

THE ASSEMBLY IN THE WILDERNESS

Four Addresses at Bristol on
the salient points in the first
Epistle to the Corinthians

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PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF THE ASSEMBLY —THE ONE BODY

1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Ephesians 2:11-18; 3:1-7; 4:1-4;
Colossians 1:26, 27; 3:15

It is my desire to take up some of the salient points in the first epistle to the Corinthians, developing in particular the thought of the assembly. For the correct understanding of the assembly it is necessary to have in our minds the truth relating thereto as presented by the apostle Paul in the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, which contain his doctrine regarding the mystery, as he says: "by revelation he made known unto me the mystery," Eph. 3:3. The Lord first intimated to Paul this mystery when He arrested him on his way to Damascus, persecuting the assembly of God. In saying to Saul, "why persecutest thou me?" the Lord disclosed to him the secret that His body was here.

The Lord had before spoken of the assembly. In Matthew 16 the Lord spoke of the assembly as that which He would build, and in chapter 18 we get the administrative side of the assembly, resembling the view presented in 1 Corinthians. In Matthew the assembly is seen in kingdom

settings; in 1 Corinthians 4:20 the kingdom is presented in assembly settings, "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." Three distinctive thoughts connected with the kingdom are found in this epistle: the temple of God, the anointed, and victory over death—features which will be seen publicly in the world to come.

The Lord in Matthew 16 refers to the assembly as a divine work: "I will build my church," but necessarily on earth, as the reference to the gates of hades implies. This is a universal view of the assembly, as in the region of danger, but invulnerable. In Matthew 18 the view is different; the assembly is there presented as a court of appeal with regard to administrative questions, and no doubt is to be available locally. Administration in Israel was centralised in an earthly centre, in the place that Jehovah would choose, but in contrast to that, assembly administration is found in every locality. Nevertheless we cannot understand the true features of the assembly unless we approach the subject from the altitude of the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.

Matthew 16 prepares us to take up chapter 18; we meet the difficulties with a sense of sure victory. Although we see in Acts 9 the secret, of the Lord having a body on earth, disclosed to Paul—the chosen vessel in relation to this mystery—we notice in the book of Acts that the unfolding of assembly features is gradual. The assembly

was allowed to free itself in the power of its own vitality from the limitations of Judaism, in which as to its circumstances, it was found; and what comes to light at first is not what is local, but features that characterise the assembly universally, such as fellowship, unity, the power and presence of the Spirit, the assembly's link with heaven, and its extension beyond the confines of Judaism to embrace the Gentiles.

Not until chapter 13 do we find the development of what is local. So both in the gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts the universal thought precedes the local idea. Not that Acts 13 is the first reference to what is local; for in Acts 9:31 we read, "The assemblies then throughout the whole of Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace." It is to these that Paul afterwards refers when he says, "I persecuted the church of God," Gal. 1:13 and 1 Cor. 15:9. Though Paul speaks of it thus as a whole, as to fact they were various local assemblies that he persecuted. This is an important point, because it has been contended that the expression, church, or assembly of God can *only* refer to what is local, and that it was to the assembly at Jerusalem that Paul referred in speaking thus.

In making his defence before Agrippa in Acts 26, it is true that Paul refers specifically to Jerusalem, v. 10, but in the next verse he says, "I persecuted them even unto strange cities." So the assembly existed under the one name "the assembly of

God," but as composed of local companies, which Paul persecuted, as he says, not only in Jerusalem, but in strange cities.* There was that here, then, which the Lord could own and recognise as Himself, marked by the feature of suffering. We may well challenge our hearts as to whether that feature marks us. It may be that the pressure which the saints in Russia are undergoing is the Lord's way of maintaining the features of suffering at present—a feature proper to the history of the assembly's sojourn here. We should all seek to avail ourselves of the privilege referred to in Philippians 1 : 29 : "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

I turn now for a moment to the epistles to Ephesians and Colossians in order to see what is to govern our thoughts in reading the epistle to the Corinthians. The opening verses of the epistle to the Ephesians give us a view of the purpose of God, all being according to "the good pleasure of his will." Reference is also made to "the mystery of his will," and to "the counsel of his . . . will," which latter will be manifest when everything is headed up in Christ. Then the apostle tells us of his prayer that we might not only have the light of these things, but be consciously brought into the enjoyment of them—a

* The reading *assemblies* (plural) in Acts 9 : 31 is questioned by some editors, but this would make more evident the fact of the term "Church of God" having more than a merely local force.

very important matter. Following upon this the apostle gives us in the first ten verses of chapter 2 an epitome of the work of God that will bring into effect His purpose, viewing that work in its entirety. As another has said, the Spirit of God had so wrought in these Ephesians that He could view them as in a "faith state in anticipation of what will be their actual state at the coming of Christ."*

The apostle breaks off from verse 10, and instead of viewing the work from the divine side, perfect in itself, and in relation to eternal conditions, or to the world to come, he takes account of actual circumstances here on earth. There are Gentiles, and there are Jews; there are those far off and those who are nigh; and God has so wrought here on earth, through the work of the Spirit and by means of the gospel, as to bring together these two absolutely contrary parties. The word "now" characterises this section; it is a question of what is accomplished now. Anyone who reads those verses without prejudice must come to the conclusion that the reconciliation of "both *in one body* to God by the cross" is what He has effected *here on earth* where Jew and Gentile previously existed. I do urge that we should note that. In order to understand the epistle to Corinthians we must see that Paul's doctrine regarding the assembly as set out in the epistle to the Ephesians lies behind it.

