I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2:9-15), the absence of musical instruments in our gatherings (Eph. 5:19; I Cor. 14:15),

the separation of believers from politics (Phil. 1:27; 3:20), the prohibition against an unequal yoke in marriage (I Cor. 7:39; II Cor. 6:14-18), the refusal to take collections in gospel meetings (III John 7) etc., but these matters have been dealt with in other parts of this book.

We have seen that a number of our practices that are said to be merely human traditions have clear Scripture to teach and support them, or spiritual principles to give us reason to continue them.

Chapter 18

Assembly Discipline

We would be far happier if the solemn subject of the next three chapters never had to be raised. Paul found it painful to write to the Corinthians about discipline, yet it was necessary. The language of II Corinthians 7:2-13 describes in a touching way the agony of his spirit when he was compelled to write to them to correct sin among them. The subject is painful and distasteful, but it is absolutely necessary.

It has been shown in our examination of Scripture that the very first mention of an assembly is against a background of human failure (Matt. 18:15-20). We have suggested that although this is most solemn and humbling, it is also encouraging. It is easy to imagine that a correct order for gathering and proper assembly function will produce testimony that is somehow without human sin and failure. We have never known such a local testimony, and He who knew the hearts of all men, never suggested that such a testimony would ever exist. Everything that the hand of man touches will be flawed by that touch, yet the encouragement lies in the fact that God has been pleased through the centuries to use imperfect instruments for His perfect work. Testimony has been maintained for God, not because of human failure, but in spite of it.

The normal way to teach assembly discipline would be to start with the internal aspects of discipline that are not so severe that they require excommunication, and then move to the more serious sins that demand a 'putting away' from an assembly. One of the reasons we are not going to do this is that discipline for moral and

doctrinal evil are not by necessity a more severe form of internal discipline. They are totally different kinds of discipline and the one has very little link with the other. The only link that we can trace is that sin always increases where it is not judged, but this is a moral principle that relates to every form of sin and is expressed by the wise King Solomon, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccles. 8:11). All judgment against evil tends to restrain evil.

In dealing with assembly discipline, we are going to look first at sins that require the 'putting away' of the guilty person from the fellowship of an assembly, and then we will look at other forms of discipline that are just as scriptural and yet for one reason or another are seldom carried out.

Discipline for Doctrinal Evil

The two men who are named in I Timothy 1:18-20 were not just guilty of using the name of the Lord in vain, even though this is a serious sin. The blasphemy with which they were charged was doctrinal evil as can be shown by the statement, "Holding faith and a good conscience which some having thrust from them have made shipwreck *concerning the faith*" (v. 19, RV). Hymenæus and Alexander had made shipwreck concerning the faith. Further proof is given that their sin was doctrinal error in verses 3 to 7 of this chapter where the false teachers are exposed. In this sense we should understand the phrase, "Of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander."

Blasphemy is an insult spoken against God. These men were guilty of speaking blasphemy to dishonour the Lord Jesus and the doctrines of the gospel which in this epistle are called the faith, the commandment, the truth, the deposit and the charge. This very precious

stewardship of truth was committed to Paul, and later to Timothy to practise, preserve and preach (I Tim. 1:11; II Tim. 1:14). Paul judged himself most unworthy of this trust, for he himself had in his religious blindness been a blasphemer (I Tim. 1:13). As a Pharisee who was blameless touching the law, Paul cannot mean that he took the name of God in vain. He rather means that he spoke blasphemous things against the claims of the Son of God. This is the correct context in which to understand the charge of blasphemy. Of course, this meaning of the word is not confined to this chapter. It is the way blasphemy is used in I Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:5; II Peter 2:2 (KJV, 'evil spoken of') and II Pet. 2:12 (KJV, 'speak evil').

These men were delivered unto Satan, and the only guide we have for the understanding of this expression is I Corinthians 5:5, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In both passages, it involves, at the very least, the removal of the guilty persons from the fellowship of an assembly. To make shipwreck of the faith and to be guilty of blasphemy against the faith are not indefinite statements. They describe evil teaching that touches the Person of Christ and the great doctrines of gospel truth.

In II Timothy 2:18, there is a man called Hymenæus who is linked with a man called Philetus. They are said to 'have shot wide of the truth'. Their error was in relation to the future resurrection, saying it was already past, and 'turned upside down the faith of some.' Such descriptions of error will guide elder brethren when they are considering cases of evil doctrine. We should never put a man away for a wrong interpretation of a particular Scripture, so long as he holds the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints; but when there is a denial of the faith, there must be excommunication, for Paul wrote to the Galatians about such doctrinal

error that "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9).

It is suggested by the statement of I Timothy 1:20 that the two men who were delivered unto Satan were not beyond recovery. The discipline was that 'they might be taught.' Is it possible that we are far too quick to give up on one who has fallen into error? Paul's words to Timothy should instruct us in the blessed work of seeking the erring ones, "Apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Tim. 2:24, 25).

Discipline for Refusing to Confess Wrong

There are those who have followed with agreement all that was said on I Timothy 1, who may now part company with us in our interpretation of Matthew 18:15-20. Showing due respect to those who differ in their interpretation of this passage, it is my understanding that verses 17 and 18 of Matthew 18 teach excommunication. Some have charged that this could be a tool in the hands of vindictive men to 'get rid' of people. Whatever might be said about the possibility that professed leaders might stoop to such a depth of depravity, we surely must in all honesty examine the words of our Lord in their context.

A trespass was committed by a man against his brother (v. 15). The entire solution of the matter is given by the Lord in this one verse. The one who has been sinned against must go privately to the one who has sinned and tell him his fault to his face, in private, without having already spread the matter far and wide among others. If confession is made, the matter is settled. A little humility settles much. This recovery should be linked to the recovery of the one sheep that has gone astray (vv. 12-14).

"But, if he will not hear thee" (v. 16). Now comes the

involvement of one or two more, making a total of two or three who are aware of the problem. The Lord does not say "Two or three elders of the assembly," for obvious reasons. The only elders known at the time were Jewish elders, and this is truth for the days when the Lord will be absent and assemblies will exist, with an elderhood recognised in each of them. But it would be a foolish man who did not take with him reliable men, in whom he and the assembly have confidence, in other words, elders. If the reader has difficulty in fitting elders in at this point, then it will be necessary to do so when he reaches verse 17, for it is impossible to think of such a matter being handled in an assembly without the proper and scriptural functioning of the elderhood.

The two or three witnesses fail to bring a confession from the man. Let us be clear that the Lord has already said in verse 15 that the man is guilty of a sin against his brother. Elders are often brought into problems where they have no such word from the Lord, and after carefully listening to both sides of the story, may be convinced that no sin has been committed, or even that both are alike guilty. Wise men will move very cautiously when there is any doubt. We need not complicate this case with such added problems, for the Lord makes it clear that this man was guilty and in the face of two or three witnesses refuses to confess his guilt.

Now the matter is taken before the assembly, which would literally mean, all the elders and all the saints (Phil. 1:1). "If even the church he refuses to hear," is a correct reading of this part of verse 17. The KJV has diminished the solemnity of this by translating *parakouō*, which means 'refuses to hear' by the less severe 'neglects to hear'. The verb literally means to be wilfully deaf. This refusal to hear the church is a most serious charge.

"But," some have said, "what if the man is right and the church is wrong?" At this point, this kind of reasoning has no application, for this man was wrong

and the church was right. "But is it not possible that the church could be wrong?" Not in this context, for the church did not make the decision, heaven did; it came from the throne of God, and on earth there was no legislating at all; it was merely a matter of carrying out what heaven had already decided about the issue (v. 18). We should never allow hypothetical problems to distract us from the plain meaning of plain verses. In fairness to those who truly fear the wrong treatment of one who is innocent, we should point out that God lives and an assembly is His house. He well knows how to rule in His own house. Hebrews 10:30, 31 is not out of context here, particularly when we remember that the quotation, "The Lord shall judge His people," is from Psalm 50:4, which is a millennial scene of perfect rule, and is followed by the words so familiar to us, "Gather My saints together unto Me" (v. 5).

