

Scriptural Principles of Gathering

—OR—

WHY I MEET AMONGST THOSE
KNOWN AS BRETHREN

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An address delivered at Vancouver, B.C., Canada, 1934

by

ALFRED P. GIBBS

Author of "Through the Scriptures," "The Preacher and His Preaching," "A Dreamer and His Dream," "The Marvellous City of Mansoul," "God's Good News," "Facts Worth Facing," "The Christian's Guide," "Gospel Hymns and Choruses for Young and Old," Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, etc.

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SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES OF GATHERING

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Foreword



As the years pass and the Lord calls home those who have been used to bring out the essential teachings of God's word as to the truth of the gospel and the Scriptural order of the assembly, and as a new generation of believers grows up, many of whom are children of the Lord's people who come into the assemblies under circumstances quite different from their fathers; it is very needful that the fundamental principles relating to the fellowship of believers as taught in Scripture should be freshly presented for their help and guidance.

This, too, may serve to enlighten others who may be exercised about the disorder, confusion and apostasy of Christendom, as these features are found in its existing religious organizations.

In the following pages this twofold service has been rendered in a worthy manner.

The reader will find that this pamphlet gives him in simple language a clear, concise and pointed statement of the teaching of Scripture as to the manner in which the Lord's people are to gather together; and in this connection the order it lays down as to reception, worship and ministry. In doing this the author also makes plain the reasons for separation from the existing unscriptural sects and denominations of Christendom. Such a separation is indeed needful so that the will of God for His people may be carried out—a thing not possible in the religious systems of men with their humanly devised names, offices of service, ministry and ritual; along with which, in the main, gross indifference is found as to the faith and manner of life of those composing their organizations; and, as might be expected under such circumstances, they give shelter to the active propagators of evil doctrines by which the foundations of Christianity are attacked and efforts made to destroy the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3, 4).

May all of us who know something of the spiritual liberty, godly care and soundness of doctrine found in the assemblies of God's people who gather together as described in this pamphlet, be stirred to a fuller appreciation of the association in which we are found; and, along with increasing gospel activity for the salvation of precious souls, seek to help and deliver our fellow-believers that they may enjoy the same privileges.

John Bloore

Plainfield, N. J., February, 1935.



Author's Preface to New Editions

The kindly reception accorded to the previous editions of this pamphlet, which have had a wide circulation in this country and other English speaking lands, has been an encouragement to issue this revised edition with larger type.

It has been a great joy to hear of many who have brought to see and act upon these truths through the reading of this pamphlet. May the great Head of the Church be pleased to bless this simple setting forth of these "Scriptural Principles of Gathering!"

A.P.G.

Scriptural Principles of Gathering



INTRODUCTION

This subject was selected by those responsible for the convening of this conference, and was chosen for the purpose of helping young believers of the various assemblies of the Lord's people to a better understanding of assembly, or church truth. By "assembly truth" we mean, first, the Scriptural warrant for the mode of gathering, or assembling as believers; second, the Christian's position in that gathering; and third, the privileges and responsibilities of being so Scripturally gathered.

God's word thus enjoins the believer: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a *reason* of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3: 15). Supposing the question that forms our topic were to be put to each believer associated with those known as "brethren," what would be the response? To the query: "Why do you meet with believers in this manner?" how many here could give a Scriptural reason for his position amongst believers so termed? It is to be feared that many young believers, and old ones too, who could give a good and Scriptural reason for their assurance of eternal salvation, could not give a similar reason for their assembly association. Surely one should be as necessary as the other. The One who has assured us of our salvation by His word has left us in no doubt, by that same word, as to how, and with whom we should gather in church fellowship.

It has been felt by many that teaching along this line has been somewhat neglected of late, with the result we have a large number of young believers in our assemblies who do not know *why* they are *where* they are. They have little or no assured convictions as to the Divine principles of gathering and, in many cases, are drifting hither and thither at the mercy of every vagary of men. Unlike the early disciples, they seem to have no definite link with a company which can be designated as, "their own company" (Acts 4: 23). In some quarters, this line of ministry has been so overemphasized to the exclusion of all else, that a spirit of sectarianism has been fostered which, needless to say, is equally to be deplored.

The first question that naturally arises after one is saved is: "Where shall I go, and with whom shall I meet for church fellowship?" There will be plenty of voices to advise. Some will reply: "Go where you can get spiritual food, no matter by what name they call themselves." Others will say: "Go to those with whom you will feel most at home socially, where there are plenty of young folks and lots doing." Still others will respond: "Join the church of your preference, and be guided by your own tastes." The sincere believer, however, will not be swayed by any such advice, but will rightly reason: "Has the One, who has saved me by His grace and assured me of my blessedness by His word, given me no guidance, from the Bible, as to how and with whom I should meet?" He will then begin to search the Scriptures to discover what God has to say about this most important matter. It should be the solemn responsibility of every born again believer to so study the word of God *for himself*, that he is made absolutely certain, from it, that he is amongst those with whom the Lord would have him to be.

This introduces the subject of "Scriptural principles of gathering." Inasmuch as we shall use this expression quite

frequently during this talk, let us define its meaning. By the word "principles," we mean that which is inherent in anything, determining its nature. It is a settled law or rule of action, especially of right action, consciously or resolutely adopted. It is the essential character of a thing, and the source from which a cause proceeds. We speak of "a man of principle," and by this we mean that this person's life is governed by certain definite and right laws which motivate and control all his actions. A right principle is always right, whatever the circumstances surrounding the case may be. Neither time nor place affect the correctness of a right principle.

By the word "Scriptural" we mean that which has the *general* teaching of the word of God, both by precept and practice, to support it. Note the phrase, "the *general* teaching of the word of God." Most heresies can point to a verse of Scripture which *apparently* supports their contentions, but when a heresy, or wrong doctrine, is examined in the light of all Scripture, its falsity is at once apparent. "No . . . scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Peter 1: 20). This simply means that each statement of Scripture must be interpreted in the light of all the other Scripture passages which relate to that subject. This is most important to remember.

By the word "gathering," we mean the coming together of believers for a distinct purpose, such as worship, prayer, or the ministry of the word. We trust that the meaning of the term, "Scriptural principles of gathering," has thus been made clear.

It may be good at this juncture to state that I was saved amongst those known as "brethren." This will probably be true of many here. I never heard the clear unadulterated gospel of the grace of God until, at the age of twenty-one, I heard it through those known as "brethren." It may be of interest to

state that, scattered throughout the world, there are hundreds of companies of believers who meet simply as Christians and seek to carry out those principles of gathering so clearly revealed in the word of God. Wherever such a company gathers, a gospel testimony is maintained and, by this means, thousands of precious souls have been led to a saving knowledge of the Son of God, "Whom to know is eternal life." These companies, assemblies or gatherings of believers, because of their refusal to accept any name that is not common to and inclusive of all believers, are sometimes termed "brethren." (This term, needless to say, must not be understood to mean a sectarian title of a certain *company* of Christians; but is true of *all Christians* everywhere, by whatsoever name they may call themselves). After being saved, I naturally desired to associate myself with those who had been instrumental, under God, in bringing me to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as my own personal Saviour.