* "The Assembly in Four Aspects"—F.E.R., page 15.

In Ephesians 3, where the apostle refers to "the dispensation of the grace of God," we see the way God is working out things: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." The assembly was being formed by the gospel, and Jews and Gentiles were formed into one body, "To the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." I do press that, because these chapters form the basis of the exhortation in chapter 4 that we should walk in recognition of the unity of the Spirit. Again we have the expression "one body": "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling," *v.* 4.

You may wonder why I am emphasising the fact that this is accomplished here on earth, that "one body" now exists; it may surprise you to hear that it has been flatly denied. There is a large body of Christians who deny the fact that there is one body now on this earth composed of Jew and Gentile. It is not what is local, but universal here: Jew and Gentile refer to what existed here, and all these distinctions have been removed in the cross, both being reconciled in "one body." What is referred to in these chapters is universal. It is a marvellous thing that there should be a unity on this earth of a universal kind. The apostle was the one

to whom this mystery had been committed.

There are three views of the "body" in the New Testament: There is, firstly, the view presented in Ephesians 5:25-27, which obviously cannot be limited to the present time. "Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself for it"—that is what took place in the *past*; He is labouring *now* in the service of love to fit the assembly for her future position; and He *will* present it glorious. That is clearly an entire view of the assembly, *including every believer from Pentecost to the rapture*. Secondly, in the verses to which we have referred in chapters 2, 3, and 4, and in chapter 4:16, "From whom the whole body," as also 1 Corinthians 12:13, the assembly is viewed *as a whole on earth at any one time*. The third view of the body is that which we find in 1 Corinthians 12:27: "Now ye are Christ's body." *The assembly at Corinth* was that characteristically; there was that at Corinth which had capability of assembly features, and so in every locality where there are believers indwelt by the one Spirit.

The verses referred to in Ephesians 2, 3, and 4 could not possibly apply to us as in heaven; it is what is brought about on earth universally, Jew and Gentile being formed into one body, and this is confirmed by the exhortation, in chapter 4, verses 3 and 4, to maintain the unity of the Spirit because "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one *hope* of your

calling," the hope is what we look on to in the future, as being still here on earth. Note that it says: "There is one body," not *will be*. If we go on to Colossians we shall see again this view in chapter 1:27: "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The mystery was that Christ, in the assembly, should be among the Gentiles. He was not manifesting His glory in a public way, but there was that which He could speak of as Himself here upon the earth. Similarly Colossians 3:15 views the body as here: "let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body." There would be no need to exhort us to have the peace of Christ in our hearts when in heaven.

This being the case, in turning to the epistle to the Corinthians we can ask ourselves the question: In what way could God maintain the administration in detail in this wonderful company, the assembly? Was He to have it governed by some central authority as in the Church of Rome? Was He to have it broken up into bodies, each independent of others? We find that neither of these is the divine intention; whilst God would have the unity of the whole regarded and jealously maintained according to the epistles to Ephesians and Colossians, He was to have administration carried out in several localities; and without the idea of locality we could scarcely

get the full thought of the assembly. Hence after the gradual unfolding of assembly features in a universal way in the early part of the book of Acts, we find a local assembly at Antioch in chapter 13, and from that point onwards the thought of localities is very largely developed, as we may see in Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Corinth, and onwards to Ephesus; but behind the local is the universal thought, developed earlier in the book.

So the address in this epistle to the Corinthians is to "the church of God which is at Corinth"; a locality is in mind, but viewed not as an independent unit, but as associated "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." So that the commands in the epistle were not only obligatory on those at Corinth, *but were equally to be regarded by those who in every place called upon the name of the Lord*; and the epistle becomes of immense value to us all because it gives universal principles as regards the order of the assembly. What company in any other place could disregard what was carried out in Corinth at the Lord's command? That is an important point, and I think might well exercise the consciences of a great number of our brethren who allow the idea of "independent assemblies." The authority of the Lord was not only to be regarded at Corinth, and the evil person dealt with, but what was done there was to be recognised in every other place; were it not so

it would mean the setting aside of the Lord's commandment.