Of course, the real problem that many have with the Matthew 18 passage is that the Lord Jesus said in verse 17, "But if he refuse to hear the church, let him be unto thee (singular) as an heathen man and a publican." The personal pronoun has been taken to mean that the man who was wronged is to act toward the offender as if he were outside the assembly, but everyone else, I take it, is to treat him as usual. In practice, this interpretation has always appeared to me to be a judgment against the innocent man. He carries out a judgment against the guilty man, but no one else does. This would exclude the innocent man from every function where others fellowship with the guilty man who, by the way, is guilty of refusing to hear the church. Unless I have missed something of vital importance here, this would mean that the innocent man is no longer truly 'in fellowship' in the assembly.

The Lord has not ceased to speak about the matter at the end of verse 17. He says, "Verily I say unto you (plural), whatsoever ye shall bind (plural) on earth shall

be bound in heaven” (v. 18). Literally this means—whatsoever ye, the assembly, shall bind on earth shall be, having been bound in heaven. It is very difficult to take this binding and loosing as referring to some other subject. Plain sense says it means the matter of the offender who has refused to hear the church and is put away, and becomes as a heathen man and a publican to the assembly until such a time as he will hear the church and confess his wrong. Therefore, assembly discipline is only a carrying out in an assembly of that which God has decreed must be done.

The parable that just precedes this section is very different from the similar parable in Luke 15. Here it is not a lost sheep, but one that has gone astray. “And if so be that he find it” suggests the possibility that the search of the shepherd might be in vain. The man who has trespassed (v. 15) is a straying sheep, and the two or three are shepherds seeking one who has strayed. Keeping the parable in mind sheds light on the entire passage. The two or three are seeking the recovery of the straying one, and make him the subject of their longing and prayer (v. 19).

Chapter 19

Discipline for Moral Evil

I Cor. 5:1-13

We are now dealing with a very comprehensive passage of the Word of God. I Corinthians 5 deals in a very full way with the subject of judging moral evil.

Some have taught that the reason the man in Corinth was removed from the assembly was that he had an unrepentant attitude. He was 'put away' for an attitude, not an act. This teaching is false. It claims that falling into fornication does not require excommunication so long as the guilty person is repentant, confesses the sin to God, and is restored.

We are facing this problem in North America today, so I am asking the indulgence of any who may be reading this who have never had to face it. It is not a new thing, but it has come up again to be a problem.

This teaching creates not one problem, but many. How many such acts can be repented of, confessed and professedly forsaken? Every believer knows from his own experience that we have been compelled to confess so called 'lesser sins' again and again. There has been true repentance and confession, but as in the case of the sin of pride, sinful anger, or evil thoughts, we have again and again committed the very sins we have confessed, and for which we have been forgiven. Have we not truly repented, or truly confessed or been truly forgiven? Then, if this is the way moral evil is to be handled, the same forgiving grace must apply and numerous acts of fornication can be confessed and forgiven privately without any assembly action. Such teaching opens wide

the door to sin in an assembly, as we have seen firsthand in moving among assemblies for many years.

My second problem relates to the number of times that the act can be committed without being able to charge that the guilty person is unrepentant. Great difficulties arise if it is claimed that one act is not a cause for 'putting away', but five acts are cause enough. What arbitrary number of acts are considered enough for assembly action? Then, what about the time period? If there is a period of time between two acts of sin, such as three months, does this make a difference? This is not idle conjecture, for it involves the very principle of 'living in sin', and whether it is an act or a continuance in sin. Then, we would have to ask if it makes a difference whether the guilty parties are single or married, and if single are they planning in the future to be married? It is possible that such questions could have as many answers as the number who would attempt an answer. However, the Word of God answers all these questions for us by simply stating that an act of fornication requires excommunication.

Cicero, the Roman statesman and orator, says that the sin of the man in I Corinthians 5 was never mentioned in Roman society. His sin was known among the saints, yet there was no mourning on their part, rather, they were inflated with pride. Verse 2 indicates that if the assembly had properly mourned the sin, God would have removed the offender. I take it that this removal was in the sense of those who are described in I Corinthians 11:30. The reason for this interpretation is that 'taken away from among you' is an aorist passive verb, that is, not an act of the assembly. Their lack of a proper attitude meant that the man remained to defile the assembly.

It is twice stated that the man who had his father's wife was guilty of a deed, in both cases (vv. 2 and 3) the noun is singular. In verse 2, the verb form is an aorist

participle, active voice, masculine gender and singular number—‘He that hath done this deed.’ This is significant, for it does not refer to an attitude at all, but to an act of sin. Again in verse 3, the verb form is an aorist singular, referring again to a deed committed and not to a state of being, such as being in an unrepentant attitude. This man was dealt with (v. 13) for a sin committed, not an unrepentant attitude about his sin. This is the point to keep in mind when it is claimed that only an unrepentant attitude requires excommunication as a last resort.

The assembly was to meet for the specific purpose of dealing with the offender (vv. 4, 5). This is important. The Corinthian assembly held a meeting for the purpose of carrying out discipline. A common practice is to carry out discipline at the end of a meeting for the breaking of bread when those occupying the seat of the unlearned are asked to leave, which they do, wondering what it is all about, and perhaps making an effort to find out. Such discipline should never be known outside of the number who are in the fellowship of the assembly. May we suggest that we should have a distinct and separate meeting of an assembly for discipline!

At Corinth, the assembly gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, with His authority fully recognised, to remove from the assembly the leaven that was causing the whole lump to be leavened (vv. 4-8). This is the primary reason for discipline. The assembly is a temple of the Holy Spirit and is to be characterised by that holiness and righteousness that causes it to be called, ‘the church of God’.

A second reason for discipline that removes leaven from the assembly is to keep the entire assembly from being permeated by the evil (v. 7). I find it impossible to conclude from this that Paul is saying that the sin of a man having his father’s wife will spread; no, this form of moral evil might never be repeated, but other forms will

rush in. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" may mean two things, first, the entire assembly is defiled by moral evil, and moral evil unjudged will open the door for others to fall into immorality. We know that this is exactly what happens. Paul wrote to Timothy, in another context, but the principle applies, "Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear" (I Tim. 5:20).

We have no evidence that the man who had his father's wife was also guilty of the other moral sins mentioned in verse 11. He may have been, but we do not know it. Paul uses the case of the man to impress on the assembly the need to judge sin among them. "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." Verses 12 and 13, immediately following, leave no question that anyone guilty of any of the sins that are mentioned must also be 'put away' from an assembly.

Discipline for Fornication

An act of fornication makes the guilty person a fornicator. This is a broad term in its use in the NT and refers to all sexual sin committed with another person where there is an entrance made into the body of the other person. We are confronted with so many forms of sin that we have to be plain and clear about what the term means. Fornication includes homosexual acts, bestiality and the oral sexual practices which are common in this dark day of evil, as well as natural sexual intercourse between people who are not married to each other, whether the guilty persons are married or unmarried. Only the marriage bed is undefiled (Heb. 13:4); all else is sin. The Greek word for fornication, *porneia*, has this wide meaning in the NT, as a careful comparison of its uses will show. Masturbation is not an act of fornication. It is sin, but not this form of sin, and is

not a cause of excommunication. I deeply regret that such matters ever have to be written or spoken, but brethren are constantly facing these questions and seeking help on dealing with them, and we are compelled to be plain.

I have heard it said, "Did not the Lord Jesus say that 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matt. 5:28)? How then can we be so hard on a person who commits an act of fornication?" An evil thought defiles the one who thinks it and no other person, but an evil act defiles others. There is a world of difference between an evil thought and an evil act, even though both are sin.

Discipline for Covetousness

A covetous person is one who acts in covetousness. It is not possible or scriptural for men to make judgments about motives, or inner thoughts, but when a person steals, or is involved in gaining possessions that are not honestly obtained, he is guilty of an act of covetousness. The act requires excommunication.

Perhaps a word of caution is necessary here. Wise brethren will do their utmost to determine the degree of accountability. A difference should be made when there is a question about the mental health of the person who is involved.