This fact, however, is not a sufficient reason for linking oneself with and remaining amongst a company of believers. As I began to study the Scriptures for myself, it was borne in upon me that these believers who had been used to lead me to Christ were also seeking to carry out Scriptural principles in their gatherings. The fact that one has been saved through the preaching of the gospel on the part of a certain company of people does not, in itself, justify that person remaining within the borders of that company; for there may be unscriptural things taught or practiced there which would prevent the young believer from growing in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Luther was saved while in the fold of the Roman Catholic Church. Should he therefore have remained in that ecclesiastical circle which both ignored and denied certain truths revealed in God's word? Had all the Christians remained in the Roman Church who were saved therein, there would have been, humanly speaking, no Reformation, no Bible for the common people, no

clear gospel, and no liberty of Scriptural thought and action such as we enjoy today.

These men, for whom we should never cease to thank God, were not content to remain where God had saved them, but they searched the Scriptures for themselves. When they discovered the unscripturalness of their assembly, or Church position, they separated themselves from that which was not according to the pattern given in the word of God. It would be well if every believer here were to give himself no rest until he has been assured, by the infallible Book, that the principles governing those with whom he meets can stand the test of the *general* teaching of the Scriptures. Once this has been settled, he will never be happy or contented anywhere else. Young believers, get established, by a diligent study of the word of God, in these Scriptural principles of gathering! It will be an anchor to your souls in these dark and troublous days, characterized by declension, denial, doubt and apostasy!

We now come to the question before us, and it has been made a personal one: "Why do I meet with those known as 'brethren'?" We shall try to answer it in as clear, simple and orderly a manner as possible, so as to leave no uncertainty in the minds of anyone present. We shall state eight distinct reasons for being so gathered.

First: because they accept no name but what is common to and inclusive of all believers, and therefore refuse to recognize man-made and man-named sects and parties.

We shall search our Bibles in vain to discover the "Baptist" denomination, or the "Presbyterian," or the "Episcopalian," or the "Congregational," or the "Methodist," or a host of others we might name. Within each of these denominations there are very many genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ and, as such, we love them and gladly own them as our brethren, "dearly beloved and longed for," and fellow members of the body of Christ; but we cannot love or own these denominations, for they are unscriptural in their formation, excluding as they do, many people of God. Is every believer in Christ a Baptist? an Episcopalian? a Lutheran? a Methodist? a Presbyterian? a Congregationalist? Of course not. These man-formed divisions separate the people of God into various distinct companies. With some it is an ordinance that distinguishes them, as with the "Baptists"; with others it is a form of Church government, as "Presbyterian," or "Congregational." Others bear the name of the founder of that particular sect, as "Lutherans" and "Wesleyans"; but all such divisions are unscriptural.

As we open the word of God, we find that believers are called "Christians," "disciples," "saints," "brethren," etc. Are these titles true of all believers? Yes. Every child of God is a "Christian," a "saint," a "disciple," and one of the "brethren." "One is your Master, even Christ, and *all ye are brethren*" said the Lord Jesus (Matt. 23: 8). By the term "brethren," therefore, *every true believer in Christ is included*, and so with all the other Scriptural titles of God's people. The moment a person is saved, God includes him amongst "the brethren," by whatsoever other man-made name he may be called, or call himself, later on.

Scripture unsparingly condemns denominationalism, or the dividing of the people of God into sects, parties and systems that

exclude many Christians, who are sound in doctrine and life, from their fellowship. This spirit of sectarianism early manifested itself in the assembly at Corinth. Paul, by the Spirit, roundly rebuked it and said: "Ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions (or factions), are ye not carnal and walk as men? For while one saith, 'I am of Paul'; and another 'I am of Apollos'; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" (I Cor. 3: 3-5). In the first chapter of that epistle he asks, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Cor. 1: 13).

If Paul had been crucified for them, or had saved them, or they had been baptized in his name; then only had they the right to adopt his name as the founder of a party. Think of the hundreds of different denominations into which Christendom has been divided! Is this of God? We reply emphatically, "No, ten thousand times, no!" It is of *man*, and the result, not of *spirituality*, but of *carnality*, which has scattered the people of God instead of uniting them! In that wonderful prayer, just before He went to the cross, our Saviour prayed that His people "might be one; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me (John 17: 21). The multiplicity of denominations certainly does not present a spectacle of unity to the world, but rather of confusion worse confounded.

Many believers excuse their denominational affiliation by saying: "What's in a name? We're all out for the same thing. We'll all be going to the same place!" These same believers would change their tune if someone forged their name to a check for a large amount and cashed it at their bank! What would be the reaction of these people if their wives suddenly decided to change

their names and take another more suited to their poetic fancy? These husbands would rightly argue: "I gave you my name at our marriage, and you cannot change that name to suit yourself!" Why, then, should we alter the name that Christ has given to His Own blood-bought people, and substitute for it another of our own fancy?

Many have sought to liken the various denominations of Christendom to so many different regiments of an army, each separate from the other, but all united for the common purpose of defending the country from invasion, or attacking the enemy, as the head of the army orders. Such an illustration surely cannot apply in this case, for denominationalism is not content with the sole authority of the marching orders of the Commander-in-chief, as found in His word; but has substituted for them its own rules and regulations, and has thus virtually denied His supreme authority for faith and practice. The exhibition of rival denominations, each under a different flag, each commanded by a general of its own choosing, and each striving for the pre-eminence, is not calculated to suggest the unity of an army under the absolute rule of a commander-in-chief!

Saturday night has often witnessed a large congregation of believers singing heartily the beautiful words: "We are not divided, all one body we; one in hope and doctrine, one in charity." The dawn of Sunday, however, witnesses a sad contradiction to this blessed truth, as each believer wends his way to his own particular denominational church building. To many, the words of that hymn were but the expression of a lovely *theory* to be *sung*, rather than a blessed *reality* to be *practiced* and enjoyed! The great truth, emphasized by the Spirit of God through Paul, needs to be proclaimed far and wide: "Ye are *all one* in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28).

The story is told of two Christians who met for the first time in a railway coach. After some pleasant conversation about the things of God, one inquired: "To what denomination do you belong?" The other replied: "That's just my difficulty, and I wish you would help me. Supposing you had only the word of God to guide you, what denomination would you advise me to join?" His fellow Christian thought for a while and then said: "Why, if I had only the word of God as my authority, I couldn't advise you to join any!" "That is exactly my position," responded the other, "and I therefore meet with those who act upon what they find written in the word of God, and who assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from all the confusion that denominationalism has wrought." This is the position that those known as "brethren" occupy. They refuse to accept any name that is not inclusive of *every* believer, and repudiate all these man-made divisions and names that are not common to all the people of God.

It may be argued by some that these companies of so-called "brethren" are as much a sect as any other, but this is not true. The mere fact that a company of believers is called a sect does not make it so. Everything must be tested by the word of God. Naturally, those in a sect will seek to justify themselves by calling others, who do not see eye to eye with them, a sect. Let us define the meaning of the word "sect." A sect is a body of people who make church claims, yet in principle and practice violate the essential principles of the Church of God, as described in the word of God. In other words, it cannot stand the test of all Scripture. A sect usually adopts as its distinguishing features, some distinct form of ecclesiastical government, or some ordinance or ordinances, or some particular doctrine, or the peculiar teaching of some person. Its conditions of membership cannot bear the light of all the word of God. It often allows unsaved people to enter its fold, and excludes many Christians who do

not see their way clear to subscribe to its creeds. It depends very largely for its functioning on its own rules and regulations, or "book of discipline." Moreover, it usually has a humanly ordained ministry, and its own self-appointed oversight.

