

God's
Way to
Assemble

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GOD'S WAY TO ASSEMBLE

1 Corinthians 14

All Christians have, more or less, looked into the Word of God to find out the way of salvation; but how few of them, after being converted, have searched into that Word to find out how the Lord would have them assemble together as His people for worship! Though all believe that there is only one way to be saved, many consider that each is left to choose for himself how he should worship. They say, "I worship in my way, and you worship in yours. It does not make much difference, so long as we all get to heaven at last." Yet the mind of the Lord as to the assembling together of His people is as clearly revealed in the Bible as is the way of salvation. And let me ask you, dear reader, If any one were to say to you, "Can you give me your authority from Scripture for the way in which you meet together with other Christians?" could you show it to him from the Word of God? Surely if we ought to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15), we ought also to be able to give an answer to every one that asks us a reason for our manner of meeting together as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We affirm, then, that the Lord has not left us in the dark as to this, but has plainly revealed to us in the Scriptures what His mind is as to Christian assemblies.

Let us, therefore, look into the Word of God, and learn from it how the Lord's people used to come together in the early days of Christianity; for we must go back to the beginning, when the Church of God was first set up, in order to ascertain the truth of God about it. And if we would understand the passages which speak directly of the Lord's people coming together, we must bear in mind a most important truth, which, we may say, characterizes Christianity; namely, the coming of God the Holy Ghost to dwell on the earth in the Church of God, after that the Lord Jesus had taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

There are two great truths which constitute the foundation of the whole of Christianity. First, Christ glorified at the right hand of God, consequent upon having perfectly accomplished the work of redemption; second, the Holy Ghost come down, in consequence of Christ's exaltation, to dwell in the Church (or Assembly*) of God upon the earth.

* The word translated *church* means *assembly*, and is so translated in Acts 19:41 – “He dismissed the assembly.” In the following pages we shall use the word *assembly* instead of *church*, as it makes the sense clearer.

Of course, the Holy Ghost always existed; for the Holy Ghost is God. In the very first chapter of the Bible we read of the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters; and the ancient prophecies of Scripture came through “holy men of God,” speaking “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” 2 Peter 1:21. But God the Holy Ghost never came to abide or dwell upon the earth until the great work of redemption had been accomplished. Accordingly we read, in John 7:39, “This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him *should receive*: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” Mark. Why was the Holy Ghost not yet given? Because “Jesus was *not yet glorified*.” But after that Jesus was glorified, the Holy Ghost came down to dwell in the Assembly of God on the earth.

Scripture teaches that God does not *dwell* with men upon any other ground than that of accomplished redemption. It was not until after the children of Israel were redeemed out of Egypt that God *dwelt* in their midst, first in the tabernacle, and subsequently in the temple. Thus they sang, on the wilderness side of the Red Sea, “Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation” (or dwelling place). Ex. 15:13. The people were redeemed, and then God dwelt in their midst. But, if God has a dwelling place, it must be holy. So it is called a “*holy habitation*.” Hence every leper, and

every one that had an issue, and whoever was defiled by the dead, was to be put out of the camp of Israel, “that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I *dwell*.” Num. 5:2,3.

Turning now to Acts 2, we find the account of God the Holy Ghost’s coming down to dwell upon the earth on the ground of the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus;” for, as we saw in John 7, the coming of the Holy Ghost was to be consequent upon Christ’s being glorified; and His being glorified is the answer to His perfect obedience to the will of God, even unto the death of the cross. Phil. 2:8,9; John 13:32.

He became a Man in order that He might suffer on the cross for our sins, and be made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21); and now, having glorified God in the very place where He settled the question of our sins, God has glorified Him as Man at His own right hand.

His position in glory is the proof that the work of redemption has been fully accomplished, and that God has acquired glory by it. It is also the proof, dear believer in Him, that all your sins are gone forever, for He could not have your sins upon Him where He is.

The scripture in Acts 2:1-4 presents, in a few words, an account of one of the most wonderful facts ever recorded. It relates the coming down from heaven of God the Holy Ghost to *dwell* upon the earth. Well might we say with Solomon, “But will

God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" 2 Chron. 6:18.

Christ had been here, had died, had risen again, and had gone to the Father, and then God the Holy Ghost came down to dwell on the earth in the Assembly of God. So we read, in Ephesians 2:22, "Ye [Christians]...are builded together for an habitation [or dwelling place] of God through the Spirit."

It is a most wonderful fact that there is really a divine Person, God the Holy Ghost, dwelling at this moment on the earth, in His dwelling place or habitation – the Assembly. He also dwells in every individual who has believed, and whose body is now become the temple of the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. 6:19.

Many think of the Holy Ghost more as a kind of influence than a diving Person. I will ask you, therefore, to look with me at two or three passages that bear upon this point. The first is Acts 10:19, 20: "While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for *I* have sent them."