In this day of legal gambling such as lotteries, the assembly believer who engages in this kind of practice is guilty of an act of covetousness and must be judged by the assembly where he is in fellowship according to I Corinthians 5:11. It is necessary for brethren to be wise in dealing with these modern problems. People who have recently been saved may never have been taught the evil of such practices, but if after plain teaching and clear warning, any person continues wilfully in it and buys a lottery ticket, he would surely need to be 'put

away', with earnest care and prayer for his recovery.

Discipline for Idolatry

An idolater was one who bowed down to the idols of the pagan world. Linked with the idols' temple were many forms of immorality. Having been saved out of such conditions (I Cor. 6:9-11), and being surrounded by them, the Corinthian converts needed a special warning. Again, it would have to be an act to be judged in an assembly, for only God can judge hearts.

Discipline for Railing

Railing is slander that has as its purpose the destruction of another. It differs from evil speaking in that it is directed against divinely constituted authority. This can be seen from the way it is used in Jude 8, 9 and II Peter 2:10-12. When a professed believer speaks against elders with the calculated purpose of bringing them down from the responsibility which the Holy Spirit has given them, he is a railer. It does not mean that a person loses his temper and says things for which he is almost immediately sorry. It is possible to rail against any fellow-believer, but the sin of railing, in the two passages of the New Testament where we have illustrations of it (Jude and II Peter 2), is a wrong attitude against divinely constituted authority—which is habitually expressed in outbursts of speech—which weakens or attempts to weaken that authority. Again we repeat, that the only authority elders possess is the authority of the Word of God.

Many have attempted to distinguish between evil speaking and railing by the way the words are spoken; if quietly, it is evil speaking, if loud and in angry voice, it is railing. To distinguish the two things by this method is almost certain to be a subjective judgment, for the tone of speech or strength of voice would depend very much on the personality of the speaker. The better way to

distinguish railing and evil speaking is by an understanding of the real meaning of railing. It is a persistent attitude of working against and speaking against the spiritual government that the Holy Spirit has raised up in an assembly with the purpose of overthrowing it, or at the very least, to weaken it.

Discipline for Drunkenness

The word drunkard, *methusos*, means a person who is given to strong drink. The word itself has in it the thought of a habit. The very best way to be preserved from the habit is to totally abstain from any use of alcohol. One in every ten people is a potential alcoholic, so a believer is preserved by never exposing himself to this threat. Linked with the use of drink is almost every moral evil known to mankind. Moral restraint or inhibitions are weakened or entirely erased by alcohol, therefore it plays a major role in the immorality that is so much a part of this modern age.

Discipline for Extortion

An extortioner is a person who swindles other people out of their possessions. By deceit and trickery, he gains advantage for himself in business dealings. This is a day of much dishonesty in advertising. If this is not as extreme as extortion, it does at least approach the idea of it, but extortion also has the thought of seizing by force, to compel a weaker person to yield.

For any of these six sins, a professing believer must be 'put away' from the fellowship of an assembly. Verse 13 shows clearly that an assembly has a 'within' and the person 'put away' is put outside the assembly until such a time as he is restored.

Restoration after Discipline

I Corinthians 5:5 proves that the man who was guilty of

the sin was a true believer. I do not know any other way of understanding the salvation of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus. Whether this man was ever restored to the assembly in Corinth cannot be proven to the satisfaction of all students of these epistles, but the teaching of II Corinthians 2:1-11; 7:3-13 is very important in understanding principles of restoration.

All assembly discipline has restoration in view. The very use of the word discipline indicates a form of correction by the rod, in contrast to admonition which is a correction by word. It will be helpful to view restoration from the two viewpoints of the assembly and the person being restored.

Restoration and the Assembly

When sin that requires discipline is exposed in an assembly, it should produce a spirit of mourning. This was lacking in the assembly at Corinth (I Cor. 5:2). A solemn illustration is given to us in the way leprosy was handled in Israel. When leprosy was found in a house (Lev. 14:34-53), the stones in which it was found were taken away and cast into an unclean place, the entire house was scraped, other stones were brought in to replace the ones that had been removed, and the house was cleansed by the blood of a slain bird and the setting free of a living bird. This is only an illustration, but it is a good one. When sin appears in an assembly that requires excommunication, the ones in whom it is found are put away, the entire house is scraped, and the blessed value of the shed blood is applied as well as the truth of the resurrected Lord who has conquered sin and risen in triumph over death. How we have felt the scraping of every stone when sin has come to light! Like Jacob, we have been caused to say, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God" (Gen. 28:17). Then, when those who have been put away are restored to the assembly, it is like new stones being

brought back in and all the thought of the sin is put away from the minds and hearts of the saints. Praise God for the precious blood and the resurrected Lord through whom this is made possible!

Restoration and the Restored Person

The teaching of II Corinthians 2:1-11 needs to be carefully studied. The assembly was very slow to judge sin in I Corinthians 5 and in this second letter, they were slow to restore a believer who had been 'put away'. What is required for restoration? The answer of chapters 2 and 7 of this second letter is that the assembly must be assured that repentance has taken place.

When confession is voluntary, the work of repentance is already far advanced. When sin is found out and confession is compulsory, the situation may be quite different. Wise brethren will be able to see this distinction. Evidence for repentance may not always be tears or even a sad countenance. The disposition of the person must be considered. Regular attendance at meetings and a right attitude toward God, self and others, accompanied by a sincere desire to be restored back to the fellowship of the assembly are good indicators. There is no set time that a person must be out of an assembly. The genuine evidences of restoration are the one true guide for reception back again. When a believer is recovered, he is to be forgiven and comforted; love is to be confirmed to him (II Cor. 2:7, 8). Forgiveness is commanded and must be given freely, but confidence is something that must be earned.

When the elders are satisfied that repentance is obvious, they should convey this to the assembly and announce that the person or persons will be received if there are no *scriptural* objections. Wise brethren will be able to judge if an objection is valid from Scripture, and not the result of some personal pride or prejudice. An objection that has no scriptural basis is totally invalid

and the objector should be so informed by the elders. This kind of an objection should not be allowed to keep a person out of an assembly if the elders believe true repentance has taken place. The assembly is neither a democracy nor is it a place for self-will (Titus 1:7). Let us be certain that the objection has scriptural authority.

Chapter 20

Internal Discipline

There are a number of Scriptures that deal with various forms of internal discipline. We will attempt to deal with them in this chapter and describe their effect on an assembly.

1 Restoration from a Trespass, Galatians 6:1

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault (any trespass), ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” The word for ‘fault’ is one of the words in the NT for sin (Eph. 1:7; 2:1 etc.). We are not told the nature of the sin. It cannot be one of the sins of I Corinthians 5:11; we have clear teaching about how they are to be handled. The man has been ‘overtaken’, that is, he was betrayed ‘unawares’. It is not a wilful choice of sin. In dealing with such a case, love and brotherly care are to be used, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (v. 2). Although the brethren involved in the restoration are ‘Ye which are spiritual’, even they must be careful, looking to themselves, lest they are also tempted. This enforces the thought that this is a sin that could ‘overtake unawares’ any believer.

2 The Prayer of the Elders, James 5:13-16

James 5 describes a believer who has fallen sick. There is the underlying fact that this sickness is from the hand of God because of sin (v. 15). “Confess your faults (*hamartias*—sins) one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,” is the Holy Spirit’s

commentary on the case. Using this as our guide, we can say, the believer had sinned, he is laid low with sickness, he is aware of the judging hand of God, calls the elders and confesses his sins. They pray for him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord and he is healed. James is a very early epistle, but it is far from being 'out of date'.

Of course, the problem is about the anointing with oil. This is not a case of the exercise of the gift of healing which was current in the early days of testimony. The man does not call apostles or others who had the gifts of healing; he calls 'the elders of the assembly'. For this reason, I do not believe the oil is intended as a means of divine healing. It was very likely an applied medicine.