Those known as "brethren" unhesitatingly repudiate such innovations, and seek to gather in accordance with the pattern described in the Scriptures. Naturally they are thus distinguished from denominations, but they are not a sect, for they have no gathering Centre but Christ; no name but what is common to and inclusive of all believers; no authority but the word of God, and no conditions of reception to the local assembly but those found in the Scriptures, namely: the person must be regenerated, be sound in the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, and be living a clean moral life before the world which commends the gospel.

It has been well pointed out that in the early days of Christianity there were congregations of believers, but no Congregationalists! There were baptized believers, but no Baptists! There, were presbyters in the assembly, but no Presbyterians! They had method in their meetings, but there were no Methodists! They had bishops in the Church, but there were no Episcopalians! They trembled at the word, but there were no Quakers. They met simply as Christians, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and were obedient to His precious word.

Second: They recognize and act upon the Scriptural truth of the unity of the Church of God, which is the Body of Christ, of which Christ is the Head, and every believer a member.

Notice those words: "*recognize and act upon.*" Every intelligent believer, whatever his denominational affiliation may be, is quite ready to *recognize* and concede that Scripture reveals the existence of but one Church, with Christ as its Head and every believer as a member; but few are prepared to follow this revelation to its logical conclusion, and *act* upon this truth, cost what it may, and lead where it will. It is one thing for a person to hold a truth, and another for that truth to so hold him that it causes him to regulate his conduct by it.

The Scriptures are plain that there is but one Church, which is called "the body of Christ," of which Christ is the Head, and every believer a member. The word of God is very definite as to this. Mark well these quotations from the Bible: "So we (believers), being many, are *one body* in Christ, and every one *members one of another*" (Rom. 12: 5). "For as the body is *one*, and hath many members, and all the members of that *one body*, being many, are *one body*, so is Christ" (1 Cor. 12: 12). "There is *one body* and one Spirit" (Eph. 4: 4). "Now ye (believers) are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (I Cor. 12: 27).

Every Christian, upon his acceptance of Christ as Saviour was, by the Holy Spirit of God, joined to this mystical body of Christ, the Church. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into *one body*" (I Cor. 12: 13). Each believer is not only united by the Holy Spirit to the *Head* in heaven, but is also united to *every other* believer on earth, in whom the Spirit of God dwells. This is the great truth of the unity of the body. Christ is thus linked

eternally with His Own, and they are described as being "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28) .

Since there is but *one* body, of which Christ is the Head; then there is no room in the world for *many bodies* with many heads, as exemplified by denominationalism today. If there is but *one* body, of which every believer is a member, and Christ the Head; what necessity is there for forming other bodies with men at their head? No one can "join" the body of Christ any more than one's finger can "join" his body. The believer is said to be *joined* to the body by the Spirit of God (I Cor. 6: 17; Eph. 4: 16; Col. 2: 19). Thus it is clearly seen that the Church is not an organization *to be joined*, but an organism (the body of Christ) to which every believer *has been joined* by the Spirit of God. Let us underline this fact in our minds.

Since, therefore, there is but *one* Church, to which every believer has been joined, why try to join another? Is not what God has joined together good enough? Is not the Headship of Christ sufficient for the Church? Is not the word of God of sufficient authority? Those who are called "brethren" recognize and act upon this Scriptural truth of the one body; and seek, *not to form another body*, but to *own what God has already formed*. They meet together as members of the body of Christ, in subjection to the authority of the Head, and in accordance with the principles He has laid down in His Own word. Could anything be more simple and Scriptural than this? We are nowhere told to *make* a unity, but are enjoined to "*keep* the unity of the Spirit (which God has made) in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4: 3). How anyone who has really grasped, from the word of God, the truth of the one body and the one Head, can continue in a denominational affiliation, is a problem that only the judgment seat of Christ must solve.

It is one thing to be ignorant of the true character of sectarianism that virtually denies the truth of the one body; and another to *remain* in such association with one's eyes open. When a Christian is unaware of the fact that a denomination is contrary to God's word, his conscience is undefiled, and God can use him; but the fact that God uses such a person must not be interpreted as proof that God approves of his denominational position. So long as a man walks according to the light he has, he will be blest; but woe betide the one who sees the evils and unscripturalness of denominationalism, and yet *remains* in it! "Light accepted bringeth light; but light rejected bringeth night"—and how great is the darkness of wilful ignorance!

Each local church, or assembly of believers, represents and expresses, or should represent and express, the church as a *whole*, even as a tiny dewdrop reflects, in miniature, the same sky as the mighty ocean. Each local assembly therefore should have Christ as its Head, believers only as its members, the word of God as its guide, the Holy Spirit for its power, and the glory of Christ as its aim. Does the company with whom you meet thus recognize and act upon the truth of the oneness of all believers in Christ; or does it create artificial barriers that shuts out regenerated believers who are sound in doctrine and moral in their lives? Such a company *is not contemplated in the Scriptures*, and therefore has no Scriptural warrant for its constitution and existence. The "brethren" seek to hold and practice this truth, so clearly revealed in the book of books, and, therefore, have Scriptural authority for their position.

Third: They own no authority but the word of God for their manner of meeting, and the maintenance of godly order in those meetings.

Like the Bereans of old they have "*received* the word with all readiness of mind, and *searched* the Scriptures daily whether those things were so" (Acts 17: 11). They believe, and rightly, that they have no more right to make a new mode of meeting for the Lord's people than they have to make a new way of salvation. If the way of salvation, 1900 years old, is good and sufficient for today; then God's principles of gathering are just as necessary for our guidance in assembly fellowship as they were in the days of old. We cannot improve on the pattern God has given His people in the New Testament Scriptures. Do you believe this? The "brethren" do, and act on it.

We shall read the New Testament in vain to discover anything approximating a denomination such as exists today, with one man selected as its minister to do all its preaching, teaching, praying, and the leading of its worship; calling itself by some man-given title; regulated by its own by-laws and books of discipline; having its own particular creed, to which all must subscribe ere they can enter; in many cases, adding rites and ordinances and ceremonies the word of God knows nothing about, and often allowing unsaved people to join and remain in its membership. This is not an exaggeration, as a visit to and examination of many denominational churches, will soon convince the sincere inquirer.

A reading of the New Testament, especially the Acts, will reveal the fact that believers, and *believers only*, gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18: 20); for remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of bread (Acts

20: 7; 1 Cor. 11: 23-24); for edification (Acts 2: 41-47; I Cor. 12th to 14th chapters); and for prayer (Matt. 18: 20; Acts 4: 23-30); etc. These companies, whether large or small, are called "churches" or "assemblies." We find the expression, "Churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14: 33); "Churches of God" (I Thess. 2: 14); "Churches" (Acts 9: 31; 15: 41; 16: 5); "Churches of Christ" (Rom. 16: 16). In these churches or assemblies of believers, there is *no mention* of "the minister," or "the book of discipline," or "the creed," or any special name such as "Baptist," "Presbyterian," etc., by which these assemblies were distinguished from each other. It was merely their *location* that distinguished them. We find "The Church of God which is at *Corinth*" (I Cor. 1: 2), "The Churches of *Galatia*" (Gal. 1: 2), etc. The Church which was at Corinth included *all* the believers in Christ in that city. A letter addressed: "To the Church of God in Chicago," or any other city you wish to name, *would apply to and include every regenerated person in that city*, for that term includes all who, by the Spirit of God, have been joined to the body of Christ.

