

Conferences as to the Assembly

Held at Plainfield, N. J., in 1896



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THE NATURE, CHARACTER, AND DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

FIRST Cor., chap. 12, gives us the Church in one character, as the body of Christ. The House of God, in Eph. 2, speaks of its relation to God. The body of Christ, of its relation to Christ, and of the members one to another. Our word church is not a translation of the Greek word *Ecclesia*, but an accommodation of the Greek *Kuriaké*, like the Scotch *Kirk*. It means that which belongs to the Lord, as in Rev. 1: 10, "I was in the Spirit on the *Lord's day*" (*Kuriaké*), and in 1 Cor. 11: 20, the Lord's Supper (*Kuriakos*). The word *Ecclesia* or assembly, means a called-out gathering, as the "Church (Assembly) in the wilderness" (Acts 7: 38), where it refers to the Jewish nation; and Acts 19: 41, where it refers to a heathen mob, "he dismissed the assembly." This word "Assembly" has been adopted by the Spirit of God to designate that new thing upon earth—a separate people linked by the Holy Ghost to Christ in heaven, "the assembly which is His body" (Eph. 1: 22, 23).

The word itself is descriptive; it suggests a separation by the divine call—a *gathering out*, in contrast to the Jewish word synagogue, a *gathering together*. Hence Satan's counterfeit of the true Church is called the *synagogue* of Satan (Rev. 3: 9)—the going back to Judaism

after the light of Christianity had come. Israel was God's assembly gathered around Himself, but it was not the body of Christ.

The assembly in Christianity is the house in which God dwells, (not a house made with hands, like the tabernacle), composed of living stones, built together by the Holy Spirit. The tabernacle was a type of this. The body of Christ had no type answering to it in the Old Testament. This was not only a *new thing*, but a *new thought* in Scripture. We have the assembly, typically, in the Old Testament very often, but not as the body of Christ.

The temple was in the land, the tabernacle in the wilderness. In Hebrews it is the tabernacle in the wilderness. The holy place there is in the heavens where God dwells. In the whole tabernacle, viewed as an enclosure, we have the court representing the earth in relationship to God, and the tent itself, God's dwelling place—the heavens. Taking it up separately we have the boards forming the habitation of God—type of believers forming the Church, the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2: 22). In the curtains, veil, etc., we have types of Christ Himself. The beauty and glory of the curtains, draped over the wooden boards, is Christ covering His people, and in whose glory and beauty they stand. The curtains give the name to the whole structure—"the tent" or "tabernacle."

The thought of a *body* is of an organic whole, and speaks not only of its relation to the head, but of each part to the other. As to the relation with the house, let us remember that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily*." In 1 Cor. 12 as soon as the apostle begins to speak of the body, he speaks of the relation of

the members one to another, and in chap. 13, which speaks of edification, love is the controlling principle, governing the exercise of these gifts. As *members*, in filling their respective functions, they serve one another and the whole body. The individual believer is looked at as quickened out of death; not so the Church: it is composed of believers. Isaac's wife must be from among the kindred of Abraham. It is not by the fact of life in Christ that we are in the body of Christ, but by a further operation of the Spirit of God, uniting us to Christ our head, baptizing believers into one body—a new and distinct thing. It is not apart from life, but a further thing.

In Thessalonians, we have not the Church properly, but individuals. "The Church which is in God the Father," etc. (1 Thess. 1: 1), does not give us the Church as the body of Christ, but as members of the family of God. This is not the same as "in Christ." "In Christ" is position. "In the Lord," is being under His authority. For instance, it is not marrying in Christ, but marrying in the Lord (1 Cor. 7: 39). This is not a question only of marrying a believer but of marrying in subjection to the Lord. Lord is always connected with individuals. In Eph. 5: 29, instead of "Lord" it should read, "Even as Christ the Church." The thought is of "nourishing and cherishing it."

The Church as the body of Christ is always looked at as complete on earth. As the house, the eternal habitation of God, it is incomplete, but growing into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2: 20, 21). Any local assembly and the Church as a whole at any given time, however, are looked at as a complete body or building, wherein order must be maintained (Eph. 2: 22; 1 Cor. 3: 16, 17; 2 Cor 6: 16).

Ephesians presents the Church in three different aspects. As the body of Christ (chap. 1: 22, 23) it is linked with Christ glorified—grace and position are the prominent thoughts. In chap. 2: 22, it is the House where order and responsibility are suggested. In chap. 5: 25-27, the Bride is suggested, looking forward to future glory and association with Christ. This thought of the body of Christ does not pass away with time, for the relations suggested by a body will go on, and we shall serve Christ and one another forever; and how *He* will serve us! In Eph. 4 the “full grown man” is the Church with Christ in glory. Chap. 1: 22, 23 doubtless shows us the Church in this character for all eternity, *the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*