3 Snatched out of the Fire, Jude 17-23

These verses describe cases very similar to the two already examined. The difference is that the false teaching of apostates has had an evil effect upon all who hear them. Not all are affected in the same way, some were totally overcome, but by this it was proven that they were not genuine (vv. 17-19). "But ye, beloved..." shows the contrast between those who were overcome and the overcomers. However, there were some who were so badly affected that they were wavering (v. 22); they were in doubt about what was right and wrong. To such weak believers mercy should be shown. They need teaching and it is to be given with compassion. There are still others who are deceived by the false teaching, and they need to be snatched from the fire. Then, there is still a third class (see RV) who have been defiled. Those who are involved in this 'saving work' are to be merciful and compassionate toward those who were adversely influenced, but not in any way tolerant toward the apostate teaching, "Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." This was evil doctrine, but it led to a breakdown in righteous living and

produced the ungodliness described in this little letter. Bad belief and bad behaviour are twins.

4 Withdrawing from a Disorderly Brother, II Thessalonians 3:6-14

This passage is a clear example of how internal discipline works. The assembly acts and yet the offender remains in the assembly. Paul taught the young assembly at Thessalonica by his conduct among them. He calls this example 'the tradition...received of us.' This behaviour had to do with working to earn his own bread with his own hands. Although this was not a commandment for one who laboured in the work of the Lord as Paul did (I Tim. 5:18), he gave them this pattern according to the wisdom that God gave him. Did he foresee the problem that would arise at Thessalonica, that some would be saying that the Lord's return was to take place at any moment, therefore they would not do their daily work? When the Lord did not come immediately and these people grew hungry, they ate the bread for which others had toiled. This is the context. Added to this failure to work with their own hands and eat their own bread (vv. 6-10), was the added problem that these idle people were 'working around' (idleness is mischievous) among their brethren (v. 11), and stirring up trouble.

It is against this background that Paul writes, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man (mark him out), and have no company with him (do not mix with him) that (in order that) he may be ashamed" (v. 14). This is not excommunication, it is internal discipline on the part of the assembly toward a disorderly man. 'Have no company with him,' means that he is not to have any companions in his disorderly walk. It does not mean not to shake his hand or speak to him, but it does mean to make it very plain that his conduct evokes no sympathy, but only disapproval.

Again the purpose is that he should be recovered from his wrong behaviour.

5 The Public Rebuke, I Timothy 5:17-22

The passage we are now considering has much teaching in it not directly related to discipline. It is tempting to try to discuss all of this truth, but this is not the place for it. The protection of an elder in verse 19 is surely a part of our subject. He is to be given the protection always demanded by righteousness. No unfounded charges are to be accepted against him. Two witnesses are the minimum number required before a charge can be accepted. I take it that this means accepted for investigation.

Some have taught that verse 20 continues the subject of the charge against the elder and have interpreted it as follows. A charge has been raised against an elder for which there are not two or three witnesses, or even after the testimony of two or three has been heard, the charge is proven to be unfounded. If the person or persons laying the charge persist in their unfounded charge, then they are sinning against an elder and must be publicly rebuked. This interpretation has the advantage of telling us exactly what the sin is that requires the rebuke. This may be the correct interpretation, however, it seems to me that this makes a relationship between verses 20 and 19 which strains the good sense of the language, demanding the insertion of human speculation.

After seriously considering the context of the rebuke, I have to accept the thought that if a charge is raised and it is proven that an elder has sinned, or any other believer in an assembly, then he must be rebuked and it must be public, that is, 'before all'. Verse 20 may not have such a close link to verse 19 as many have thought. Paul is giving a series of instructions in this section of the epistle. It is not an easy task to be dogmatic about where

one subject ends and another begins, but there does seem to be good evidence to believe that the phrase, 'Them that sin' is not limited to the elders of verse 19, and includes anyone in an assembly. This is the Scripture that should be used, for instance, to rebuke a person in the assembly who marries an unsaved person.

Most certainly, there cannot be one standard for believers and a lower one for elders, in fact, the standard for elders is higher. So, if an elder sins, and a number (two or more) in an assembly know of a sin on the part of an elder and nothing is done about it, they would surely be stumbled. An elder has very particular responsibility and answerability. The rebuke would not be with the purpose of destroying him, or done in a spirit to destroy him, but with the ultimate purpose that 'others may fear.' Perhaps there is so little of the fear of God among us, and so little consciousness of the possibility of sin on the part of any of us, that we cannot conceive of an elder ever being rebuked and going on in his elderhood. The other side of this is, Could he go on in his responsibility if the sin is known and yet unjudged, making the assembly a partaker of his sin (v. 22)?

The problem with this interpretation is, What is the sin that is rebuked before all? We do know certain things about it. It could not be an excommunicable sin, or Paul would have clearly stated that he must be put away. It must have been a sin that was known, not just by one person, but by at least two, therefore it was a sin committed before others, or about which others had obtained eyewitness testimony. It must have been more serious than the sins which are not public and are to be confessed to the Lord alone (I John 1:9) or to one another (Jas. 5:16). This narrows the possibilities. The rebuke was for a sin that was public, that was damaging to the testimony, and yet not so serious that it required excommunication.

6 Silencing the Contradictors, Titus 1:9-11

These verses have often been applied to internal assembly discipline, so in the light of their frequent use, they must be carefully examined.

Titus is told that he will be confronted by “Many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision” (v. 10). On the Island of Crete there were young assemblies with a lack of leadership and many problems, but if they had these many unruly men and deceivers in the assemblies, then their problems were great indeed. I do not believe the men described in verse 10 were in assemblies. Paul goes on to say, “Who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake”—for base personal gain. The very fact that Paul links their evil ‘subversion’ to houses would indicate that their activities were in the homes of believers, and anyone else who would lend an ear to them.

It was one of this kind, a prophet among such unruly men, who said, “The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies” (v. 12). In spite of the source of this quote, Paul says, “This witness is true, wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (v. 13). The question that concerns us is, Who are to be rebuked sharply? The ‘unruly men’ who live off those they deceive, or the Cretians who are in the assemblies? The relative pronoun ‘rebuke them’ does not go back to verse 10, but rather to verse 12. The one thing that is true of both the unruly men in verse 10, and the Cretians in verse 12, is that they both live on Crete, but they are two very different groups of people.

This means that the ‘stopping of mouths’ in verse 11 does not refer to brethren in an assembly, but the rebuke for idleness in verse 13 does. The ‘stopping of mouths’ is not an act of discipline, but is rather an ability to so live and speak ‘according to the teaching’ (v. 9) that by sound doctrine those who are contradicting the truth

may be convicted by their folly and close their mouths (vv. 9, 10).

Then this is not a Scripture to silence an unruly man in an assembly? No, I do not think it is. Then an assembly has no way to stop a man from teaching and preaching whose life gives the lie to all he says? Yes, there is clear Scripture to control the functions of all gifts in an assembly. This is the context of I Corinthians 14:26-33. "Let the prophets speak two or three and let the other (*alloi*—others of the same kind) judge." The statement of I Thessalonians 5:12, "Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord..." has very clear application to this kind of judgment. We must not allow an all-man-ministry, or any unfit man to minister in an assembly. The next form of discipline is also a control on who ministers and what they say.

7 The Rejection of a Heretic, Titus 3:10, 11

The word that is translated 'heretick' in the KJV is literally 'factious'. This is a man who is self-opinionated to the point where he continues to force his own peculiar views on an assembly. After being corrected twice by responsible brethren, he continues his 'factious teaching' and is to be avoided, his teaching is not to be allowed, or given any place. No believer should lend their ear to this man who is subverted and really knows he is sinning (v. 11).

This is not the Scripture to use for a man who teaches 'heresy', that is, teaching that denies the faith. We must go to I Timothy 1:20 or II Timothy 2:14-19 for the judgment of doctrinal heresy.