In the church which is His body, Christ the Head has given certain gifts for the edification or building up of the whole body of believers. These gifts are evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4: 8-16). These are recognized in and discharge their ministry in and with the fellowship of the local assemblies. Then also there are bishops or elders, and deacons in these churches, as for example in Philippi (Phil: 1: 1). There is no mention at all of *one man* in charge, to whom the assembly delegated the task of teaching, preaching, and shepherding. We find no such term as "the pastor of the church," or "the teacher or preacher of the church." The word is always in the *plural*. In the same assembly there were "pastors, evangelists, teachers, bishops, and deacons." How does this fit in with what is seen in modern denominationalism?

If a person were to go to the New Testament to discover how to get rid of "the pastor of a church," he would discover there was no such person described, or even contemplated in the word of God. There are two kinds of troubles from which a company of believers may suffer: Scriptural and un-Scriptural. The former can be dealt with according to the directions of the Bible; but the latter must be decided by the by-laws and discipline books of men. The "brethren" have their troubles (for the flesh is within them as it is amongst all the other "brethren in Christ"), but these troubles are anticipated in, and the remedy provided by the word of God.

For example: here is a company of believers who have failed in acting toward one another in love. Jealousy and strife have been allowed to remain unjudged in the assembly; the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched, and confusion and barrenness follows. What is the remedy? There are two methods. One is for every believer in that assembly to so humble himself before God in confession of his sin and restitution to his brethren, that God will be pleased to come in and revive the assembly of believers with the conscious sense of His presence, and the liberty and power of the Holy Spirit. The other method is to appoint one man as the head of that assembly, and allow him to have the management of the meeting, the responsibility for the ministry of the word, the dispensing of the Lord's supper, the conducting of the prayer meeting, and the preaching of the gospel; so that all confusion will be brought to an end. Which is the right method of restoration, the first or the last? Such a question has only one reply. Every child of God will agree that the first method is the one honouring to God, and is the Scriptural remedy. The other method is seen in denominationalism with its attendant evils of clerisy, hierarchies, synods, councils, books of discipline, etc.

It cannot be emphasized sufficiently that *Scriptural principles of gathering require Scriptural power*—the Holy Spirit—for their operation. When that power is absent, confusion follows; but it is not the *principles* that have failed, but the *people*. Once the people of God are restored in heart, the power will once more be apparent. The principles, being Scriptural, are true and right. Let us not adjust the *principles* to our form of *gathering*, but our form of *gathering* to the *principles* found in the good Book. Is this clear? So long as the flesh remains in the people of God, there will be manifestations of it which will make painful history; but the *principles of Scripture remain unchanged and unchangeable*. In his letter to Corinth, Paul severely rebuked the believers for their behaviour in the assembly, which resulted in disorder and disgrace, but *never*, for one moment, did he suggest that the Scriptural *principles*, which he had delivered to them, should be altered to suit their backslidden condition of soul.

Fourth: They are uncompromisingly loyal to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words “They hold (or acknowledge) the Head” (Col. 2: 19). Nothing derogatory to the Person and work of Christ would remain unchallenged and unjudged for one moment in their assemblies; and this is true the world over, wherever these Scriptural gatherings are to be found. The essential Deity of the Son of God, as coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and the necessity for, and the efficacy of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, at Calvary, as the only ground for the believer’s acceptance before God, is emphasized constantly.

Those who meet amongst those known as "brethren" may not be noted for their oratorical gifts; but one thing is certain: wherever one stands up to preach the gospel, Christ's Person is exalted, His eternal Deity is confessed and the all-sufficiency of the work of redemption, which He accomplished by the shedding of His precious blood, is proclaimed with no uncertain sound.

Would that this were true of denominational gatherings but, alas, it is more often the exception than the rule! Men are allowed in the pulpits of many church buildings who deny the Deity of Christ, scoff at the doctrine of redemption through His blood, and belittle or refuse to accept the Bible as the Divinely inspired and therefore, absolutely inerrant and authoritative word of God. Yet many professing Christians seem to be content to listen to this denial of their Lord and sad travesty of the gospel. By their membership, presence and financial support of such an organization, they thus help to perpetuate this disgraceful thing! The Deity of Christ is the foundation-stone of Christianity, and the person who denies this *is not a Christian*, and therefore has no place in a professedly Christian pulpit. Any company of people that tolerates a preacher who denies Christ's Deity and work, is no place for a true and faithful child of God. If Christ is not God, we do not *need* Him. Since Christ is God, then we *cannot do without Him!*

To remain within a company of professed believers which permits such doctrinal evil to be preached and remain unjudged, is to be disloyal to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To continue in such an association is to give one's support to it. The word of God is clear as to the attitude of a believer in such a case. "What part hath he that believeth with an unbeliever? . . . Wherefore *come out from amongst them*, and be ye separate, saith the Lord " (II Cor. 6: 15-17). "Evil communications corrupt good manners," declares the Bible.

A man is known by the company he keeps. It is far better for a person to stand alone for what he knows to be the truth of God's word and the honour of God's Son, than to be linked by association, with the enemies and blasphemers of his blessed Lord.

Loyalty to the commander-in-chief is essential to the united attack of an army against a common enemy. What would you think of those in an army who were afraid to face the foe lest some of their own number should plunge a bayonet into them from behind? This is the situation in many denominations where loose and blasphemous views of the Person and work of the Son of God are tolerated. A member of such an organization never knows when the Deity of his Lord will be attacked from behind the pulpit, the efficacy of His precious blood ridiculed and denied, and the truth and authority of God's word questioned. Thank God, such is not true amongst the hundreds of assemblies of believers known as "brethren" scattered throughout the whole world.

Fifth: They welcome into their assemblies all whom Christ has received, to the glory of God.

That is, all regenerated persons who are sound in doctrine, and godly in their walk before the world. To make any other conditions for welcoming a person to the Lord's supper, and the privileges of the assembly, is to *act in a sectarian manner* that has no Scriptural warrant, and which only serves to bring confusion and dishonour to a company of believers.

A reading of the book of Acts and the Epistles will convince any Christian that the early churches were composed of believers only, and were not a mixture of saved and unsaved. With these assemblies each believer associated himself upon his conversion. There was no need to ask in that day: "What

denomination shall I join?" There was only one place for a child of God to go, and that was where believers met together in the name of the Lord Jesus, either for prayer, praise, worship, or the ministry of the word. On the day of Pentecost, those who gladly received the word were baptized and added to the assembly that had already been formed by the Spirit of God (Acts 2: 41). Peter and John, after their arrest and acquittal, "went to their own company" (Acts 4: 23). We are told: "And of the rest (the unsaved) durst no man join himself to them" (Acts 5: 13). Simon, a false professor, was told by Peter that he had "no part nor lot in this matter" (Acts 8: 18-23). Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, "was with the disciples certain days" (Acts 9: 19). When he "assayed to join himself to the disciples" at Jerusalem, the believers were afraid to receive him, because he had been such an enemy of Christians. Barnabas, however, vouched for his Christian profession and character, and he was then gladly welcomed (Acts 9: 26). This is the story all through the Acts. The apostle Paul was greatly used of God, through the preaching of the gospel and teaching of the word, in establishing assemblies of believers who met together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. To these local assemblies every Christian, doctrinally and morally sound, was gladly welcomed.