In eternity we have a city (Rev. 21 and 22), and in that city the Bride, who gives character to it. Although man began building a city in unbelief (Gen. 4: 17 and 11: 4), yet a city is God's final thought for him, with all its suggestions of unity, social intercourse, cooperation, etc. It is sometimes questioned whether the Bride is the Church, and not rather the whole company of the redeemed in glory. Abraham looked for a city that hath foundations (Heb. 11: 10-16), evidently the city of Rev. 21. From this it is argued that the Bride, being the city, must include Old Testament saints. To this it can be replied that the city takes its name from the Church, its most prominent occupant; the bridal city as the habitation of the Bride—just as in Rev. 19 we have the bridal supper at which the Old Testament saints are the invited guests. The city includes more than the Bride but gets its name from the Bride. The reverse of this is seen in Isaiah 62: 1-5, where the city is again the Bride—the *earthly* Bride—but now including *less than the whole nation*, which is married to Jehovah. In either case the meaning is plain.

“We are come to Mount Sion” (Heb. 12: 22-24), is in contrast to Mount Sinai, the place of law and judgment. It is the reminder of grace, and of the coming glories of Christ’s earthly kingdom which are established upon grace. The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the city of which we have been speaking—the heavenly Bride. The spirits of just men made perfect are the Old Testament saints.

The truth as to the Church, its unique position, heavenly character, exalted dignity and eternal existence, is one of the principal doctrines recovered from the word of God for us in these days, having been lost since the apostles’ time. Not even at the reformation or afterward, was the truth of the Church understood. It is therefore to be expected that Satan will use his utmost endeavors to nullify or becloud this truth. We must therefore be on our guard and ready to resist his wiles, and to maintain the truth in love at all costs.

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory *in the Church* by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3: 20, 21).

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE ASSEMBLY

As the Holy Spirit forms and indwells the body of Christ, He is its power to act in relation to Christ as head, and for us as fellow-members of that body. The Spirit is thus the life of the body, as it were, similar to the “spiritual” body which will be the suited abode of the spirit of the redeemed. The Church is thus the vehicle for the display of the Spirit’s energies.

Entrance into the Church is by the baptism of the Spirit and began at Pentecost. Baptism is *always initiatory*, whether by water or by the Spirit; when used alone the word always signifies water baptism. Israel's baptism was unto Moses (1 Cor. 10). John's baptism was unto repentance (Matt. 3: 11). Christian baptism is unto Christ as Lord and introduces into the kingdom (Matt. 28: 19, 20). Baptism of the Spirit is unto Christ, as Head, and introduces into the Church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 13).

Baptism of water stands at the door of *the Kingdom* and baptism of the Spirit at the door of *the Assembly*. It is of this baptism we are now speaking.

The Spirit is the active power in all that God does. At the creation He brooded over the waters (Gen. 1: 2). New birth is the work of the Holy Spirit by the Word (John 3: 5; 1 Pet. 1: 23). When a person is saved, he is sealed by the Holy Ghost (Eph. 1: 13), who is to abide in us till the day of redemption (John 14: 16); and by the same act the person is baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 13).

The baptism of fire with which that of the Holy Ghost is connected (Matt. 3: 11), seems to speak of judgment. At Pentecost the cloven tongues as of fire appeared upon each of them. This seems to connect the two, suggesting the discriminating action of the word of God, which is anticipative of the final judgment. The form in which the Spirit came at Pentecost is suggestive. He came upon our Lord as a dove—the bird of love and sacrifice—suggesting what marked Him in His life and death. The *tongues* speak rather of testimony to all the world, and the *fire*, of the judgment connected with that testimony, whether in the one testifying or those testified to .

“And have all been made to drink into one Spirit,” expresses the soul-satisfaction in constant reception and enjoyment of that which has been poured out.

The expression “never thirst” in John 4: 14 refers to what we get at the beginning, but also to what we get all through. “Springing up,” is onto eternity, *i. e.*, now and always. “Never thirst” is in the nature of the gift, not a question of whether we need to drink or not. Drinking is a continuous act for daily refreshment and joy. “Have been made to drink into one Spirit,” this is once for all—the living fountain is there in the believer, and in that sense he never drinks again.

A question of interest and importance arises, as to the nature of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the whole assembly. Is it merely that as He dwells in each individual believer, He by this fact dwells in the assembly? This would give us no added thought as to the assembly. It would be merely an aggregate of individuals and not a divine unity. Just as the individual members in one body are permeated by one life, and as the house in its several parts is one building, so also the Church is a whole, and as a whole is permeated and controlled by the one Spirit (1 Cor. 13: 16; Eph. 2: 22; 1 Cor. 6: 19).

The Spirit being present is the power for all ministry, worship, and every activity proper to the individual or the assembly. His function is to occupy us with Christ Himself as the object of our hearts, the One to whom we are in subjection and upon whose almighty strength we lean for every need.

THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY AND DISCIPLINE

1 Cor. 12: 27 presents to us the local assembly, though not to the exclusion of the assembly at large.

There is no definite doctrine in Scripture of a local assembly. There is only what concerns the body as a whole. The practice of the local assembly is spoken of in 1 Cor. 14, but as has often been said, there is no membership of a local assembly. There is membership of the body of Christ.