Here the Holy Ghost said, "*I* have *sent* them." It is a divine Person who *says* and *sends*. You could not speak of an influence as sending three men, and saying, "*I* have sent them."

Again, Acts 13:1, 2, 4: "Now there were in the church [assembly] that was at Antioch certain proph-

ets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Cucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate *Me* Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them...So they, being sent forth *by the Holy Ghost*, departed unto Seleucia.”

Here again the Holy Ghost is seen as a divine Person, directing the Lord’s servants concerning their ministry. An influence does not say, “Separate *me*,” nor does it send forth the Lord’s servants.

Further, the Holy Spirit distributes different gifts in the assembly, “dividing to every man severally as He will.” (1 Cor. 12:8-11.) Here it is distinctly a divine Person who gives and divides, and is sovereign in doing so: “As He will.”

We have now seen clearly, I trust, from the Word of God, that God the Holy Ghost, a divine Person, has come to dwell on earth, and that Christians are builded together for His dwelling place. In John 14 the Lord Himself speaks of the Holy Ghost’s coming to abide or dwell with us. “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide [dwell] with you for ever” (in contrast to the Lord’s leaving them to go to the Father); “even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye

know Him; for He abideth [dwells] with you, and shall be in you.” vv. 12, 16, 17.

Believers cannot see the Holy Ghost any more than the world can; but they can say what the world cannot, “We *know* Him; for He dwells with us, and is in us.”

Bearing in mind, then, the fact that the Holy Ghost has come to dwell on earth, let us now turn to some scriptures that speak directly of the coming together of the Lord’s people, whether it be to partake of the Lord’s Supper, for worship, or for prayer.

We will look first at Acts 20:7: “Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached [discoursed] unto them, ready to depart on the morrow.”

The Apostle and those with him had been a week at Troas (v. 6); but it was not till the eve of his departure that the disciples came together to break bread, that being the first day of the week, which shows that it was their custom thus to assemble to break bread; and the Apostle Paul, being at Troas, assembled with them.

Here we see that the Lord’s people used to come together on the first day of the week to “break bread”; that is, to eat the Lord’s Supper. Who came together? The *disciples*—believers in the Lord Jesus. This was not a mixed company of believers and unbelievers, gathered together to hear the gospel preached, but

those that were saved, disciples; and on this occasion their object was to remember the One who had died for them, and risen again, who had put away all their sins, and made them fit to dwell in God's glory in the Father's house. It was to show the Lord's death till He come again to take to be with Himself forever all those whom He has loved, and for whom He gave Himself (1 Cor. 11:26).

It is important to observe two things in the New Testament. First, the preaching of the gospel to the whole world (with this all Christians are familiar); and secondly, the gathering together of those who were saved—God's children— as an assembly of the members of Christ's body. The passage we have been looking at is a sample of the latter; that is, of the gathering together of those that were saved. In this case the object was to break bread.

Now let us suppose that all the members of the body of Christ in the place where you live were exercised as to the scriptural way of meeting together, and that they acted according to Acts 20:7, "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread." What a blessed thing it would be; a gathering or assembly of the saints of God!

The next question would be, Now we are together, how are we to conduct the meeting? What ought we to do? Is there any scripture to guide us in the matter? or has God left it to us to arrange as we think best?

The answer is simple. God *has* given us divine rules and commandments as to the assembling of His people, especially in one chapter of the New Testament, which I am afraid is little studied by the Lord's people. That chapter is 1 Corinthians 14. We have read, in Acts 20:7, that "the disciples *came together* to break bread." And you will see that the first sentence of 1 Corinthians 14:23 says, "If therefore the whole assembly be come together into one place." Here we find the very circumstance that we have been supposing; the whole assembly of the Lord's people come together into one place. But some might say, "How do you know that the assembly was composed of true believers only? Might it not have been a mixed company of believers and unbelievers?" The answer is in verses 24 and 33: "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches [assemblies] of the saints." This was an assembly of the saints. And who are saints? Every true believer in the Lord Jesus is a saint, or sanctified one. All Christians are "beloved of God, called saints," or saints by calling. Rom. 1:7. What a beautiful expression is that: "*Assemblies of the saints*"! How blessed thus to gather—as those who are saved and who know it—around Him who is in the midst of the two or three that are gathered in His name to worship "in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." John 4:23.

We have seen that God the Holy Ghost came down to dwell on the earth in His dwelling place, and that Christians are said to be an habitation of God through the Spirit. We find the same truth in this Epistle to the Corinthians. "Know ye not that *ye* [collectively] are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Chap. 3:16 When the individual is spoken of, it is said, "Know ye not that *your body* is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" Chap. 6:19.