It seems to have been the custom, in the early church, for a believer who left one town to go to another to take with him a letter from his home assembly, commending him to the love and care of the assembly in the town to which he was going (II Cor. 3: 1). By this means it was made reasonably certain that believers and believers *only* met at the Lord's supper to show forth the Lord's death. While a letter of commendation serves a good and useful purpose; it must not be allowed to become a rigid rule, or made an essential condition, ere a believer can be welcomed to the Lord's Supper. This is mere formalism. It is with *principles*, and not *rules* that the New

Testament concerns itself in this matter. The spectacle of saved and unsaved, linked together by a common membership of church fellowship, such as we see around us in Christendom, has no counterpart in the New Testament Scriptures. We read there that "all that *believed were together*" (Acts 2: 44). The "brethren" have sought to return to these New Testament principles of gathering, and no unsaved person is knowingly permitted to partake of the Lord's supper, or allowed to associate with them in their assembly fellowship. Neither is any person who is unsound in the fundamentals of God's word, or who is morally wrong in his life, permitted to continue with them in church fellowship. If any person in their midst is proven, *after careful and unbiased examination*, to hold and teach wrong doctrine, or is immoral in his life, or guilty of the sins enumerated in I Cor. 5: 11, he is put away from that assembly until such time as it is quite clear he has been restored in heart to the Lord (I Cor. 5: 13, II. Cor. 2: 6-8).

The "brethren" rightly argue that as the Lord's supper belongs to the Lord, it is for the Lord's people only. The Lord invites His own blood-bought people to thus remember Him. The assembly simply *welcomes the Christian* who is sound in life and doctrine, and who has seen from the word of God his privilege and responsibility to be there. If, from what you have seen and heard from God's word, you have been brought to realize that your place is amongst those who thus meet in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, in Scriptural simplicity, and apart from the ecclesiastical forms invented by men, make known this desire to an assembly of believers. They, in turn, will interview you to see whether you can give a reason for the hope that is within you, and whether you are sound in life and doctrine. Once this is established, they will gladly welcome you to share with them the Christian fellowship and assembly association that is the birthright of every believer in Christ.

Sixth: They observe the ordinances, given to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ, in a Scriptural manner.

These ordinances are two in number: Baptism and the Lord's supper. The first is administered to the believer *once*, the second observed by the believer *often*.

BAPTISM is the God-ordained *figure* of the believer's death, burial and resurrection with Christ. By his baptism with water the Christian confesses his identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, and his determination to walk in newness of life to the glory of Him who went under the waves and billows of God's wrath to deliver him from the penalty and power of sin, and from this present evil world (Psa. 22: 1-21; Rom. 6: 1-14; Gal. 1: 4).

The Saviour's commission to His disciples was: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matt. 28: 19, 20). In obedience to this commission, those known as "brethren" have gone forth with the gospel. When souls have been won for Christ, the truth of baptism has been placed before them, and the believers have been baptized, or immersed with water. There is no such thing taught in Scripture as baptism *before* profession of faith on the part of the individual. The Scriptural order of Christian baptism is, "He that *believeth* and is *baptized*." Search the history of the Church, as found in the Acts of the Apostles, and *you will not find one case of infant baptism*. Baptism is conditioned upon believing, which comes through an intelligent hearing of the gospel (Rom. 10: 13-17); and surely this cannot be true of a helpless babe in arms!

Of the theory of so-called "Household Baptism" (which teaches that each member of the household of a believer, *including the infants of the home*, should be baptized) we cannot do better than quote C. H. Macintosh, author of the world famed and greatly used C. H. M.'s "Notes on the Pentateuch," who wrote: (Dec. 22, 1871) "I believe the course of some of our friends in urging this question of (household) baptism, will, unless God in His mercy interpose, *lead to most disastrous results*. For my own part, seeing the question has been thus forced upon me, I can only say I have, for thirty-two years, been asking in vain for a *single line of Scripture for baptizing any save believers*, or those who profess to believe. I have had *inferences, conclusions, and deductions*; but of direct Scripture authority, not a tittle."

Many Christians seem to regard water baptism as a "*non-essential*" and treat it with indifference by saying: "Well, it doesn't affect one's salvation, so why bother?" But surely the distinct command of the Lord Jesus is not a non-essential. It is true that baptism does not affect the soul's eternal salvation, but surely it is necessary to complete obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, if He declared it should be done. Though the Lord puts the responsibility to carry out His command directly upon those who preach the gospel (Matt. 28: 18; Mark 16; 15, 16); it is fitting that the believer should be prayerfully exercised about having this Divinely-appointed ordinance carried out in the way that Scripture teaches, especially in view of the important Scriptural meaning attached to it by the apostle Paul (Rom. 6).

While maintaining firmly that baptism by immersion, subsequent to profession of faith in Christ, is the plain teaching of Scripture; we should be careful not to make this ordinance *the door of admittance* to, and participation in the Lord's supper, or the basis of our fellowship with other Christians. Many

of these have not yet been brought to see, from God's word, the distinctive truths of believer's baptism, or the privilege of gathering together, as believers, in Scriptural simplicity. We must ever remember that we are living today in the midst of something the New Testament *does not contemplate*; that is, a *baptized mass of humanity*. Practically ever genuine Christian we meet has passed through some form of baptism, so-called. In a great number of cases he was sprinkled with water as an infant. When, in later years, he was saved by the grace of God, he imagined that this christening was the equivalent of believer's baptism, and his denomination encourages him in this belief.

Let us, by all means, place before such, in a kindly, courteous and Christian way, the teaching of God's word as to these things. At the same time, we should never forget that every believer is a child of God, and a fellow member of the body of Christ. Let us extend to all those that "belong to Christ" that Christian love, care and forbearance that the Head of the body declared are the marks of true discipleship. (John 13: 34, 35; Mark 9: 41; I John 3: 14, 16; 4: 20; 5: 1). Many a godly Christian has been stumbled because of the harsh, hypercritical, uncharitable and even contemptuous attitude adopted towards him by a better taught believer, or a company of believers, who utterly failed to take into consideration his spiritual environment. Let us ponder carefully and prayerfully the words of the inspired apostle: "Owe no man anything, but to *love* one another," and: "Wherefore *receive ye one another*, as Christ also received us. to the glory of God" (Rom. 13: 8; 15: 7).

THE LORD'S SUPPER, as we have already seen, is for all the Lord's people who are sound in life and doctrine. An examination of the practice of the early Church, as seen in the book of Acts, seems to indicate that brethren of a given community came together *each Lord's day* to show forth the Lord's death in the

breaking of bread (Acts 20: 7). They came primarily, not to hear preaching, but to break the bread, the Divinely appointed symbol of the body of their Lord and Saviour; and drink the cup, the symbol of His precious blood.