There cannot be a local assembly without assembling, but though there is nothing of doctrine about it, it is assumed to be the whole body of Christ in a place. If we could not get the assembly together it never could act. Each assembly is therefore the mouthpiece of the assembly at large, and the only way this can express itself. The principles that apply are therefore the principles of the body of Christ, assuming, as Scripture does, an unbroken condition of things. So that even now, in the presence of so much confusion, the principles remain the same for the two or three gathered to the name of the Lord. The local assembly represents and acts for the whole: it is its representation in every place. A combination of assemblies in a city has no real ground in Scripture. "If the whole assembly be *come together* into one place," that is the whole assembly in that place. To take away the power of a local assembly and place it in the hands of delegates, who may have leisure, gathered together from many places, must involve serious results. When this combination acts in any question, it has an influence with people who say, Such a place has acted, and it goes far in carrying others. But if a country gathering acted, it will be asked, in comparison, Who are they?

The local assembly is the practical mouthpiece of the assembly at large. There is nothing more than this, and nothing less. Of the two or three whom the Lord directs—who truly act in His Name—He says, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth is bound in heaven,” etc. Binding and loosing thus were done even by two or three. They had the fullest authority. Matt. 18: 20 is for any number of believers—for prayer, reading, worship, discipline, or whatever else. Confining it to prayer would be to abandon the preciousness of the Lord’s presence among us, specifically when gathered to His name, and all authority to act for Him in discipline.

Here is a question of discipline: the whole assembly is interested, and all, women as well as men, should be exercised, and should judge as part of the assembly. If there are those who will absent themselves, their staying away should not hinder the assembly acting.

There may be questions which do not come within the province of the local assembly. The assembly cannot decide what is false doctrine and what is not. Scripture alone must decide that. If it be a question of doctrine, there may be a question of what is really taught. If he be a crooked man he may dissemble; such men mostly do; therefore there needs competent testimony; and while the local assembly would have the responsibility of dealing with it, it would be a help, and possibly a necessity, to have those present who can lay open the whole matter plainly.

Authority in an assembly is not merely a question of unanimity, but of the Lord’s mind. Of course no violence should be done to any exercised conscience, and we should be clear that it is really the mind of God which we have reached. “The many” in 2 Cor. 2: 6 would

show that the action at Corinth was not absolutely unanimous. Not that there was any division, but that some were probably unexercised and indifferent. In most cases the evil is clearly manifest to those of a single eye.

There is a clear distinction to be made between reception and putting away. It is the wicked person who is to be put away (1 Cor. 5: 13). There is no need to stigmatize as "wicked" every one whom we could not receive. There must be positive reasons for reception. It is sometimes said, How can we take the responsibility of refusing such and such persons? Our reply must be How can we take the responsibility of *receiving* them? Reception is into the circle of that which we believe to be of God, to the enjoyment of all the privileges and acceptance of all the responsibilities connected with it. It implies therefore confidence in the character and obedience of the person, and corresponding assurance of our love, intercourse, and care. In a very real sense we assume the responsibility of that person's walk. While a matter of most blessed privilege it entails grave responsibilities. Were there more exercise and care in reception, there would be less subsequent failure. When a person is desirous of reception, he is especially open to the careful examination that should be made at that time. Hence his conscience can be put under exercise as to both principles and practices, and he be thus delivered from much which he might resent being reminded of after being received.

We should also guard carefully against receiving casual visitors, as an act of courtesy, merely because they are professing Christians, or even known by some to be really such. While no rigid rule can be laid down, persons should know that the assembly is not a place where every one

who desires breaks bread as a matter of course, but that we feel our responsibility to guard the holiness of the table of our Lord. If our position is carefully and kindly explained, no godly conscience will take offense, but be rather truly awakened and exercised. In this connection we might suggest that seats be provided for visitors and those not in fellowship, apart from those who break bread—not in the pharisaic spirit of “Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou,” but marking the separation between those who bow to Christ and those not ready to take that position. 2 Tim. 2: 22 shows we are to receive those who purge themselves from evil. Those purged from vessels of dishonor are the only vessels to honor. We are far, however, from laying down a rule, which would indiscriminately exclude simple and unintelligent saints, who have never had occasion to be exercised on matters relating to the Church.

As to secret societies, surely not much spirituality should be required to separate the Christian from them. Many of them are avowedly un-christian—Christ’s name being rigidly excluded. All of them are avowedly mixed associations of believers and unbelievers. God’s command is, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6: 14, 18). One is in no condition for fellowship who prefers such brotherhood to that of Christians. The whole character of *secret* societies is contrary to the nature of Christianity, of which we read “This thing was not done in a corner.”

There are three main conditions of fellowship:—

First: Being born of God.

Second: A consistent walk.

Third: Clean associations, which involve holding no unscriptural principles.

Careless reception brings in disorder. All scriptural discipline begins with reception; and if there were care in this, the need for much subsequent discipline would be avoided.