Notice the expression, "the church of God which is at Corinth with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, *both theirs and ours.*" We see in Ephesians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that there is the bond of the Spirit, but here the Lord is the bond. This shows how necessary is the recognition of our place in the kingdom of God, and of our practical owning of Jesus as Lord before we can rightly take up anything in relation to the assembly, otherwise we shall not keep rank one with another as moving collectively. If I recognise the authority of the Lord, and others are walking under that same Lord, we shall be found as in unity together. Any violation of that unity would prove the working of will somewhere. Normally the assembly is a region here on earth where the will of God is done as it is in heaven. There may be failure, but the fact of the confession of failure shows that what is confessed is not recognised as right in principle.

What an attraction such a sphere must have for anyone who loves our Lord Jesus Christ! May I appeal to each believer: Do you love the Lord, and own His claims of redemption over you? If that be the case, what will be very attractive to you is a region where that will is the recognised principle. A lawless, self-willed person is disqualified from having a place in

the assembly. Would that we ever bore that in mind! What absence of self-assertion there would be, and what meek submission to one another, and above all, to the Lord!

May the Lord exercise our hearts, and lead us to see the true character of the assembly as constituted here, each local company having been set up to maintain what is proper to the whole; for we could not think that the apostle in moving from one town to another would set up a local assembly which would be the virtual denial of that which he so clearly enunciates in his epistles. May the Lord exercise us on these lines, so that we may understand the constitution of the assembly, for His name's sake!

THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT HERE AND ITS RESULTS

1 Corinthians 1:17-24; 2:1-12; 12:1-13, 27

THE first two chapters of 1 Corinthians stand like the two pillars at the entrance of the temple in the first book of Kings, the one of which was called Jachin, meaning "He shall establish," and the other Boaz, meaning "In Him is strength," see 1 Kings 7:13-22. One might rightly use the first pillar as illustrating the cross which is spoken of in chapter 1; for all that God establishes is on the basis of the cross; and the second pillar, which was named "In Him is strength," might illustrate what comes before us in chapter 2, that is, the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly all that is in the assembly must be established upon what came out in the cross, and whatever power is there, whether with regard to gift, or service, or praise, is dependent on the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit.* It has been said that whenever there is trouble in a meeting it is due to one or both of these most important facts having been overlooked—the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit. How important it is therefore that

* I merely allude to the pillars of the temple as an *illustration*, not as giving their typical import. In the latter view both may refer to Christ.

we should bear them both in mind ! In the light of the epistle to the Romans we should learn to be subject to the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, and to live in the Spirit. The flesh having been set aside, we have to learn the power that is available for us in the Holy Spirit with regard to the righteous discharge of every obligation. We then may learn to avail ourselves of this power collectively.

I wish first of all to speak of the immense lesson there is for us in connection with the teaching of the cross. I would remark that it is not the blood of Jesus that is referred to in 1 Corinthians, but the *cross*. The blood surely has a most important place in Scripture ; without it there could be no redemption, no remission, no atonement, nor could we be brought nigh to God, who alone knows the infinite preciousness of the "precious blood of Christ." In the type, God sheltered the children of Israel through the blood of the passover lamb, by which they were redeemed ; but the type of *salvation* is the passage of those people through the Red Sea, which speaks of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is with this that we find the thought of *salvation* connected rather than with His blood.

In baptism, a figure of the death of Christ, we take the way of deliverance from the world as the place of judgment. But here in 1 Corinthians 1, it is the cross, so that something more than redemption and salvation is in mind, something more probing to the conscience and heart. On the

one side the cross speaks of the public shame that man heaped upon the Lord ; on the other it speaks of God's judgment on man after the flesh and on his world, in which he lives away from God. Hence it is proper to Christians to take the position of those who have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. Paul, having taken it up personally, could say, "I am crucified with Christ," Gal. 2 : 20, and with regard to the world—the religious world in particular—he could say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world," Gal. 6 : 14. The type of this is the brazen serpent which Moses erected in the wilderness. See John 3 : 14 and Romans 8 : 1-3.

We can understand, therefore, how the cross stands at the very portal of the assembly, so to speak ; nothing of the world nor of man after the flesh and his glory must enter there. There was much glorying in the flesh in Corinth ; hence the apostle brings this teaching to bear on the Corinthian believers, to test how they stood in relation to Christ. The world has many phases, and the Lord alone knows the peculiar phase which attracts any heart ; but we must remember that on the cross the superscription was written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, representing the three-fold character of the world. The Greek world is the world of culture and refinement. The writing in Greek on the cross showed that *that* world would

crucify Christ, and the cross also expressed God's condemnation of that world. What a wholesome lesson for our hearts! The world in its most attractive form is not pleasing to God. The Latin world is the world of power, not now linked so much with the idea of military prowess, for the power acquired by commerce is even greater. Therefore we should be watchful as to our commercial tendencies; for naturally we would like our businesses to succeed; we like power in some form or other; but the world of power crucified Christ, and God is not finding pleasure in that world. Then the Hebrew world is the world in its most seductive form—the world of religion—and it surrounds us to-day in these so-called Christian countries. The world, once pagan, has clothed itself with features nominally Christian; yet it is the same world, and deceives many hearts by its new dress. By it the enemy comes to us, not as a "roaring lion," but as an "angel of light," see 2 Cor. 11:14. We must be on our guard lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve, we may be led away from the simplicity of Christ.