8 Those who Cause Division, Romans 16:17-20

This passage is a plain warning from the pen of Paul, at the close of this great epistle that deals so fully with the doctrines of the gospel, against those who cause division and occasions of stumbling contrary to the teaching that

has been given. It is a parallel passage to Philippians 3:17-19 and should be compared with it. The great problem in interpreting these verses is to determine if these false teachers are in an assembly, or if they are outside, but have influence on some who are within the fellowship. I strongly lean toward the view that they are outside. The language used about them indicates that they taught some form of Judaistic legalism, yet at the same time had Epicurean philosophy and served their own bellies, not the Lord Jesus Christ. Some believe that the way they served their own belly was by food laws, and not by gluttony, but I doubt this interpretation, for it is characteristic of such teaching that a dual standard can exist between doctrine and practice.

However, it would not be out of context, to see a strong warning in Romans 16:17 against any who cause division by wrong teaching. Paul uses the phrase, "Mark them," as in Philippians 3:17, where believers are exhorted to mark (to pay attention to) the good example of those who live godly lives. In Romans 16, believers are to mark the wrong ways and teachings of those who cause division so that they may avoid any bad effect of their doctrine. That this is the meaning is confirmed by Paul's statement in verse 19, "I would have you wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil." It was necessary to be acquainted with the false teaching so it could be identified and rejected, but it is not necessary, nor is it safe, to delve into many forms of evil. We are better to be simple concerning evil. Do not delve into spiritism, demonism and the sewer of modern immoral perversions. It is defiling and dangerous.

We have often failed to carry out these internal forms of discipline. It may be that had we been more careful about carrying out the Word of God in this respect, we would have had fewer cases of the more severe kind of discipline to face. While we are not excusing any failure

to obey the Word of God, we are deeply thankful that assemblies are still observing practical discipline. It has almost disappeared from denominational organisations, but some independent congregations still obey these Scriptures.

Chapter 21

Assembly Giving

We can be deeply thankful to God that the assemblies we know do not make appeals for funds. If there is an error in regard to teaching or practice about giving, it is that it is seldom, if ever, mentioned and young believers are seldom taught the principles of scriptural giving. It is likely that this is the best side on which to err, for so much that professes to be linked to the name of the Lord Jesus is characterised by begging for financial support.

If there is any need for justifying the handling of this subject, we should appeal to Paul's words to the elders of the assembly at Ephesus, "I have coveted no man's gold or silver or apparel...I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:33-35).

The pages that are read first in the Truth and Tidings magazine are those that contain the news, and secondly, the Question and Answer section. The subject of assembly giving will be handled by asking and answering questions.

What is giving to the Lord?

Assembly giving to the Lord is a sacrifice of holy priesthood. If rightly understood and practised, it is an act of worship. It begins with the presentation of ourselves to the Lord. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Paul writes about the believers of the churches of Macedonia,

“They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (II Cor. 8:5).

The presentation of ourselves to the Lord is true spiritual worship (Heb. 13:13-16), so that when we give of our substance it is “An odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). This close link between worship and giving makes the offering on the first day of the week a distinct part of the worship of the saints.

Who can give?

Assemblies are unique in that we do not take offerings or collections in meetings that are arranged for prayer, teaching, Bible reading or gospel preaching. There are some professing assemblies where an offering is even taken from Sunday School children with the excuse that they are being taught to give to the Lord, but unsaved children or adults cannot give to the Lord.

John, the aged disciple, writes to his well-beloved Gaius, who had often succoured him, that he ought to receive brethren who came to him, even though they might be strangers to him, “Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well” (III John 6). The reason these brethren should be helped was that “For His name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles” (v. 7). Obviously, this is still a godly practice. It would be utterly incongruous to go forth to serve the Lord for His name’s sake and take help from the Gentiles to pay expenses. The division of the entire world into three classes is of great help here, “Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Gentiles, or to the church of God” (I Cor. 10:32).

People who do not have Christ as their Saviour and Lord cannot give to God. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 15:18). The ‘wicked’ of the OT are the unconverted of the NT. The reason for this abomination is explained in a very similar

verse, "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" (Prov. 21:27). There is help in the RV margin to understand this 'wicked mind', "How much more when he bringeth it to atone for his wickedness?" This is a major wrong with the giving of the unsaved. They tend to think they can appease divine justice with their gifts.

Poor believers can give to the Lord. It was out of their deep poverty that the churches of Macedonia gave to the needy saints at Jerusalem (II Cor. 8:2). Paul teaches in this very full section that God accepts the gift, "According to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." A gift of very small value in the eyes of men, can be of great worth to God.

The Lord sat over against the temple treasury one day and saw the rich casting in great gifts. "And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites" (Mark 12:42). Her gift amounted to 1/96 of a penny, but it was all that she had, and the Lord placed great value on it. The context of this passage is startling. It happened at a time when the Lord and His disciples were looking at the great buildings of the temple that Herod, the Great, had renovated. Against their grandeur, what worth could there be to the widow's two mites? But she gave to the Lord, not the temple. Had she been occupied with the size and wealth of the structure, she would never have offered her whole-hearted sacrifice.

The rich can and should give to the Lord. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Charge them that are rich in this world... that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute" (I Tim. 6:17, 18). However, the work of God is mostly supported by those who are "Poor in this world, but rich in faith" (Jas. 2:5).

Why should I give?

The Lord Jesus gave all that He had, "Who, when he

had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that He had and bought it" (Matt. 13:46). "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

I vividly remember the late Mr. Benjamin Bradford, and the last time I heard him speak, he took up a favourite subject. From Luke 16:5, he tenderly, powerfully applied the question of the unjust steward to believers, "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" May the Holy Spirit apply the question to our hearts!

One of the themes of the Roman epistle is that we are debtors. Paul began by saying that he was a debtor to all men, to carry the gospel to them (1:14). He taught that we are not debtors to the flesh to live after its dictates (8:12), but our debt to God is so great, we can never repay it. "Owe no man anything, but to love one another" (13:8).

Where should I give?

A. Giving should be to the Lord through the assembly.

This is a primary responsibility for each believer in fellowship in a local assembly. Giving is a priestly act and is part of the collective, priestly function of an assembly (Phil. 4:10-20). The first time Paul mentions the 'fellowship' of the Philippians, he speaks of their giving as 'begun' and 'completed', two priestly, sacrificial words to describe it (1:5, 6). These same two words are also found in II Corinthians 8:11. At the close of the epistle, he calls it, "An odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable" (4:18), two more priestly expressions.

The fellowship of the assembly at Philippi was personal and practical, for it met Paul's immediate need. It was accompanied by prayer and was persistent, for they continued to send gifts to him.

1 It was out of love, "your care of me" (4:10).

2 For need, "communicated with my affliction" (4:14).

- 3 To the Lord, "giving to the Lord" (4:15).
- 4 Fruit to their account, "I desire fruit" (4:17).
- 5 A priestly sacrifice, "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable" (4:18).
- 6 With the promise that all their needs would be met, "But my God shall supply all your need" (4:19).

B. Giving is also done personally.

We would not be carrying out NT principles, if our only giving was through the assembly. Paul was in full agreement with the elders in Jerusalem, "They would that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do" (Gal. 2:10). Assemblies did give to the poor, but Paul's use of the first person pronoun indicates that he personally gave to the poor.

Personal giving was not confined to the poor. "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6). Those who receive the benefit of the teaching, communicate in all good things to the man who teaches them.

The loving hospitality of saints toward strangers, fellow-believers, and servants of the Lord is a wonderful form of personal giving. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers" (Heb. 13:1). People of the world cannot believe that gospel preachers are kept in the homes of believers for many weeks at a time while special gospel efforts are in progress. This has been a mark of assemblies through the years and is most honouring to the Lord. "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers, who have borne witness to thy love before the church" (III John 5). "Phoebe...for she hath been a succourer of many and of my own self" (Rom. 16:2).

Many older saints, who for years have kept preachers, eventually reach the place where they can no longer do so. How good when there are younger believers who are willing to consecrate themselves to this service! It is a

worthy work, and must be done in devotion to the Lord Jesus.

How much should I give?

The tithe of OT giving was a commandment to Israel, but the NT does not repeat it. Instead, there are spiritual principles of grace that guide in giving.