Reception is the door into the house: then we are subject to the discipline that governs it. There are grades of discipline:—

First: Personal trespass (Matt. 18: 15-17).

Second: One overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6: 1).

Third: Those that are unruly (1 Thess. 5: 14; 2 Thess. 3: 6, 11).

Fourth: The shutting up where the condition is uncertain (Lev. 13: 4, 5).

Fifth: Putting away the wicked person.

Some of these points need no enlarging upon. There is an evident distinction between being overtaken in a fault and going on in a course of sin. A boil is different from leprosy. For instance, one under sudden provocation might lose his temper and say a bitter thing. This, while inexcusable, is clearly different from deliberate malice, which may keep its temper while poisoning the minds of many by its evil surmisings. Wickedness is evidenced by a persistent course in which the will is engaged. It answers to leprosy in the Old Testament, where the characteristics were quick raw flesh, "deeper than the skin." this is no mere ebullition of nature, but the deep-seated disease, which shuts out from God's presence and the company of His people, lest they be defiled. Godly discrimination is needed to judge aright, answering to the priestly discrimination in the Old Testament. The Lord's people are earnestly requested to read prayerfully and carefully Lev. 13 and 14, where we have divine directions

both for detecting and dealing with failure and evil in God's people. Let it always be remembered, too, that it is in priestly communion alone that we are fitted to act toward our brethren. This is implied in "Ye who are spiritual" (Gal. 6: 1). The priest is the one who has discernment as to the true nature of the disease—of the evil—and is able to weigh aright symptoms which might be overlooked, and which would decide as to the gravity of the case or otherwise. "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." The priest, too, is one not held down to the mere cold letter of the word, which may be mere pharisaism, and easily wrongly applied, but in the love which would cover all things is too sincere to allow evil unjudged in God's house.

As to admonishing and warning but little need be said, save to press its importance, and to lament that there is so little of it amongst us. The Lord in His mercy raise up among us men of godly character and moral weight, who shall be "able to admonish others also." How many cases, if thus early dealt with might be recovered, which afterward have to be dealt with in the extremest way, to the shame and sorrow of the whole assembly.

Withdrawing from the disorderly walker would naturally follow disregarded admonition. The person might still be in fellowship, his course not warranting final dealing, though it might end in that. The faithful avoidance of such an one, in love to his soul, would often be blessed of God to his recovery. Just here the Lord's people need to be warned against a most dangerous fault, of meddling or sympathizing with persons under censure, and thus taking off the edge of the wholesome chastening, which would have been blessed to their souls. This is the very opposite of showing love, and is the beginning of what

may even lead to division among the people of God.

In 2 John 10, we have both the man who brings not the doctrine of Christ, and also the partaker of his deeds. Not only heart contact is here contemplated, but association of any kind. The word "God speed" implies a mere greeting. It is painful to think that the people of God should need to be warned against association with a wicked person. It affects both the one greeting, by lowering in his mind the sense of sin, and the one greeted, by hardening his conscience still more, confirming him in his way.

In contrast with *greeting*, we see in 1 Cor. 5 how God would have come in had they *mourned*. By being humbled they would have called in God's help even if they knew not what to do. Our responsibility is even greater than theirs, as having the complete Word of God and fullest light upon this very subject.

When all else fails, putting away is absolutely necessary. First, to clear the Lord's name of dishonor. Second, to preserve the rest of the assembly from defilement. Third, for the welfare or recovery of the person dealt with.

"A little leaven leaveth the whole lump" does not mean, of course, that the whole assembly will fall into the same kind of sin, but by allowing evil among them they are defiled by it in God's sight. Moral indifference to evil is what the Word of God calls leaven.

A CIRCLE OF FELLOWSHIP

A circle of fellowship is a necessity. If we have none how can we carry out the order established through the apostle Paul for God's house? On the same principle as we recognize a local company, we *must* recognize a general company. A mere confederacy it is not. We make no terms with one another. We seek only to walk together in obedience to the word of God. People object to the term "circle of fellowship," but they also say "the ground of the one body" is sectarian. Call it what you will; the term may be changed, but the truth of it is there in God's Word. This circle is the only practical representation of the body of Christ. The opposite is independence, and independence in this way is the thing God would not have in a creature. If there be not a common or general judgment, a judgment binding upon all, there is none. There needs, therefore, "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

If we make this keeping the unity of the *body*, we should have to recognize every member of the body of Christ, no matter how they act; but in keeping "the unity of the Spirit" we act for the whole, and discipline does not hinder but helps this. The Lord's Table has to do with our gathering together. We do not inquire merely if a man has certain marks of godliness or morality, but if he is associating with men who are wrong with God. We are to follow righteousness all the more in a day of break up, and we cannot fellowship people who are going to make war upon the principles which God has given for our guidance.