At the cross the world in its every form received its judgment, and it should be rigidly excluded from our thoughts and manners as we approach the assembly, the dwelling-place of God. We have to watch lest, as being in the world as to circumstances, we countenance it in any form in ourselves; for the flesh finds its life there; it cannot live in the presence of God. I would ask

you, Have you learned the lesson of the cross ? If we did so, many of our difficulties would be solved. For instance, suppose I am personally hurt by a slight received from a brother or a sister. If I remember that the Lord was put on the cross, and that even if anyone were to go so far as to treat me thus, it is but the place I deserve ; I should not complain. When the Lord was reviled, He reviled not again. My suffering may bring to light the flesh which I have professedly crucified ; this should humble me indeed.

If I have really accepted the teaching of the cross, how could I bring into the assembly anything of myself as of Adam's sinful order, or recognise anything of the flesh ? It must be rigidly excluded in order to make room for the marvellous power given us in the Holy Spirit. That brings us to chapter 2. It is evident that the apostle avoided everything in his very delivery and manner, as among the Corinthians that might have the semblance of mere human ability, something in which man could trust. In striking contrast to the magnificent architecture of Corinth, he comes among them as a tent-maker. What marks him ? The cross on the one side, and on the other, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Would that we in our service were all marked by a like exclusion of what man would rest in, and by the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit.

We see in chapter 1 the outward features of smallness and weakness, God having intentionally

chosen that which was contemptible in the eyes of the world ; like the tabernacle in the wilderness which outwardly was but a tent covered with badger skins ; but inwardly, how exceedingly precious all was. Everything was patterned after things in the heavens. Though outwardly of small account, inwardly the assembly is marvellous, for the Holy Spirit is there. Hence we need not go to the universities of this world to be equipped as servants of God ; all the needed equipment is found in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Have we realised the immense gain of His presence here ? It renders us better off than if the Lord were corporeally present with us. The Lord Himself said to His disciples that it was expedient for them that He should go away, for otherwise the Comforter would not come, John 16 : 7 ; an amazing statement, but we need only consider the apostles themselves to see the immense gain they received through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Lord, when here, had to say to them, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth," John 16 : 12, 13 ; and when we see Peter standing up in Acts 2, and Stephen in Acts 7, equipped in the Spirit's power with ability to handle the Scriptures in the most masterly way, we see the enormous difference that His presence made to them.

Normally the Holy Spirit is given to every

believer. We are told that God gives the Spirit to those who obey Him, Acts 5 : 32, that we receive the Spirit on the hearing of faith, Gal. 3 : 2, and, as having believed on a glorified Christ, Eph. 1 : 13. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," Rom. 5 : 5. It is normal to Christians that they receive the Holy Spirit. If that be the case, what a remarkable power the believer has for discernment and understanding, as 1 Corinthians 2 shows ! He is to form part of the greatest and most august assembly on earth—*God's* assembly. Such an assembly as the Privy Council, composed of some of the most remarkable men in Britain, is not to be compared with the assembly of God. The apostle says here, "we have the mind of Christ," *v.* 16—the *thinking faculty* of Christ—and this is by reason of the presence of the Spirit. "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God"—things which the mind and heart of man could never have imagined. Romans 8 : 28 speaks of those who love God as being "called according to purpose," and here again we get His purpose referred to—things which God has prepared for those who love Him ; and He reveals them to us by His Spirit. The most intellectual person, apart from the gift of the Spirit, is utterly incompetent to understand the things of God. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in

him ? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God," *v.* 11.

I would encourage young believers to pray that God would keep them from grieving the Spirit, so that they might have the unhindered power of the Spirit with them in order to understand even the deep things of God, to be led into the conscious enjoyment of them. How quickly the Spirit would teach us if we were only going His way ; even as Abraham's servant took Rebecca, and went his way. The next thing we read in that connection is that Isaac comes into view, and the servant says, "That is my master" ; and so we should reach Christ spiritually in His heavenly position. Alas ! that we so quickly grieve the Spirit, and instead of carrying on His normal work of unfolding these things to us, He has to point out our failures, and we have to judge them. We lose the direct power of the Spirit in failure. Self-judgment is a very important matter in this connection ; much of the ignorance found among Christians is due to the lack of self-judgment. People say, I do not see that ; but why do they not see it ? Other believers see it. It should be a serious exercise to anyone who is unable to see spiritual things, because the Spirit has been given that we should know the things which have been freely given to us of God. Let us not be content with what is just "milk," but desire to be led into the deep things of God—"strong meat."