Paul's words in II Corinthians 8:1-15 contain the clear answer to this question.

Verse 1 According to the grace of God—Gratefully

Verse 2 "The riches of their liberality"—Liberally

Verse 3 "Of their own accord"—Willingly

Verse 5 "Gave their own selves"—Totally

Verse 8 "The sincerity of your love"—Sincerely

Verse 12 "According to...he hath..."—Accordingly

When should I give?

On the first day of the week:

I Corinthians 16:1, 2, "Now concerning the collection for the saints... Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." This is a significant passage and tells us several things about giving. There are some who interpret this verse as meaning that the believers were to put aside this money at home every first day of the week, but this creates a problem. Why mention the first day of the week at all, if it is merely money stored up at home, and how would this avoid the need of collecting it when Paul came? The clear meaning of this passage seems to be that all were to participate in the giving and it was to be proportionate according as each one had prospered. It was to be brought to the offering of the assembly each first day of the week, and the assembly was to lay it up so that it would be ready when Paul, or whoever he might send, came to receive it. It is important at this point to see that the phrase, "Upon the first day of the week," has the same force as Acts 20:7, that is, it was every first

day.

This was a special offering for needy saints at Jerusalem, but there are divine principles here to show us how the early assemblies handled their giving. In the introduction, we mentioned the law of positive pattern, which certainly applies to this epistle, and its many commandments (14:37), for assembly order and function. This is the pattern for when we should give as an assembly, and we should obey it.

There is another time when we must give. Whenever there is a personal need to be met, the believer is to do his utmost to meet it at the very time it presents itself. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food... notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (Jas. 2:15).

Will I lose what I give?

The teaching of the NT indicates a present return for all that is sacrificed to the Lord. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom" (Luke 6:38). There is a divine principle that spans all of God's various dealings with mankind. It is linked with giving, "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:6, 7). This fact is true for all time and eternity.

The believer who gives of his service, time and means to the Lord is laying up for himself "a treasure in the heavens that fadeth not" (Luke 12:22-36).

The entire subject of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ is linked to what is presently sacrificed for His name's sake, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23, 24).

How does an assembly handle finances?

A detailed section of II Corinthians 8 gives ample guidance in the handling of assembly funds (vv. 16-24). Paul desired that honourable brethren, well known to the believers in the various assemblies, who had ministered to the saints in spiritual things, should accompany Titus to Corinth to share in the responsibility of gathering the offering there. There were at least three of these brethren including Titus (v. 23). The principle of the 'two or three' witnesses is apparent all the way from Matthew 18, and should be practised by assemblies in all the handling of funds. At least two brethren should be responsible to count and record the offerings, and at least two or three should handle jointly all the assembly financial business. There may be more, but this would be a minimum.

Qualifications for such administrative work are first spiritual and then practical. The successful handling of a business in the world is not a major qualification for handling assembly finances. It is spiritual fitness which must have priority, but assembly matters should be handled by a proper business method. Paul gives ample reason for this in this chapter, "Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (vv. 20, 21). Some elders feel that all this 'business practice' is totally unnecessary in the handling of assembly funds; but Paul did not share their feelings and neither do we. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).

A Glossary

Brief definitions of terms used in Scripture, or commonly used in ministry and discussions on the church, with some Scripture references.

Apostles' doctrine

The teaching of the apostles that they had received from the Lord Jesus directly, or that was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:42; John 16:12-14; II Tim. 3:10).

Assembly

A more accurate translation of the Greek word *ekklēsia*, translated 'church' in the KJV. The believers who meet as a local church in a particular locality.

Authority

The unique authority of the Bible as the only source of spiritual truth (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

Autonomy

Literally self-governing, sometimes used to describe the accountability of an assembly to none but the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:20).

Back seat

A misnomer given to the seat of the unlearned or the unsaved (I Cor. 14:16, 23-25). It is not necessarily a back seat, but demarcation is necessary between those who are within an assembly and those who are without (I Cor. 5:12).

Baptism

Water baptism is immersion in water in identification

with Christ in His immersion in the overwhelming floods of God's judgment at Calvary. The baptised believer is also linked with the burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 6:3-6). The baptism in the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13) is done by the Lord Jesus and is a spiritual reality for every believer at conversion. Please note that the word 'baptism' has these two distinct meanings.

Bible reading

A meeting for the teaching of spiritual truth from the Scriptures in which there is participation by a number of brethren (I Cor. 14:19-32). A conversational Bible study.

Bishop

A KJV translation of *episkopos*. It literally means one who looks over, or an overseer (I Tim. 3:1-7). There were a number of bishops in each assembly in NT days (Acts 20:28). It is not a title for an office-holder, but a work.

Body of Christ (the)

The NT term for the church which is the body of Christ. This is a great spiritual truth. It includes all believers from Pentecost to the rapture (Eph. 1:22, 23).

Body of Christ (a)

The assembly at Corinth is called a body in I Corinthians 12:27. The human body is used as an illustration of how the individuals in an assembly are united to one another. An assembly is body-like in its functions.

Breaking of Bread

The simplest term used in the NT to describe the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7).

Brethren

Used of all believers in the church age (Rom. 12:1 etc.). Never used in the NT to segregate believers from one another, but rather to show that all are one in Christ.

Brother

A fellow-believer who is a male (II Pet. 3:15).

Called out

A term that has sprung from the Greek word *ekklēsia*—an out-calling. This is a correct term when it is used for an assembly.

Christian

Every person and truth that is vitally linked to the NT revelation of God in Christ (I Pet. 4:16).

Church

A good term badly abused in Christendom. It is the KJV translation of *ekklēsia* and is used of the church which is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23). It is also used of a local assembly, meeting regularly in a given locality (I Thess. 1:1 etc.). It has these two meanings in the NT. In Christendom it has two meanings as well, first, a building used for religious purposes and second, a religious organisation which is distinguished by a denominational name, which are both contrary to its scriptural use. Its misuse in the religious world causes us to prefer the word 'assembly'.

Churches of Asia

Assemblies in the Roman Province of Asia (I Cor. 16:19).

Churches of Christ

Assemblies wherever they have been planted, for they truly belong to Christ (Rom. 16:16).

Churches of Galatia

Assemblies in the Roman Province of Galatia (I Cor. 16:1). It would be correct to speak of the churches of North America, but wrong to use the term, 'The church of North America' when referring to a number of assemblies.

Churches of the Gentiles

Assemblies formed from non-Jewish, pagan people (Rom. 16:4).

Church of God

Used thirteen times of an assembly in a particular place (I Cor. 1:1, 2 etc.).

Churches of the saints

Assemblies wherever planted, made up of saints (sanctified ones, I Cor. 14:33).

Christendom

The professing Christian systems and organisations that give assent to the teachings of Christ. It is seen as a great tree in Matthew 13:31, 32.

Circle of fellowship

Not an aggregate of assemblies who are known to one another and therefore have 'fellowship' with each other, but the spiritual unity of an assembly that gathers around the Lord Jesus Christ. He is *en mesoō*—in the midst of such a company (Matt. 18:20).

Collective testimony

A term used to describe the honour brought to the Lord Jesus through an assembly in its own locality and used to distinguish this testimony from the personal life of a believer among his neighbours (I Thess. 1:8-10). Personal testimony affects assembly testimony.

Commandment of the Lord

The entire body of teaching relative to the order, functions and practices of a local assembly (I Cor. 14:37).

Commended worker

One who has been given the full fellowship of an assembly or assemblies to devote his life to the work for which the Holy Spirit has fitted him and to which the Lord has called him (Acts 13:1-4; 16:1, 2).

Deacon

A brother, or a sister (deaconess) who has been entrusted with a service for an assembly, either in the temporal or spiritual realm. One who serves or one who ministers (I Tim. 3:8-13; Rom. 16:1; Eph. 3:7, 8).

Denomination

A religious organisation that has chosen a name to distinguish it from other Christians. Denominationalism is unscriptural in all its forms.