The reason why we left the various systems was not because they were wicked persons, but because the direc-

tions of His Word were denied, and also because they were more or less yoked with unbelievers. We need more care to-day than ever before in receiving. Corrupt doctrine and morals have greatly increased, and everywhere there is a cry of neutrality. There is need of instruction in God's word about these things increasingly.*

Every Christian has a right to the Lord's table in a certain way, but he may not in every case be entitled to sit at it: his ways, his associations, or his state of soul may hinder it. We do not expect people to walk in and sit down. It is a question of reception, and we are responsible to receive or refuse. We receive "one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God." This conditions reception, and the glory of God often requires us to refuse. It is love for the souls of those who are wrong, to refuse them, on account of what may not only injure the saints, but seriously injure and harden their own souls.

If not utterly careless, the local assembly necessitates the thought of a circle of fellowship, more or less wide. Fellowship means community of interests and of judgment. Where these do not exist true fellowship is impossible. This principle, if true in the local gathering, is equally so in the wider circle, and must apply to every one who enjoys the precious privilege of fellowship. It is to be feared that we do not rightly value this inestimable blessing, else we would be more careful. The hearts of the Lord's people are open to one another, and their confidence unquestioning. We share one another's sorrows and joys. Love is unhindered in all its exercises. All that is

* What fearful strides in unbelief have been made, both in the clergy and laity, since this was written!—[Ed.]

sweet and blessed in the family relationship is implied in that word "fellowship." How carefully, then, should it be guarded from all abuse by insincere persons, unworthy of the confidence to be reposed in them. And on the other hand how we should realize our responsibility to make it practically what it is in the word of God. Let us not lower our thoughts as to this most important matter. Is there not legalism in thinking that every Christian must be received immediately, or some wrong is done him? We do not pronounce a person to be no Christian because we refuse him fellowship; and should ever seek to minister the precious things of Christ to every one with whom we come in contact. Let the breaking of bread be reserved for that fullest expression of fellowship embodied in it.

These principles being clear, the truth as to a circle of fellowship is necessarily established. In the Lord's grace two or three come together in His name, and have His sanction for so doing. Their fellowship is real and scriptural. Suppose two or three others gather in the same way, on the same street, perhaps, would that be right thus to ignore the others? If the Lord says there is to be no schism in the body, are we not responsible to endeavor to carry that out? Who then would be accountable for their remaining apart? Only what is dishonoring to Christ or unscriptural, is sufficient reason for not being together. Otherwise to remain apart would be schism.

The simple truth that the body of Christ is one, only separated in various localities by distance is a simple guide. Were it not for the distance that separates would we not all be together? If scriptural reasons exist for separation, how solemn a thing to unite what God has separated. Here we have at once the circle of assemblies. 1 Cor. 10: 16, 17; 14: 33 show that the order the apostle

insisted on as obedient to the command of the Lord at Corinth was the order which he could assure them also existed in the gatherings elsewhere.

What is meant by "the ground of the one body" is that we seek to act according to that truth in relation to each other and other assemblies. This is the endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4: 3). However narrow the path may seem, as God's principles are for the whole, therefore to maintain them is the best thing for the whole Church. There must be a circle of fellowship (which really means a number of gatherings holding the same truth and acting on the same divine principles) in order that we may carry out the things that associate us together. It is really a oneness which the word of God produces by the Holy Spirit. The only alternative is independency, which is against God right through. It is the greatest assumption to declare that we will act for ourselves independently of our brethren elsewhere, and destroys all confidence, not merely in the gatherings, but in the power of the Spirit of God to control and guide them. This is most serious.

Several matters of great practical importance grow out of this truth. Each assembly is responsible for those locally connected with it, and for the condition of other assemblies with which it is in fellowship. Therefore letters of commendation are given and received. These authenticate the bearer, and insure him a welcome (Rom. 16: 1; 2 Cor. 3: 1, 2; 8: 23). The letter simply means that the person received in one place was received for the whole Church of Christ, and bears witness to his walk. Great care should be taken not to omit this letter, especially in days like the present; and, on the other hand, not to give it carelessly. The letter of commendation is not from

an individual, but from the assembly; and not sent to individuals but to the assembly that receives the person.

Growing also out of this important truth of a circle of fellowship, is the acceptance of all ordinary discipline in every local gathering. The action, for instance, of the assembly at A is recognized by all the gatherings in fellowship with the assembly at A. If there are grave questions the remedy is not to take up the matter at a distance, but to refer it all to A. If difficulties still remain, let an appeal be made—not *from* A, however, but *to* it, and there let the question be settled. If A should prove to be clearly wrong, and so self-willed that it would not bow to the word of God, separation from it as an assembly would be the proper course. It would be dropped out of the circle of fellowship. To say there is no scripture for cutting off an assembly is to say there is *no scripture for separation from evil*. It need hardly be said that the greatest care should be taken and every means exhausted to prevent such extreme action, but it may be necessary.