There is no matter but what a spiritual man

would be able to discern. The assembly of God is as a high court of justice where the hardest matter can be settled. Nothing should be allowed to go on among Christians that is inconsistent with God's holy dwelling-place. If it be a case of an individual who is not going on rightly, it calls for individual care—"between thee and him alone," Matt. 18 : 15 ; if that fails, "take with thee one or two more," so that the spirit and grace of Christ in a larger measure may be brought to bear on the offender, so that he may be gained. If the person is obdurate, the matter may have to be brought before the assembly, which, normally, is composed of spiritual persons. There is no case with which the assembly cannot deal, even as every case was dealt with by the children of Israel in the wilderness. If there was a case too hard for Moses, he brought it to the Lord ; and not only was the case dealt with, but there was a great accession of light.

The acceptance of the teaching of the cross is necessary to the understanding of chapter 12. That chapter begins by referring to spiritual manifestations—gifts. You will remember how Saul spared the best of the sheep and oxen, taken from the Amalekites, to use them in the service of God ; and he would have spared Agag, representing the flesh at its best ; but Samuel hewed him in pieces at Gilgal, 1 Sam. 15, a most significant act, for Gilgal is a type of the most complete application of the cross of Christ ; there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. As has been said long ago,

“Every mark of the world is a reproach to a heavenly man.” Gilgal would teach us that mere natural ability is of no power in the service of God. Flesh could employ mere natural ability. All utterance in the assembly must be in the power of the Spirit who sovereignly disposes of all gifts.

“When I behold the wondrous cross
On which the Lord of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.”

Gifts are viewed as resident in the Holy Spirit, according to this chapter ; whereas in Ephesians 4 they are viewed as coming from an ascended Christ. The exercise of gift by a servant should be under the direction and control of the Lord ; for there are differences of administration, or services, but the same Lord. But it is the Spirit who distributes the gift. All operations are by God, who operates in all. It is remarkable how the Trinity, as we speak, is brought in here. But since all gift is distributed by the one Spirit, how important it is to recognise that the Holy Spirit is here, and that all the equipment necessary for the assembly is resident in and furnished by Him. Where He is grieved and has not His place, nor the Lord His place, it is not surprising that people should complain of scarcity of food ; but there is no lack of ministry for those who are in line with the Spirit's activities, for He distributes “to each in particular according as he pleases,” *v.* 11.

This brings in another question, the desire for gift

whereby to meet the need for ministry as it appears in the assembly. The apostle exhorts us to "covet earnestly the best gifts," *v.* 31. Have you earnestly desired a gift in order to serve the assembly? The possession and exercise of gift might entail much hardship and labour, but it would be love's desire to be most serviceable to the assembly which is so precious to Christ. We have to take into account the formation of the vessel as well as the giving of a gift. The Lord knows what He will do with each one of us; He knows our hereditary tendencies, our abilities, and limitations, and allows and orders our circumstances, passing us through varying degrees of education, with a view to fitting us as vessels. Paul was chosen as a vessel from the first moment of his existence, and the various experiences he passed through from that moment up till his conversion were used by God with this in view. Then he was converted, and became a servant; receiving a gift, and the necessary spiritual education as a servant. There is the vessel, but the gift, though very closely related to the vessel, must be viewed as distinct. What a comfort it is that the Lord knows just what we are; we ought never to wish to be anyone else. The Lord give us grace to accept our circumstances; whether they are marked by limitations or advantages, they are the best calculated to fit us as vessels for the service which He wants us to do.

Not only is the distribution of gifts by the Spirit, but He has a vessel here, as we see in verse 12:

“For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.” I need scarcely say that this expression “the Christ” does not refer to the Lord Jesus personally; the verses which follow make that perfectly clear. “So also is the Christ,” refers to the anointed vessel down here, not now the Lord Jesus personally, for He is in heaven. We read in chapter 1 : 6 of this epistle “the testimony of the Christ has been confirmed in you.” The testimony is not in heaven, it is here, and there was a vessel formed which God anointed, just as God had “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power,” Acts 10:38, and He expressed what God was. So now, the Lord Jesus having been crucified, God is not thwarted in His purpose, but has another vessel here, formed of believers baptised by one Spirit into one body—a vessel that is to set forth God here.

I would draw your attention to the use of the pronoun “we” in verse 13. “By one Spirit are *we all* baptised into one body,” whereas in verse 27 the apostle uses the pronoun “ye,” referring, obviously, to the believers in Corinth: he says, “ye are body of Christ,” omitting the article, as the original shows, meaning that they were the body in character, but not the “one body” in its entirety. If the article had been present before “body” it would have meant that they were the body of Christ to the exclusion of all others. In verse 13, on the other hand, the allusion to the one Spirit and “*we*

all” makes it perfectly clear that it is universal, including all believers on earth. It is a statement of great importance, and I doubt if we can understand this epistle rightly unless we approach it in the light of the doctrine of the assembly as presented by Paul, in Ephesians and Colossians, and recognise that *the local* assembly is to maintain what is proper to *the whole*.