For this ordinance we have abundant Scripture testimony. The very night in which Christ was betrayed, He gathered His disciples together and instituted this feast of remembrance (See Luke 22: 19, 20; Matt. 26: 26-28); Mark 14: 22-25). From John 13, it seems certain that Judas left after the Passover feast, and before the Lord's supper was instituted. From I Cor. 11: 23-34, we learn that this ordinance of the Lord's supper was given by the risen Lord as a distinct revelation to Paul the apostle. The subject is introduced because the brethren in Corinth had abused the privilege of this remembrance feast by turning it into a meal in which every man satisfied his own appetite for food and drink. The purpose and propriety of this blessed ordinance is here stated as a direct revelation from the ascended Lord in glory, and every Christian should read this whole passage carefully and prayerfully.

Some think that in the primitive Church this feast was celebrated each day (Acts 2: 46); but by the time that assemblies of Christians were spread throughout Asia, it became the established custom for the disciples to come together the first day of the week to break bread. Notice, it was not the first Sunday of the month, or the first Sunday of the quarter, or the first Sunday of the half-year, or the year; but the *first day of the week*. The expression is used again in I Cor. 16: 1, 2, where Paul is speaking of the collection for the saints and says: "Upon the first day of the week, let each of you lay by him in store as the Lord has prospered him." Their primary purpose in assembling themselves together on the first day of the week, in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ, was to remember Him in His own Divinely appointed way, and thus “proclaim the Lord’s death until He come.”

This is what those called “brethren” still seek to do. Throughout the world, at a time most convenient to the majority of the believers, Christians, and *Christians only*, gather together in the Lord’s name alone. In their midst is a table upon which is placed a loaf of bread and a cup containing the fruit of the vine. Inasmuch as it is the *Lord’s supper*, there is no one present who attempts to usurp the Lordship and authority of Christ by attempting to take His place or arrange its programme. One after another of the brethren rise as the Spirit leads—one with a hymn, another voicing the worship of the assembly; another with some Scripture exposition in keeping with the feast of remembrance. One rises to give thanks for the bread, and it is broken and passed so that all may break it and eat. Perhaps another rises to give thanks for the cup, and it, in turn, is passed from one to another.

Thus, in Scriptural simplicity, this feast, instituted by the Saviour, is kept. There is no *visible* head at this meeting for remembrance, for none such is contemplated in God’s word. Christ, however, is there according to His promise: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them,” and who would dare to take His place? This is what clerisy has done. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Christ’s place of pre-eminence in the assembly of His saints for worship has been superseded by the so-called “minister,” humanly ordained, who dispenses the elements and, *apart from whose presence*, the Lord’s supper cannot be partaken and enjoyed! From such a travesty of the pattern given in the New Testament, we turn away with abhorrence. The Scripture makes clear that *Christ is the Host* at His own table, and each believer

is His honoured *guest*. It is *His presence*, and not the presence of a clergyman, that gives virtue and value to the ordinance.

There is no greener spot on the face of this wilderness of a world in which the believer's lot is cast, than to meet, with believers only, around the Lord, each Lord's day, to remember the Lord Jesus Christ in the Lord's own appointed way, proclaiming the Lord's death until the Lord comes back again. Is this your happy privilege, fellow believer? Rest not until it is and you can truthfully sing:

“Lord Jesus, in Thy precious name,
And, in that name alone;
At Thy request we gladly meet,
Thy Lordship here would own.

As on that dark betrayal night,
Thou didst this feast ordain;
We, too, the bread and cup would take,
Thy death, Lord, to proclaim.

The bread, Thy body doth portray;
The cup, Thy precious blood;
By which our sin was put away,
Our peace was made with God.

The Host art Thou, O blessed Lord,
Thy honoured guests are we:
With grateful and adoring hearts,
We would remember Thee!

Lord Jesus, Whom, unseen, we love,
As thus we muse on Thee;
We none would see, save Thee alone,
Thou Man of Calvary!”

Seventh: They give liberty for the exercise of the priesthood of all believers, and have room for the development of all the gifts given by the risen Head to His Church.

The abominable heresy that divides the people of God into two classes, called the "clergy" and the "laity," is unknown in the New Testament. This did not come into being until the latter part of the second century, as a perusal of any reliable "Church History" will prove. This innovation was undoubtedly the work of the Devil, and it has wrought untold havoc in the Church of God. The word "clergy" comes from the word "kleeros" which means "heritage." In 1 Pet. 5:3, the Spirit of God declares that all believers are God's "kleeros" or heritage. The term "laity" comes from the word "laios," which means "the common people." In Christendom today we hear of "clergymen and laymen," or the "kleeros and the laios." The clergyman belongs to a particular class in the Church, who, by reason of education along certain religious lines, and human ordination, has authority conferred upon him to preach, baptize, administer the elements of the Lord's supper, and also lead the congregation in public worship, prayer, and ministry, as well as shepherd the flock. The layman, not being so educated and ordained, has no such privileges, and must be content to occupy a subordinate place. This unscriptural theory finds its fullest expression in the Roman Catholic Church, but Protestantism is also greatly corrupted by it.

There is not the slightest ground for this division of Christians in the New Testament. You will search therein in vain for it. It is foreign to the whole language of the New Testament, in which *every believer is viewed* as a "priest" (1 Peter 2: 5-9). As such he is exhorted to "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 5). *All* God's people are described as being constituted a kingdom of *priests* unto God (Rev. 1: 5, 6). *All* are invited to draw near with a true heart,

in full assurance of faith, through "the great high Priest of their confession," whose blood has opened up the new and living way into God's presence and favour (Heb. 10: 19-22).

The elaborate ritual of Judaism, with its special priesthood, *was done away in Christ!* The separating veil has been rent, and every regenerated person has been constituted a priest unto God. All enlightened Christians will acknowledge this, yet many go on with a system that maintains and supports this multitude of unscriptural "reverends," and "right reverends," etc. Inasmuch as the Church of God is likened to a human body, each part being necessary for the proper functioning of the whole; there can therefore be no dividing of the body into two separate bodies or classes, such as is practiced in most circles of denominationalism.

Amongst those known as "brethren," no such distinctions are tolerated for one moment. As they meet as an assembly for worship, or for prayer, all are on the common ground of priesthood, and liberty is given to the Spirit of God to express Himself *audibly* through any of the *men* so gathered, the *women* being particularly enjoined to be "silent in the churches" (I Cor. 14: 34, 35). In such gatherings, worship is given its proper place. Christendom has practically eliminated the place of the worship meeting, where believers gather for the purpose of giving God that which He is seeking from His people, the worship of their hearts. Worship is not prayer for one's needs, or praise for one's blessings, but the overflow of the soul in adoration to God for what He is in Himself, as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer is the occupation of the heart with its needs; praise, the occupation of the heart with its blessings; but worship is the occupation of the heart with God Himself. How little of this is found in denominationalism, and God is thus robbed of His portion from His people!