If a person is, for any reason, out of fellowship with the gathering with which he has been locally connected, and presents himself at any other gathering, it would make the greatest confusion to receive him there. He should simply be referred back to his local gathering, where his matters must first be adjusted. This may be painful at times, and involves a certain measure of firmness, but is a real and simple safeguard against confusion and worse. Young gatherings, or where there has not been much experience of difficulty, are peculiarly exposed to this danger. It is to be feared that they are often selected as the most suited places to get a foothold by those who would destroy all unity, and from this point of vantage to continue their work of disintegration.

Again, following this is a most important matter. Where questions have arisen affecting the people of God *as a whole*, it is most obvious that no local assembly should undertake to settle them, either for themselves or for the saints at large, until there has been the amplest opportunity for weighing everything by every one, and full time allowed for the expression of dissent. This will secure that unity of action which is necessary to any real fellowship, and will at the same time prove the means of a most wholesome exercise of patience, prayer, and love.

A word, too, may be added as to reception of persons who have been put from, or had difficulty with, other companies of Christians. In the vast majority of cases such persons should not be received until matters have been cleared up with those they were formerly in fellowship with. Much trouble has arisen through the neglect of this.

ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

The central and chief meeting of the assembly is, of course, the breaking of bread. The simplicity of it, as a memorial of Christ's death, only enhances the holiness which should mark it in the happy solemnity of the Lord's presence. Praise and worship will surely mark it—not mere individual worship, but the assembly's united thanksgiving, under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the place of happy freedom for the new man, not of fleshly energy or carelessness. The singing of hymns is a lovely exercise in its proper place, but requires discernment and moderation in its use. To break a silence, or merely to fill out the exercises, is bad indeed. Let

us not be afraid of moments of silence which produce wholesome exercise, and be warned against the unseemly haste that marks the religious world by which we are surrounded: "Wait, I say, *on the Lord*" (Ps. 27: 14).

While free from the dread which accompanies legalism, the Lord's people should guard against approaching His table with sin unjudged, or in a state of carelessness and levity. Gravity, deliberation, and a chastened spirit, are the fit accompaniments of a joy which is all the deeper for being less exuberant.

It need hardly be added that this holy scene is no place for the intrusion of questions of discipline or difficulties which may be before the assembly. Such matters should all be attended to at a proper occasion, that without distraction the hearts may be free to be engaged with the Lord, and worship will be the result. A happy state at the breaking of bread tends to blessing and edification in the other meetings.

If asked for definite scripture for Reading or Prayer-Meetings, Hebrews 10: 25 gives us a general exhortation as to coming together. Various needs call for prayer, of which we have example in Acts 12: 12; 2: 42, etc. The saints need instruction, which the Reading-Meeting affords in a happy and simple way. We must not expect, in this dispensation, to find definite directions as to details of meetings; the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit supplying its place. If a practice is in accord with the word of God, and evidently for edification, we need not require further authorization for it. Certain clear and well-defined limits are drawn by the word of God. The Holy Spirit is to be unhindered as to what channel He may use; the simple direction, "Let all things be done unto edifying" is sufficient (1 Cor. 14: 26, 40).

The Reading-Meeting, for a feeble people, who cannot boast of great things, or make any display of eloquence, is very appropriate, while it affords at the same time, the very food and instruction needed by the saints. Let there be dependence upon God, and proper diligence, and the feeblest company of saints will find the Reading-Meeting of great blessing. It seems best, as a rule, to take up and go regularly through whole books, such as a Gospel, or an Epistle, rather than a chapter here and there. Special subjects, of course, would form exceptions. Long discussions especially on what is not of general interest, should be avoided, and points too difficult left for further light. If the plea of dullness be made against the reading, the answer must be that it is not in the word of God—it must be in ourselves. The remedy is not to neglect the Reading-Meeting, but the stirring up our interest in it. Perhaps, too, if those engaged in the Lord's work held Readings more frequently, an example might be set, and encouragement given to go on with them. There is deep need of a revival among the Lord's people in this direction.

Where there is a sense of need and faith that counts on God, there will be no difficulty about the Prayer-Meeting. Reality and simplicity should mark it. There must of necessity be the greatest freedom for the guidance of the Spirit, whether it be in the comprehensive prayer of the "father," or the few broken utterances from the "babe." Criticism of either is out of place. Let the younger saints be encouraged to express their needs freely in the Prayer-Meeting. Where the real energy of the Holy Ghost is present there will be no room for dullness.

May God in His mercy awaken His people to much prayer.

The fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians provides for

what we would call an Open-Meeting, in which all are free, under scriptural limitations, to take part. Oftentimes when none feel equal for a lengthy address, several may speak greatly to edification.

This is different from a Gospel meeting or a lecture, which should be entirely in the hands of the one who assumes the responsibility for it.

WOMAN'S SPHERE

The Lord's work in apostolic times was simple and informal, not a question of hiring halls and inviting people in, but going *out* to them. After all, it is only the few that can preach publicly. The great work that brings souls out is dealing with them privately; in this, sisters can engage as freely and fully as any. House-to-house work is a real sphere for women, for there they have access often where men have not. Wherever you find women coming forward in a public way in Scripture, it is always evil or pre-supposes failure in man. There is nothing that she is shut out from, save the public ministry and rule. Philip's daughters prophesied in their place. If we look at woman as the heart of humanity, we see her work. Anna in the temple, was not haranguing a throng, but speaking personally to people.