The assembly at Corinth was not the whole body, but every several believer in the company at Corinth was equally in the “one body” universally. The assembly, the “one body,” here on earth is not an aggregate of local assemblies. The assembly is an organism here on earth composed of all believers who have received the Spirit. In whatever place I may be, I am still of that one body, as are all the believers in that place. “By one Spirit are *we all* baptized into *one body*.” The passage means what it says. I emphasise this because it has been denied by some Christians that there is “one body” universally on earth to-day, embracing every believer—a very solemn thing to do, for the words are as clear as possible: in verse 13, “by one Spirit are *we all* baptized into *one body*,” and in verse 27, “*ye* are body of Christ.” We cannot reverse those words, or use them interchangeably.

I would ask the prayerful consideration of every believer to this fact that there is “one body,” which includes every believer on earth. Could you leave out one believer who has received the Spirit from the “we all”? In corroboration of this state-

ment we read in Ephesians 4 : 4 : "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling"; so in Colossians 3 : 15 : "to the which also ye are called *in one body*." The calling is such, and we have to walk worthy of that calling ; and we must never ignore this unity of a universal kind which exists on earth to-day, to which every believer in every local company has to be true. "By one Spirit are we *all* baptized into one body . . . and have been *all* made to drink into one Spirit." The baptism implies immersion and the drinking implies a vital unity most willingly taken up. How important to recognise this unity ! Those at Corinth could not ignore other Christians ; the one Spirit bound all believers together as one body ; not as an aggregate of assemblies, but as an organism formed of all believers by the power of one Spirit.

Now this has a very practical local application. Am I maintaining in my locality what is proper to the whole body ? Am I caring for the members, not only locally, but universally, according to my measure ? For the unity of the body, if made merely local, would destroy the feeling of affection of a universal kind, that is proper to the body. I speak with deep concern, for I feel that the enemy has deluded Christians on this vital point.

May the Lord exercise us all as to that which is so dear to His heart, His assembly here. May we recognise the cross which would keep out every element of the world and of the flesh. May we recognise the Spirit who would give us ability to un-

derstand the things of God and to inquire in the temple of God. It is He, too, who has united us together, not only locally, but “by one Spirit are *we all* baptized into one body”—blessed, glorious fact that, in spite of all the break-up, remains true, and in the light of which every individual believer should seek to walk, keeping himself from all that is contrary to it. May we be pleasing to the Lord not only individually, but collectively. The Lord grant it, for His name’s sake !

FELLOWSHIP—ITS PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITY

1 Corinthians 1 : 9 ; 12 : 15-24, 31-33

IN continuation of the subject that has been before us, viz., the salient thoughts in the first epistle to the Corinthians, it is my desire to take up the subject of fellowship. In chapter 1 : 9 it is said that God has *called* us to the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In Romans 1 : 6 believers are spoken of as the called ones of Jesus Christ. There is something inexpressibly sweet in the fact that Jesus has called us ; whatever the means used to our blessing, it was the call of Jesus Christ that reached us ; and the sweetness of this link with Him as Saviour and Lord is never lost. Having responded to this first call by the gospel, there comes with great force a call which God gives to all Christians, a call into "the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Whether we have responded to that call in our souls' experience, and whether we are true to it, should be matters of spiritual concern. It may be with some that the course they are pursuing, and the associations they maintain, forbid the practical enjoyment of what that call implies. "God is faithful" ; He will not allow any accommodation with respect to the terms of the fellowship in order to meet the present-day ideas of man. No.

God is faithful, and it is a matter of concern for us to answer in faithfulness to the call.

I would like to emphasise the dignity of this fellowship. There are many fellowships in the world to-day, many associations, guilds, unions, and bonds of various kinds; and all those stand in contrast to this fellowship, which is dignified by the wonderful description: "The fellowship of his (God's) Son Jesus Christ our Lord." If it be the fellowship of *His Son*, it implies that we are called to the enjoyment of the knowledge of God as revealed in this blessed Person. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, *he* hath declared him," John 1 : 18. In Hebrews 1 : 2 we get a remarkable statement: "God . . . at the end of these days has spoken to us *in Son*." It is not that another than God has spoken; that glorious Person *is Himself God*, "the expression of his substance," though a real Man, and in the relationship of Son. In Jesus, the One who lived in the enjoyment of that precious intimacy with the Father here on earth, there was the perfect declaration of God—God whose love found its full expression in the sorrows of Calvary. What a wonderful telling out of God there was at the cross, which on the one hand was the witness of His judgment, but, on the other, becomes to us the manifestation of His love. In resurrection also the Lord declared the Father's name. He had said in speaking to the Father, according to John 17:26: "I have declared unto them

thy name, and *will* declare it” ; and in resurrection He hastens to tell His brethren through Mary Magdalene, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God,” John 20 : 17.