Discipline

The correction of evil in an assembly. Moral evil results in excommunication in I Corinthians 5:1-13. Doctrinal evil results in excommunication in I Timothy 1:20. There are other forms of discipline that are internal and do not require the 'putting away' of the offender (I Tim. 5:20 etc.).

Division

The fracture of fellowship in an assembly that is the result of envy and strife and destroys the unity of the assembly (I Cor. 3:1-5).

Door of an assembly

This term is not in the NT, but the truth it expresses is

found (Acts 9:26-30). It expresses the fact that there is a proper way to be received by an assembly and there are door-keepers who guard the door.

Elderhood

The proper term used to describe those who have the responsibility of overseeing the spiritual needs of an assembly. They are always plural (Phil. 1:1 etc.).

Elder

Literally, one who is older, but used particularly of a brother who is spiritually mature and who has been fitted by God to be a spiritual guide in an assembly (Acts 20:17, 28; I Pet. 5:1).

Exercise

Used four times as a verb and once as a noun in the NT to describe the personal concern and therefore the spiritual activity of one who serves the Lord in whatever capacity (I Tim. 4:6-8).

Excommunication

The removal from the assembly of one whose sin or wrong teaching requires it. See chapter 18 of this book (I Cor. 5:11; I Tim. 1:20).

Evangelist

A gift from Christ to the body (Eph. 4:11-13). It is one of the gifts for the building up of the body and is a divinely given ability to herald the gospel publicly. "The work of an evangelist" involves more than preaching from a platform. (II Tim. 4:5).

Fellowship

The spiritual oneness of believers on the ground of the precious shed blood of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 10:17). Although this is a spiritual truth, it has a visible

presentation in an assembly. It can be portrayed in the order seen in the meeting for the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42).

Fellowship, the

In Acts 2:42, I Corinthians 1:9 and 10:14-22, 'the fellowship' is the common sharing in the privileges and responsibilities of those who together make up a local assembly.

First day of the week

The Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10), the resurrection day (Lev. 23:9-14) and the day on which the NT assemblies met to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1).

Gathering on the ground of the one body

A term used by certain teachers that claim that an assembly meets on the ground that all believers are members of the body of Christ. Such teaching fails to distinguish between the spiritual body and a local assembly (see chapter 3).

Gathering unto His name

The uniqueness, attraction, distinction and authority of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is all involved in this scriptural term (Matt. 18:20; I Cor. 5:4).

Gifts

Divine ability given to believers by the Holy Spirit through which the gospel is preached and believers are edified, exhorted, comforted and guided.

Gifted men

Evangelists and teaching pastors given by the risen Christ to the body for its growth and nurture and mature development (Eph. 4:11-13).

Gospel meeting

A very simple term which means what it says—a meeting of saved and unsaved for the preaching of the gospel (I Cor. 15:3; Acts 12:42).

Government

The rule in God's house. The rule of the Word of God in the house of God, as it is lived by elders as an example, and taught by them (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:1-4).

Having fellowship

A term that is used to describe the prayerful, practical and personal support of those who labour in the gospel and teach the Word of God (Phil. 1:3-7; 4:14-19).

Head covering

The two head coverings of the sister as she gathers with the assembly, the sister's long hair and the veil upon the head as they are described in I Corinthians 11:2-16.

Headship

The plan of God that 'man' should have dominion over all creation. Headship was lost by Adam in the fall, but God has not abandoned His plan and a Man shall yet have eternal and universal dominion over all creation. While the Headship of the Lord Jesus is denied by fallen humanity, it is recognised and displayed in an assembly (Eph. 1:22, 23; I Cor. 11:2-16; Heb. 2:5-9).

House of God

One of the descriptive terms used in the NT for an assembly (I Tim. 3:15). The 'church of God' expresses the fact that believers have been called out of the world. The 'house of God' emphasises the truth that we have been brought into the place of divine rule and order.

Independency

See 'Autonomy'. The principle that each assembly is a golden lampstand on its own golden base and responsible only to the Lord Who walks in the midst of the churches (Rev. 1:12-20).

In fellowship

Is generally used to describe people who are in the fellowship of an assembly (Acts 2:42), however, fellowship is a word of wide meaning and applies to the personal communion that the children of God enjoy with the Father (I John 1:3, 4) as well as the fellowship believers enjoy with one another (I John 1:7). 'The fellowship' is used in the NT for the responsibilities and privileges shared commonly by those who form part of any given assembly.

In the midst

A translation of the Greek phrase *en mesōō*, referring to the presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst of His gathered people (Matt. 18:20).

Interdenominationalism

Religious organisations with various names uniting for a common effort. The extreme form of this is the ecumenical movement.

Internal discipline

The united act of an assembly to judge wrong that is in it which is not so serious that it requires excommunication (II Thess. 3:14, 15).

Leading of the Spirit

Acknowledging that the Holy Spirit presides at assembly meetings and bowing to His authority as it is expressed in the words of Holy Scripture (Rom. 8:14-16; I Cor. 12:4-11; 14:26-39; Gal. 5:18).

Legalism

The principle of adherence to a legal system as a means of pleasing God. Service that is motivated by bondage to regulations instead of love and devotion to the Person of the Lord Jesus. Romans 7 is the experience of a man who attempted to be sanctified by means of a legal system. This is always wrong and leads to the cry of despair of Romans 7:24.

Letters of commendation

The scriptural way by which a believer is introduced to an assembly where he is visiting or to which he is moving his residence (I Cor. 16:10; II Cor. 8:22; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10; Acts 18:27, and II Cor. 3:1-3).

Levitical service

The service of the Levites in the OT was toward Israel, whereas most priestly service was Godward. Levitical service was always accompanied by priestly service. The principle of Levitical service in an assembly is anything that ministers to the spiritual needs of believers (I Tim. 4:10-16), whereas priestly service is Godward.

Lordship in an assembly

Giving to the Lord Jesus Christ the place of pre-eminence in the gathering and being totally in subjection to Him. I Corinthians is the epistle of the Lordship of Christ in the assembly.

Lord's Supper

Observed each Lord's Day when the assembly meets to remember the Lord Jesus and proclaim His death (I Cor. 11:20). The six other meetings of the assembly all receive their character from this pre-eminent meeting.

Lord's table

Communion with the Lord. I am at His table when I am

enjoying fellowship with Him and appreciating the blessings that have come to me through His blood (I Cor. 10:14-22). The Lord's table should be a daily privilege of each believer; yet it is very closely associated with the supper, so that one who is enjoying the table will be at the supper if it is humanly possible.

Ministry

Service (deacon) rendered in the Lord's name for the edification, exhortation and comfort of believers. We are correct to call a gathering where the Word of God is taught, a ministry meeting (II Cor. 3:6; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:7).

Missionary meeting

A report given to the assembly of gospel work in an area of consistent labour, not necessarily a foreign field, but usually so (Acts 14:27).

New Testament assembly

A company of baptised believers gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20; I Cor. 1:1-9; 5:4), who meet regularly in a particular locality, according to the pattern found in such passages as Acts 2:41, 42 and the epistles of I Corinthians and I Timothy. They are a spiritual fellowship that is expressed visibly as they meet for the breaking of bread, worship, prayer, testimony, the preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of the Word of God. A much fuller definition is given in chapter 2.

New Testament pattern

The first assembly that was gathered in Jerusalem left a pattern to be followed by every assembly that gathers together at any time (Acts 2:41, 42). When Paul wrote a letter of correction to the assembly at Corinth, he used this pattern to correct them, and commended the

Thessalonians for following the pattern (1 Thess. 2:14).

Number, the

Such passages as 1 Corinthians 14:23; Acts 5:11; 15:22 and Romans 16:23, indicate that an assembly is composed of a number of believers, known to the elders and known to one another.

Officialism

The holding of offices and positions and the performance of duties as an official service. There are no offices or office-holders in the assemblies that are described for us in the NT. "The office of a bishop" (1 Tim. 3:1), is a notably bad translation. The correct reading is, "the work of an overseer", or "if anyone aspires to exercise oversight" (JND). There are three things we are to recognise: godly character and life, spiritual gifts, and experience in the things of God, but we are not to recognise offices.