While it is quite true that all believers are priests, yet it is also true they all are not evangelists, pastors, or teachers. These are gifts, given to the church by the ascended Head: but the fact that a believer exercises one or other of these gifts does not place him in a professional class above his brethren. He merely exercises the gift he has been given as part of the body of Christ, and thus the whole assembly is edified, or built up thereby. In the assembly, as a whole, there are evangelists, pastors, and teachers. As such, they are not limited to any one church. There is no such thing as *the* evangelist of a church, or *the* pastor of a church, or *the* teacher of a church. Bishops and deacons are local in their sphere. As regards the bishop, he is a very different person from what we know of that high ecclesiastical office as found in the sects of Christendom. The practice of this would greatly upset some of the highly organized denominations of today.

The "brethren" seek to *recognize* and give liberty for the exercise of these gifts in the assembly. They believe that God meant what He said when He declared: "As every one hath *received* the gift, even so *minister* the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4: 10, 11). Gift will make room for itself, and it will soon become apparent to an assembly whether this person or that has really the gift of an evangelist, a teacher, or a pastor. The saints are exhorted to "*know* (or recognize), them that *labour*" amongst them (I Thess. 5: 12); but are never asked to *elect*, *choose* or *appoint* them. With the *business* affairs of the assembly, however, this is different (Acts 6: 1-4).

Christendom presents the spectacle of one man being elected and appointed by a congregation, for a certain stipulated salary, to do its evangelizing, preaching, teaching and shepherding of the flock; but seldom indeed is there one person who has all these gifts combined in himself. Furthermore, Scripture does not contemplate a salaried ministry. It is foreign to New Testa-

ment principles, which describes the evangelist, teacher, or pastor, who is devoting his whole time to such ministry, as looking alone to the Lord for his support. We need not be surprised at attacks on the part of so-called "ministers" of denominations against the "brethren." These men realize that if they accepted what the "brethren" practice along this line, their *position* would be lost. Theirs is simply a gesture of self-defence to defend a system from which they derive a livelihood (I Cor. 9: 14; III John 7).

The idea of taking collections of money from a mixed audience of saved and unsaved also has no Scriptural warrant. "Freely ye have received, freely give," was our Saviour's exhortation (Matt. 10: 8). There is not the slightest suggestion in the New Testament that money was solicited from unsaved people to "help the cause," or to "pay the minister's salary," or to "pay off the mortgage on the house of God." The collections of money were to be taken from the *Lord's people only* (I Cor. 16: 1, 2). What shame and disgrace Christendom has brought to the name of Christianity, by using worldly means to extract money from the reluctant pockets of unsaved people to support what is professedly of God!

To sum up: We have seen that an assembly of believers, according to the New Testament, gives room for the manifestation and development of all the gifts given by the Head of the Church to His body. We read: "From Whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the *edifying of itself in love*" (Eph. 4: 16).

Thus the evangelists in the local church are busily engaged in *preaching* the gospel to the unsaved; the teachers are seeking

to *instruct* the believers; the pastors are *shepherding* the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (I Peter 5: 1-4); and the bishops or elders and deacons are fulfilling their God-given function. Is this possible in the assembly of which you form a part; or are you associated with a humanly-conceived, humanly-organized and humanly-directed company, that allows no liberty for the exercise or development of the gifts of Christ to the church to function within the local assembly?

Eighth: Their Gospel activity is governed by the principles laid down in God's word.

From the assemblies of those known as "brethren," over a thousand have gone forth to preach the gospel in the foreign mission fields, looking alone to the Lord for their support. As many more are busily engaged in the homelands, opening up new places where little or no clear gospel is heard, and where these Scriptural principles of gathering are not practiced. Besides those who spend all their time in the Lord's work, there is a large army of business and professional men and tradesmen who devote their spare time to preaching the gospel, distributing tracts, visiting the sick and teaching the word of God. The only difference between these and the other workers is that they are part-time, and the others are whole-time labourers in the same harvest field. In every place where any of them are scheduled to preach the gospel, you may be absolutely certain of hearing nothing but the clear statement of man's need and God's remedy, and the proclamation of a full and free salvation, conditioned through faith in Christ's finished work, acceptance of Him as Saviour, and confession of Him as Lord of the life (Rom. 10: 9-10).

Go where you will in this world, wherever these companies of Christians known as “brethren” are found, and you will hear a clear presentation of the gospel that is honouring to God and glorifying to Christ. They are prepared, as individuals, to go *anywhere*, providing they can take the whole Bible with them, and are given liberty to declare the whole counsel of God. Wherever they go, they preach the word without fear, or favour, or charge. Eternity alone will reveal the countless thousands who have been led to own their need as sinners and trust the Saviour, Who has been presented to them through the gospel as preached by them. Of course, each servant of the Lord is responsible, to his own Master alone, as to his *sphere* and *methods* of service (Rom. 14: 4). While he should welcome advice from godly brethren, he should not allow himself to be dictated to in regard to these things, for he is not “the servant of man” (Gal. 1: 10). An ever increasing number of assemblies, from which goes forth the Word with no uncertain sound, bears eloquent testimony to the fact that God’s principles of gathering are as workable today as when they were laid down many years ago; provided God’s people will bow to the authority of Scripture, and allow the Lord to have His rightful place as Head of the Church, which is His body.

Being thus on Scriptural ground, and acting upon Scriptural principles of gathering, those that are added to the assembly have freedom to develop their gift, and also grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. One-man ministry tends to stifle this development of gift, as does also narrow sectarianism and unscriptural principles. A friend of mine was speaking to a very well known teacher amongst the denominations. During the conversation he asked him why it was that the average young Christian in an assembly of believers known as “brethren,” could give a good Scriptural definition and a reasonably clear exposition of the great doctrines

of the Bible, and the average young Christian amongst the denominations could not. The worthy doctor of divinity, since gone to be with Christ, though agreeing with the fact of the statement, could furnish no explanation of its truth. My friend, of course, pointed out that the explanation lay in the fact that those who met on Scriptural lines were able to function according to the Scriptural pattern, and thus a Scriptural atmosphere was created that made possible the recognition, exercise and development of God-given ability.

On another occasion in Johannesburg, South Africa, an elderly clergyman, a true Christian, came to the meeting for the breaking of bread and, of course, was received as a believer. After the bread had been broken and the cup passed, he arose and, amongst other things, said: "Brethren, value the liberty you have in meeting thus, and let no one bring you into ecclesiastical bondage." Personally, the more I read and study the Bible, the longer I remain associated with those known as "brethren"; and the more I see of denominations and meet those who are linked to them, the clearer do I see the Scripturalness of the position of those who meet simply as believers only, and thank God that He ever, in His grace, led me amongst them.

As companies of believers we freely admit to having failed in many respects, and bemoan the oft manifestations of the flesh among us, which has grieved the Holy Spirit and brought shame to the testimony of our Lord. We have to confess our lack of love oft-times to those of our brethren who have not seen eye to eye with us; but, in spite of all the failure, those known as "brethren" are seeking humbly to put into practice those principles of gathering found in the sure and certain word of God. Because of this, I do not want to be anywhere else but amongst those who gather in the alone and sufficient name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who accept the word of God as their sole authority for faith and practice.

CONCLUSION



The foregoing eight reasons for my being with those known as “brethren,” really represent the *privileges* of being so gathered; but privilege always carries with it *responsibility*. Since these principles of gathering are Scriptural, it devolves upon each Christian to act as before the Lord in the light of them, and I would suggest that each believer give his earnest and undivided attention to what follows.