In the work of the tabernacle the women spun goats' hair and fine linen, while men did the public work.

In Judges 4: 4, while Deborah judged Israel in a day of declension, yet they *came up to her*; and while it is her faith that encourages Barak, she does not lead the army. In times of declension, woman comes forward as a sign of it. God is sovereign, but we are to obey His Word.

There is a large and varied field for women traced out in the New Testament. "They ministered unto the Lord of their substance" (Luke 8: 3); bore His message of resurrection to His brethren (24: 9); made Him a supper and anointed His feet (John 12: 2, 3); made garments and were full of good works (Acts 9: 36); opened their houses for prayer (12: 12); entertained God's servants (16: 14; Rom. 16: 2); served God with prayer (Luke 2: 37); and much more.

What has troubled persons is the idea that all must be public ministry. It runs side by side with the thought of all the gifts of ministry in one person. Some of the very best work in India is zenana work, done by women, among women.

As to sisters taking part in public meetings the matter is very simple; sisters are not to take the position of teachers. Man is comparatively the mind of humanity, and woman is the heart. The heart is in the chest, hidden from view; the head is outside and public. Ability is not in question, her sphere is private, and this is the true instinct of a womanly spirit.

The home circle is where woman shines in ability and usefulness; without neglecting this, many most happy and blessed fields of labor are open to her. In the restlessness of the age in which we live, the tendency is to thrust woman more and more out of her true place, whereby the man, herself, and the family are the losers. The very world itself begins to cry out against this publicity of woman, to the neglect of family care. The result is realized in the neglected sons and daughters. As to the headship of the husband it will usually be found that the husband who truly takes that place in subjection to the Lord, will have little to complain of as to the wife's in-

subjection. Scripture says, "Husbands, love your wives," not "Command them" to obey you.

As to woman taking part in meetings for discipline, there will be no need to violate Scripture. If her testimony is required it can be given. In this connection we must remember their consciences need to be exercised and respected as much as the men's; there will be no difficulty in making her judgment known. Perhaps the very necessity of allowing time to ascertain the mind of the sisters may prevent undue haste in pushing matters to a decision at one sitting.

Cases that are manifest to all would require no such delay, of course.

FELLOWSHIP IN SERVICE

The assembly should come together for the work among us as well as for other objects. Is it a right thing for us to depend on laborers for this? As in the Church we are all priests and men of war, so we are all ministers. What we need is more practical interest and care for one another and the Lord's interests; fellowship with Him in His activities as well as in His Word. We ought to retain our individualities and yet realize that we have a common concern. Some fear system in such a thing, yet all God's ways have system in them. He is a God of order. Our very coming together to consider these matters would suggest many things. We want all to be active—heart and soul engaged for the Lord. Such a meeting would benefit all our meetings, but should not be united with any other meeting. What scripture have we for it? "Consider one another to provoke unto love and good

works" (Heb. 10: 23). We were made to fit together and thus have a divine organization.

Ministry is very general in Scripture, from that of an apostle to the slightest service we could name. Phebe was a minister of the assembly (Rom. 16: 1, 2), she did needed service in the assembly. We need this fellowship meeting to draw out our hearts to the work unitedly, to have fellowship with the Lord in His activities, and consideration of His interests.

The assembly should be the happy home and the hive of every Christian industry where all are at work. This sustained by communion would stop many roots of bitterness.

Such a meeting should be of an informal character, preceded perhaps by having tea together, and personal intercourse. In remembering the *assembly* character, we should not forget the *family* character. Here every kind of work could be discussed informally—tract distribution, visiting, hospital work, cottage meeting, and all other matters connected with the assembly's activities. If we have meetings for discipline where our sorrows are the theme, shall we not also have them for the brighter object of discussing happy service for the Lord? If it would be a burden to add this to the meetings already held, one of the week meetings might be set aside each month to make way for this "fellowship meeting."

DEVELOPMENT OF GIFT

All the gifts that Christ gave for the nourishment of His body, He continues, spite of failure; while those for the establishment of Christianity in the world, such as

miracles, signs, etc., are withdrawn. Miracles mean something beyond the power of man, and are called,—

1st. Wonders—they call attention.

2d. Powers—they are supernatural.

3d. Signs—Significant of what they are connected with.

Luke 5: 24 illustrates it. Christians think so little of the truth that God has given, and are all alive as to the miracles, that God in His goodness may have stopped these gifts in view of it. When the truth is fairly before men, then miracles may divert them from the truth itself. Miracles cluster round certain times, the beginning of a new dispensation, such as the exodus and entrance into the land; but once they are there, they naturally die out, as obedience to God's word is all-sufficient.