Again we read, in the verse we have already looked at, "God...in all assemblies of the saints." 1 Cor. 14:33. Hence we know that, when the Lord's people are thus assembled together, God the Holy Ghost is really present to lead and guide in the assembly; and not only so, but the Lord Jesus is in the midst, according to Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there *am I* in the midst of them." What a blessed truth! When two or three are gathered together in His name, the Lord Jesus is really present in the midst!

Suppose the Lord Jesus were to make known to all His people in the place where you live that He would personally appear in a certain place at eleven o'clock next Lord's day morning; how eager would every true believer be to be there! All would flock from every part of the town to meet *Him*; and if one were stopped, and asked the question, "Where are you going this morning?" the answer would doubtless

be, “Do you not know that we are going to meet the Lord?”

It was something like this that we read of in Matthew 28:16, 17: “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted.” The Lord Jesus has said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29); and He is as really present for faith in the midst of the two or three gathered to His name, as though we could see Him. If any one were to ask us on Lord’s day morning, as we go to remember Him in the breaking of bread, “Where are you going?” we could answer, “We are going to meet the Lord.”

In the case we have been supposing, were the Lord to appear at a certain place and hour, He Himself would be the Center to which every one would gather; and it is just the same to faith always.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 14, we have in verse 23, “the whole assembly...come together into one place.” The Holy Ghost is in the assembly to guide and lead, and the Lord Jesus is in the midst.

We will now see what was done in the assembly. In verse 15 we find prayer and singing. “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” The spirit here is not the

Holy Ghost personally, but a man's own spirit, though led of the Holy Ghost. He prayed and sang intelligently; not merely saying words into the meaning of which he did not enter.

In verse 16 we find they blessed, or *gave thanks*. This might be giving thanks, for instance, at the Lord's Supper. "The cup of blessing which we bless," or "give thanks for." Chap. 10:16.

There was also *teaching*. "That by my voice I might teach others." v. 19.

In verse 24 we have *prophesying*. To prophesy, in the New Testament sense, means not only to foretell future events, but to reveal the mind of God on any special occasion; and the result of it is edification, exhortation, and comfort. v. 3. We should remember that the early Christians had not the entire New Testament as we now have it; but the Spirit of God revealed the truth directly through the prophets for the edification of the saints.

In verse 26 we read, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, 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." Here *every one* had a psalm, or a doctrine, etc., which shows that there was liberty for any brother in the assembly to take part, but only as led of the Holy Ghost; for the Apostle adds, "Let all things be done unto edifying." Now, the Corinthians were

greatly gifted. They came behind in no gift. (Chap. 1:7) They had the gift of tongues—that is, the power of speaking in foreign languages—and they evidently thought more of these outward manifestations of the Spirit’s power than of the edification of the assembly.

In those days there were direct revelations from God given to the saints, as the New Testament Scriptures were not then completed; and although there are no revelations now apart from what is written in the Word of God, the principle applies as much now as then, that there is liberty for any brother to take part in the assembly if led by the Spirit, and then the result must be edification. The Apostle was not rebuking them for taking part in the assembly; but what he presses is that the part they took should be for edification. Besides, verse 31 removes all doubt: “For ye may *all* prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.”

There was liberty for *all* to prophesy; of course as led of the Spirit; for then there would be no confusion, since “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all assemblies of the saints.” v. 33.

The women were to keep silence in the assembly. v. 34 “It is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.” And the Apostle adds, “For it is a shame for women to speak in the assembly.” v. 25.

But it might be said, "Although it seems from this chapter that the early Christians used to meet in this way, things now are different, and we have to adapt ourselves to the times we live in."

The answer is found in 1 John 2:24: "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the *beginning*." We must go back to the beginning, to the truth that was revealed then, to find out the mind of God about any thing. There has been no new revelation since that day. The "commandments of the Lord" are the same today as they were in the apostles' days. Some, however, might say, "I do not think there is any *commandment* that we are to meet in the way taught in 1 Corinthians 14." But how clear and how solemn are the inspired words of the Apostle Paul in verse 37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the *commandments of the Lord*"!

The things written in this chapter are not the opinions of the Apostle Paul, nor even *his* commandments. They are "the commandments of *the Lord*"; and "if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

Have you, dear reader, obeyed these commandments of the Lord? Do you gather together with the Lord's people in the way spoken of in this chapter? Or do you say, "This was written to the Corinthians only"? Here you mistake. This Epistle is written to you also; for if you are a believer in Christ, you are

included among those to whom it is addressed. Look at the second verse of chapter 1. To whom is the Epistle addressed? “To the church [assembly] of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with *all* that in *every place* call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

It is, you see, addressed not only to the Corinthians, but to *all* that in *every place* call upon the name of the Lord. Are not you among that number?

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments...He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.” John 14:15, 21. “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” 1 Sam. 15:22.

-- R. F. K.

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