By the expression, “the fellowship of his Son,” in 1 Corinthians 1 : 9, we are to understand that the fellowship implies the perfect declaration of what God is, as now revealed to us in the Son, going far beyond the partial shining out of God in connection with His governmental ways, which had taken place in Israel’s history. The knowledge of God is the first feature of joy that marks this dignified fellowship ; and for the enjoyment thereof we must be in the light as God is in the light, 1 John 1 : 7 ; for no longer, as in Old Testament days, is He in darkness, that is, behind the veil ; He is now fully made known.

This fellowship is further described as “the fellowship of . . . Jesus Christ our Lord.” The expression, “Jesus Christ,” brings before us the Man who has been approved of God and anointed by Him. Only that order of man is suitable to such a fellowship, and can find its life and enjoyment there. The order of Adam’s life, and all that went along with it, is excluded by the cross, as we see later in this chapter. The cross forbids the glory of this world, and the glory of the man that finds his life in this world.

Then, too, this fellowship is the fellowship of Jesus Christ “*our Lord*.” How much those two words, “our Lord,” bring before the heart ! They

imply a bond to which we are ever to be faithful. Not only is He my Lord, but He is Lord to every Christian, by reason of His redemptive claims over us. Can the reader say from the heart:

“I love to own, Lord Jesus,
Thy claims o'er me divine” ?

Is there anything in your life individually, in your domestic circle, or in your business circle, of which the Lord does not approve ? If so, before you can take up this matter of fellowship, it is incumbent on you to get to the Lord at once, and own your failure, and seek His grace for recovery, and for the practical recognition, henceforth, of His control in every department of your life. We cannot be right collectively unless we are right individually. I would press the importance of this on everybody here, for it is a matter that stands at the threshold of all that relates to the assembly.

As a consequence of the confession of Jesus as Lord, we shall find our path outwardly an isolated one ; we shall be refused by former companions, and unwanted by the world, as must be the case with disciples who are following in the footsteps of a rejected Christ. What a joy, then, to find others who own that same Lord, and delight in obeying Him ! Our lives as believers would not be divergent if we were all marked by implicit obedience to Him ; we should be moving on together in the same direction, and on the same plane, realising the blessedness of the bond existing between us.

The apostle, in the opening verses of this epistle, addresses not only "the church of God which is at Corinth," but also embraces in his address "*all that in every place* call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, *both theirs and ours,*" showing that this bond is one of a universal kind, and that it is one practically realised in the recognition of Jesus as Lord. The form of address also calls attention to the fact of believers being in different localities. We have seen on a previous occasion the importance of local assemblies as in the mind of God, with a view to maintaining what is proper to the assembly universally. While it would be great assumption on the part of any company of Christians in a place, in view of the broken condition of things that marks the profession of Christ's name, to claim the title of "assembly of God," we may well seek to be marked by the *moral features proper to it*, and to be separate from everything inconsistent with it.

We find the assembly viewed universally in Ephesians 4:4: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling"; also in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." We find no mention in Scripture of *members of assemblies*; each believer is a member of "the body"—an important distinction for us to bear in mind. The fact that the apostle addresses "all that in every place" who recognise the same Lord "both theirs and ours," implies that the commands of the

Lord carried out at Corinth would be recognised by all who owned His authority in every other place. If other local assemblies had called in question the disciplinary action of the assembly at Corinth with regard to the wicked man referred to in chapter 5, an action carried out under the command of the Lord, and necessary to the maintenance of holiness, they would have acted inconsistently with their recognition of the same Lord. Every such judgment and consequent action of discipline carried out under the Lord's command, if only by two or three, who are, according to Matthew 18, maintaining moral conditions proper to the assembly, is ratified in heaven, and surely should be recognised on earth by those who own that Lord. Let us take that to heart, and carry it out in practice, with concern that we may be entirely separate from everything contradictory to it.

It is a very serious matter that this simple principle, most clearly set forth in Scripture, is so widely overlooked or denied ; but in God's grace, since the assembly revival of these last days has taken place, there are those on earth to-day available to us in a multitude of places, with whom we can practically enjoy the features of fellowship, in the recognition of one Lord—as we read in chapter 8 : 6 : “to us there is . . . one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him,” N.T. It is the wide Christian “us” or “we” that the apostle uses here, as so often

in this epistle. If he had been speaking only of the Corinthians, he would have said: "to *you*," but he is speaking of what is proper to all Christians in contrast to the "lords many" of the idolatrous world. How unity would be brought about and preserved if we all recognised this blessed, salient fact that "to us there is . . . one Lord"! May we ever be true to it!

Not only is the fellowship spoken of in this manner; but in chapter 10 we find another feature introduced. That chapter speaks of three circles: "the Jews, . . . the Gentiles, . . . the church of God," *v.* 32. There was the Gentile with his idolatry, and all its degrading accompaniments; for, not having wished to retain God in his knowledge, God had given him up governmentally, as described in the latter part of Romans 1. Then there was the Jew, the descendant of Abraham, one whom God had called out as a depository of the promises, and to be a witness to the one God Almighty.