Old paths

Jeremiah 6:16 is the source of this expression. The 'old paths' that were to be sought were paths of moral righteousness. The revival under Josiah had failed to produce righteousness among the people. These first seven chapters of Jeremiah describe a people who had the altar, the temple, the priesthood and the sacrifices. They observed the holy festivals, but they oppressed their neighbours and lived lives of wickedness so that in all Jerusalem not one righteous man could be found (Jer. 5:1-18). This expression is a solemn warning that external correctness does not necessarily mean a heart that is true to God and His Word. (See Rev. 2:1-7.) This phrase was used in this way by godly teachers of the last century.

Open table

A term that has been used to describe the practice of receiving to the breaking of bread a person who does not consistently meet in an assembly. The term 'open table' is a misnomer and the receiving to the breaking of bread is not found in the NT. The pattern was and should still be, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and the fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42; note the articles).

Ordinances

It is often said that we have two ordinances left to us to observe, baptism and the Lord's supper. However, if by an ordinance we mean a physical element that expresses spiritual meaning, then the long hair and veiled head of the sister would also need to be included.

Oversight

The work of the elderhood of an assembly. It is a spiritual overseeing of the little flock. The elders are spiritual guides who have a spiritual care for an assembly (I Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20:28, etc.).

Pastors

Men who have been fitted by the Holy Spirit to guide, guard and feed the little flock. A pastor or shepherd is never one man over a congregation, but always a number of men who together exercise spiritual care for an assembly (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

Pentecost

The day which could only occur once, the complete fulfilment of the feast of Pentecost when Jew and Gentile were brought together into one body, the church (Lev. 23:15-22; Acts 2:1-4; I Cor. 12:13).

Positional truth

This is truth that is true of every believer in Christ at all times without degrees that are related to appreciation and apprehension. The true believer is eternally secure in Christ whether he appreciates it or not. Practical truth is related to behaviour and appreciation. Most positional truth has practical applications or outworking.

Priesthood

A holy and royal priesthood made up of all NT believers (I Pet. 2:5-9). The privilege of priesthood belongs to every believer. It is the presentation to God of the spiritual worship of a company of holy priests (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 3:3).

Prayer meeting

'The prayers' of Acts 2:42 make a clear distinction between the personal coming of a child of God to the Father and the collective prayers of an assembly (I Tim. 2:1-8).

Principles of gathering

The order and functions of an assembly as they are revealed in the NT.

Reception

There are five forms of reception practised in an assembly, first, the initial reception of a baptised believer who desires to take his/her place in the assembly (Acts 9:26-28); second, the reception of a believer who moves his residence (Acts 18:27, 28); third, the reception of a visitor who is in the fellowship of an assembly where he lives and visits another assembly (Rom. 16:1, 2); fourth, the reception back into an assembly of a person who has been disciplined (II Cor. 2:5-11), and fifth, the reception of teachers and their teaching. It should be remembered that not only does

the assembly receive an individual, but the individual, coming into an assembly, also receives the assembly and the principles of gathering which are practised by it. Apart from this mutual reception there cannot be an expression of oneness (I Cor. 12:25; Eph. 4:1-6, 25).

Ritual

A set form of religious observances, often performed as a duty or ceremony with little if any awareness of their original meanings. It is usually a return to Jewish or pagan practice.

Sanctuary

A dwelling-place of God, a place of spiritual worship such as the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple where Israel through her high priest met with God. The mercy seat where the blood of the sin-offering was sprinkled was the meeting place (Ex. 25:22). In the NT the OT type is called a worldly sanctuary (Heb. 9:1) because it was made of the materials of this world. There is no worldly sanctuary today. Our sanctuary is within the veil through which we are invited to enter with confidence into the very presence of God (Heb. 10:19-25). It is a spiritual sanctuary, not of this world. Christendom has many sanctuaries with altars, vestments, incense, candles and beautiful music, but by these practices they have returned to the shadows of Judaism.

Second names

Names that are added to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to identify a gathering of professed believers. All second names are wrong and imply that there is another name worthy of being put beside the name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9).

Sectarianism

The practice of forming a denomination that segregates

itself from other believers through following a leader, a doctrine, or a form of practice that fails to recognise the entire teaching of the NT about the local church, its order and functions. Ecumenicalism is modern Christendom's antidote for this evil, but the cure is as great an evil as the disease.

Separation

The scriptural principle of being separate from sin and all the evil that characterises fallen man in his moral, religious or social practices (II Cor. 6:14-18). Separation is first of all a positive truth, for we are separated from the wrath of God we so richly deserve, and cannot be separated from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:38, 39). It is clear from II Corinthians 6:11, 12 that it is not a narrowing truth, but is rather a truth that enlarges the affections, first toward Christ and then toward others.

Silence of women

A woman is forbidden to take audible part in an assembly meeting for prayer, preaching or teaching (I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2:12-15).

Sister

A fellow-believer who is a female. Many times in the NT, the term 'brethren' refers to male and female believers.

Spiritual service

The offerings of the NT priesthood which begin with ourselves (Rom. 12:1, 2) and include our worship (Heb. 13:13-16), our substance (II Cor. 8:1-5) and our song (Col. 3:16).

Subjection

The principle of acknowledging the Lordship of Christ in an assembly. It is seen in our obedience to His Word

and includes our submission to one another, to elders, and the submission of the woman to the man in the Lord (I Cor. 11:1-16; Eph. 5:15-30; I Cor. 16:15, 16; Heb. 13:17).

Teacher

A man gifted to teach spiritual truths and fitted by moral character, godliness and experience to communicate the Word of God to others in all its fulness and variety (I Cor. 12:28-31; Rom. 12:6-8; I Pet. 4:10, 11).

Traditions

A word that often has bad connotations as when it refers to the traditions of the Jewish elders (Mark 7:3-5), but is used by Paul to refer to the doctrine of the apostles in a very good sense (I Cor. 11:2; II Thess. 2:15; 3:6-9). See chapter 17.

Truth

Divinely revealed truth as it is found in the Scriptures. In teaching, an appeal to truth should never be made unless the Scriptures are expounded where the truth is found.

Two or three

It is a numerical value, but also is a term that indicates the minimum number of brethren who may act in or for an assembly in matters of judgment, government or communication, such as any communication with another assembly (Matt. 18:15-20; I Tim. 5:19; II Cor. 8:16-24).

Universal church

A convenience term that is not found in Scripture. Men use it to refer to the large aspect of the church which Christ calls 'My church' in Matthew 16:18, or is called 'the body of Christ' in Ephesians 1:22, 23.

Undenominational

Literally means to take no name. It is a term of very dubious value. The NT teaches that there is one name that has been given for salvation (Acts 4:12), or for testimony (Matt. 18:20), and it is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Worship

This is likely one of the most difficult words in all the dictionary of spiritual terms. There is no simple definition. We know it is the adoration that comes from redeemed spirits as God is revealed in Christ in His essential Being and many attributes. It contains within itself the thought of reverence, gratitude, thanksgiving, praise and wonder; but any of these or all together cannot describe worship. It is the response of a redeemed spirit to the revelation of the Godhead as seen in the person and work of Christ (Phil. 3:3). The word worship comes from worthship.

Worship meeting

A term that is often applied to the meeting for the breaking of bread. It should be remembered that while we meet to worship when we come to the Lord's supper, worship is not confined to this meeting. In all our prayers and hymns and spiritual songs, there should be worship going up from the heart to God.

Note: The definitions that are given in this glossary are intended to guide the reader in studying the church and the churches. There has been no attempt to replace the use of a good dictionary. Many of the terms that are used may have a wider meaning in other contexts. The references to Scripture are not at all exhaustive. Other references relating to each subject will be found in the text of the book.

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Offering answers for the many questions that arise about local church order and function, Norman Crawford, the editor of the Truth and Tidings magazine, provides a detailed study which will be helpful to any Christian seeking guidance about church fellowship. This book will also serve as a ready reference work in the many issues that confront local assemblies in our time.

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