First. That each genuine believer, who is sound in life and doctrine, and who realizes, from the Scriptures, the unscriptural character of denominationalism and all that it involves, will not rest until he or she is meeting with those who hold and practice these Scriptural principles of gathering. Remember, it is not a case of “joining the brethren.” If you are saved, you have already been joined, by the Spirit of God, to all the other “brethren in Christ.” It is simply a case of associating oneself with those who have seen and are acting upon the truth of the one body of which Christ is the Head. The person who really apprehends this truth will never rest content until he has gladly gone forth from all that which, in practice, denies Christ the place of pre-eminence in the assembly, and the Spirit of God the liberty to minister through whomsoever He will in the assembly. The Scriptural assembly of believers, to whom you make known your decision, will gladly welcome you, and extend to you the right hand of fellowship after a godly sort.

Second. It will mean that he who thus sees his place will surely desire to support the assembly by his presence at all its

meetings, whenever possible. He will earnestly endeavour to co-operate with his fellow believers in the assembly and, by his wholehearted support financially, and his efforts individually, will seek to encourage, strengthen and edify the company of believers with whom he meets.

There is a noticeable lack of co-operation on the part of some believers. They imagine that their responsibility to an assembly ends with their being present at the meeting for the breaking of bread on Lord's day. It needs to be emphasized that the prayer meeting, the Bible reading, the gospel meeting, and special meetings are just as much meetings of the assembly for the purposes named, as the feast of remembrance. How can an assembly hope to develop if the prayer meeting is neglected? How can it be edified if a mere handful attend the Bible reading? What will the unsaved think, if only a few of the believers gather to support, by their presence and prayers, the one who is to deliver the gospel message? Only an excuse that can stand the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ should be made for neglecting these meetings; yet often the most trivial excuses are put forth by those whose lack of heart, or ignorance of these principles, causes them to absent themselves from these meetings.

A Christian man whom I know, used to put it thus:
"What kind of an assembly would this one be,
If everybody in it was just like me?"

Would there be a prayer meeting? a Bible reading? a gospel meeting? An assembly is formed by a *number* of believers, and the spiritual tone of the assembly is determined by the spirituality, or otherwise, of *each individual* composing that assembly. When a person avoids the prayer meeting, it is a sure sign he needs that meeting more than anything else. Many a discouraged believer has been tempted to stay home

on a prayer meeting night because he was tired in mind and body; but when he went, he discovered how true was the promise: "They that wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength." Doubtless, the very word of comfort or rebuke that we so much need is waiting for us at the Bible reading, but we must be there to get it, or it will do us no good.

If I would emphasize one thing above another to young believers in assemblies, it would be this: be loyal to the assembly of which you form a part. Do not be a liability, be an *asset*. Do not go visiting around here and there on your own meeting night, or get so involved in Christian work *outside* the assembly that you have no time to be present at its regular meetings and fulfil your obligations to it. Concentration is a splendid thing. I have known an assembly to die because those composing it assumed no responsibility to it. They devoted their energies in this work, and that effort, in many cases under denominational auspices, which were opposed to the very Scriptural principles they professed to hold.

If the assembly with which you are connected is Scriptural in its formation, *back it up by all the means in your power*, and concentrate your energies on edifying, or building up that which is according to the pattern revealed in the New Testament. It is a case of either *concentration* or *dissipation* of energy. Do not develop into a "Sermon taster," or become a "Floater," or a "Thrill hunter," following this or that man around, to the neglecting of your own responsibilities in your home assembly. The story is told of a man who saw a boy about to drown a dog. On being asked why he was going to drown the dog, the boy replied: "Well, it's like this. This dog follows everybody, and a dog that follows everybody is good to nobody!" The moral is obvious.

Third. The Christian who seeks to gather according to these Scriptural principles will need to have a big heart for *all* the children of God, by whatsoever name they may call themselves. He will have to continually distinguish between *personalities* and *principles*. He may not be able, in loyalty to the word of God, to have any fellowship with the *system*, or sect, with which this or that Christian is connected; but he ought to show that believer, as an individual, all the love and care that is his due as one of "the brethren." It is sadly possible for one who professes to have seen these Scriptural principles, to become very sectarian in heart. Let us remember that all who "belong to Christ" are dear to His heart, are in the Church which is His body and, as such, should be the objects of our love. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, by your love one for another," said our Lord and Master. (John 13: 35).

Any true Christian, who is sound as to his walk and in the fundamentals of God's word, should be *gladly welcomed* to the Lord's supper, on no other condition than that he "belongs to Christ." To impose any other conditions of reception to an assembly *is to form a sect*, with all its attendant evils. There is no such thing in Scripture as the sect of "The Brethren"; but there is such a thing in Scripture as brethren being assembled together on the common ground of the Headship of Christ and the unity of His body. Any assembly that *knowingly* refuses a believer, who is sound in life and doctrine, a place at the Lord's supper becomes, by that very act, *a sect*, however strenuously those composing it may deny the fact. Let us beware of sectarianism in any form! What mischief—and worse—has been wrought by a narrow and bigoted attitude adopted towards the Lord's people! If they belong to Christ, and are walking as becomes a believer, count it the greatest privilege to welcome such, and so "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4: 3). All snobbery is detestable, but religious snobbery is the most nauseating of all. May the Lord give us to realise

what a hateful thing it is to Him "Who loved the Church and gave Himself for it!" A well-known teacher of the word once wrote: "If you fail to provide an amount of fellowship for every known child of God, that moment you deserve to go out of existence." (J.N.D.)

Fourth. The believer who meets on Scriptural lines should so study his Bible that he will be able to help other Christians who are not similarly placed as to their church association. One has no need to apologize for his position amongst the so-called "brethren." Since it is of God, and according to His word, *let us boldly affirm it*, and seek to deliver our fellow believers from the evils of sectarianism, with its ordained clergy, and all the confusion that goes with it. Plenty of good literature has been published on this subject by able teachers, so that there is no excuse for not knowing the certainty of the things we stand for. While making no claims for perfection in our behaviour whilst so meeting, let us boldly maintain the Scripturalness of the principles that we hold and practice.

A well-known teacher amongst the denominations once confided to me: "I'll come amongst you, when you brethren cease your quarrels." At the time he said this, his own denomination was in the midst of a bitter fight over the question as to who should govern its church policy: the modernists or the fundamentalists! Apparently this quarrel did not enter into his thoughts, or cause him to leave his denomination! As "brethren," we have differences of opinion but, thank God, they are not over *fundamental truths* that question the inspiration of God's word, or the Deity of Christ, etc. We do not have to dispute about the pastor's salary being raised or lowered, or whether a modernist preacher shall be allowed to speak on our platform or not, or how we shall get rid of an unsaved "minister." All our differences can be solved by submitting to Scripture, and manifesting that

love, forbearance and hum'ility the word of God enjoins upon all the brethren. Let us then heed the injunction of Paul to Timothy: "The things that thou hast heard of me amongst many witnesses, the same *commit thou to faithful men* who shall be able to *teach others also*" (II Tim. 2: 2).

May we so study and obey God's word, that we shall each be found in the place where He would have us to be, gathering in His name alone, with those whom it has pleased Him to call "His brethren"; owning the sole authority of His word; and allowing the Holy Spirit liberty to minister through whomsoever He will, to the glory of God, and the edification of the Church, which is His body!

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