Wicked systems claim to have all the gifts of the primitive Church, and usually quote Mark 16: 17 to prove their title to them. If that were the order of things all through, then it would prove that there were no believers now, as no one does these things.

As to Joel 2: 28-32, it might be asked of those claiming it as proof for miracles: Are *you* working them? So are the Christian Scientists. Roman Catholics have the most remarkable cases of all in connection with the Lady of Lourdes. We may count on God still to raise up the sick, but the quieter the better. There were so many cases of healing in Ireland at first, Mr. Darby said, that it became a hindrance to the work.

As to the pretensions of many Faith-Healers, people are taught to tell you lies,—to tell you they are healed, no matter what they feel. They entirely ignore the Lord's dealings as to Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul, and Trophimus.

A great mistake made by many is in confusing the gifts of healing, which meant the power given by God to heal the sick (chiefly of those outside), and the Lord answering prayer, as in James 5. This leads to much vain talk about people being unspiritual who are not healed, when we know many of God's true saints have been great sufferers; and it needs more grace to patiently suffer the Lord's will, than to "get healed"—which often means the disease changing its place from the body to the soul! It is striking that in such a scientific age, people were never more gullible. Why? They turn away from God's word.

But turning to other gifts: Every child of God ought to be able to contribute to the common blessing of all, both in care one for another, and the work outside. The actual gifts the Lord has given are developed before one may know even what they are. God adapts the gift largely to the vessel He puts it in. The evangelist easily becomes aware that he has something that people need, and uses it, and it grows. There may be real hindrances in the assembly to the development of gift. It is often chilled by the cold shoulder turned to simple suggestions.

We have in 2 Tim. 2: 2 the principle of instruction. The truth should be communicated by those who can impart it to others, who will in turn distribute it. The actual study of the Word is little known, and we need to stimulate God's people to the study of His book in every way we can. With the present advantages of written ministry in books, periodicals, general meetings, etc., the diligent seeker after truth should have little difficulty in getting the help he needs. It would doubtless be greatly to his advantage to come into personal touch with one "able to teach." In this way a number might gather for a season of study and profit by such help as the Lord might

give. Companionship also in gospel work, with one of experience and knowledge, would be a great advantage.

The study of the word of God affords training to every faculty of the mind. The danger with the Lord's servants is in getting confined to a too narrow channel of truth, to the neglect of the word of God as a whole. The direction of those whose acquaintance with that Word is broad and deep will serve as an antidote to this. False doctrine is abroad everywhere, and pressing closely in all quarters. The remedy is the word of God, in its entirety, and there is need that the man of God should be thoroughly furnished by it. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4: 16).

VISITING OF ASSEMBLIES

There are many small gatherings in distant quarters which should not be overlooked by those who have addicted themselves to ministry among the saints. Peter "passed through all quarters." Paul and Barnabas also (Acts 15: 36). Paul "went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18: 23).

While this is a matter of individual responsibility, let not the visiting of assemblies be neglected. Local conferences, too, within easy reach of the gatherings in a certain quarter, are most useful. Each gathering in that vicinity should endeavor to be represented there by as many as possible. At such a conference a meeting might be devoted to learning of the Lord's work in those various assemblies, and of their needs. In this way the link of fellowship between assemblies would be strengthened.

When a gathering is to be formed in a new place it would be well, if possible, to seek the fellowship of one or more gatherings in the vicinity. What we need in all the gatherings is the revival of assembly life, and to put into practice the scriptural doctrines as to the unity of the body and of the Spirit.

The Lord's servants, too, will gladly learn of need in their localities, and seek to minister to it. Stronger assemblies also ought to look after the weaker ones in their neighborhood, and thus compact all together.

As to the regions beyond, every fresh pioneer, if sent of the Lord, should be upheld in our prayers and our practical fellowship. He looks to the Lord for his support, and the Lord looks to His people, and finds them the happy privilege of being channels of His bounty. May we all be awakened to more earnest desire and prayer that the Lord should send forth laborers into the new and needy fields of the world. When this is the case we may count upon widespread blessing, and have the joy of being laborers together in this blessed work.

SUNDAY-SCHOOL WORK

The prosperity of a Sunday-school depends much on one at the head of it, who loves children and exercises government. What is needed is to instruct children in all the truths and histories of the Word, not always in the gospel. Grace and law are in opposition, one to another. Grace and government are not.

As to music and lesson-leaves, let us seek to teach our children the principles of truth and worship. How can we conscientiously allow that which may have to be painfully

unlearned later on? Instruct them in scriptural knowledge, and set a right example.

Committing portions of Scripture to memory, and repeating them in concert, will prove not only interesting and most useful, but it is sowing the precious seed which the Lord may use in future life.

The organ is a link with system, and tends away from the simplicity of the gospel. In the Old Testament, God made all attractive to men, appealing to their senses. Now the whole power for us is the power of the *Spirit*. If we showed more heart, such souls as God would have us minister to would come in.

All that merely appeals to the feelings tends to the destruction of conscience; thus many are counted converts who are not so at all.

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