In the development of His ways, God ordered that the descendants of Abraham, namely, the children of Israel, should be in conditions of slavery in Egypt. He then later delivered them from their bondage, and brought them through redemption into covenant relation with Him as Jehovah. Through Moses He gave them a system of sacrifices, on the ground of which they could approach Him in worship, as, indeed, they did in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. You can understand that

a right-minded Jew, under the old economy, if invited by an idolater to join him at his heathen feast, would say, I cannot come with you ; I am a worshipper of the one true God, Jehovah. This day I have presented my peace-offering ; Jehovah's portion has been offered on the altar, the priests have partaken of theirs, and I and my family have eaten of the sacrifice. I could not recognise idolatry in any shape or form—and, in so saying, he would have commanded our respect. But after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a new condition of things existed. That wondrous death of Jesus removed all need of repetition of sacrifice, one offering having perfected for ever the sanctified, removing for ever from the conscience the question of sin, and bringing the believer nigh to God in Christ Jesus.

Nevertheless the believer has an altar, as we read in Hebrews 13 : 10 : "We have an altar." It is not a material altar, like that of the Gentile or the Jew. It is Christ as the One who died ; for the very death of the Lord Jesus which has for ever cleansed us from our sin, and been the basis of our being brought to God, perfecting us for ever, and delivering us from the world, has also become a *basis for communion*—a communion, or fellowship, proper to all believers. The death of Christ is not only a bond, but a barrier, a wall of separation, from the world in its every form, not only the world of idolatry, seen in the Gentile, but also the world of religion, seen in the Jew. The death of

Christ is a call to every believer to come outside the camp, which Judaism was, and which professed Christianity has become. As in the days of Moses when the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf, there had been the call to come outside the camp, so the writer to the Hebrews says, "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp," chap. 13 : 13. The idea of the altar thus becomes to Christians a kind of moral touchstone to the heart.

Now it is this that is assumed to be understood in the tenth chapter of Corinthians. The apostle refers to idolatry, and to those who eat the sacrifices in connection with the Israelitish economy, like the Jew who brought his peace-offering, whom I have used as an illustration ; now this principle of fellowship is shown to exist in Christianity. *The Christian has a memorial of the Lord ; the Lord had instituted the supper, and had asked His own to remember Him. The bread speaks of His body given, the cup is the new covenant in His blood. This memorial is not a sacrifice (alas ! that it should be made one to-day, denying its whole force and bearing), for it speaks of a sacrifice accomplished, never to be repeated ; it is to be in remembrance of Christ, and is a very precious expression of fellowship.*

The supper reminds our hearts of that death of Christ which procured our blessing, and has become a boundary to our movements and thoughts, a barrier lest in any way we should become worldly.

“Is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? ” That precious blood which cleansed us, and is a token of the love of God as expressed in the new covenant, is also a bond of communion to which we are always to be true. What a challenge to our hearts ! The world in all its phases, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, was condemned by God in its every principle at the cross. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world,” Gal. 6 : 14. Let us beware lest we act like Achan, by whom Israel “committed unfaithfulness in that which had been brought under the curse,” see Josh. 7 : 1 ; for God had pronounced a curse on Jericho. Jericho represents the world as a system of evil. The world is put forward by the enemy to attract believers, and especially the young. May God keep us from committing unfaithfulness in *that which has come under the curse* ; it all came under His condemnation at the cross ! May we ever be true to the communion of the blood of Christ !

There is also another side to communion, in connection with which the act of our partaking of the one loaf is emphasised : “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? For we being many are one bread, and one body ; for we are all partakers of that one bread (or loaf),” v. 16, 17. The symbol of the one loaf brings before us the unity in which all believers are set together as members of the one body. I would

ask your attention to the pronouns in this chapter also. When the apostle is speaking to the Corinthians in particular, he says, as in verses 20 and 21, "I would not that *ye* should have fellowship with devils. *Ye* cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils"; but when he speaks of what is normal to Christianity, what is universal, he uses the pronoun "we"—"we being many are one bread, . . . one body; for *we* are all partakers of that one bread." Is there a Christian, who though in that one body, is not partaking of that one loaf? How comes about such an anomalous state of things? You are not true to what you are. Will you not answer to this challenge? You need not be afraid to face your responsibilities, for the resources are greater than the demands; the Lord will see you through.

I would like to dwell on the practical effects of this unity. This subject, while intensely interesting, is intensely solemn, for I am confronted in my remarks with a great deal of error held by Christians whose personal piety I would greatly respect; but when the truth of God is at stake we must not regard persons. I beg you to consider the thought here: "we being many are one body." What does that mean but that there is a unity on this earth to-day by virtue of the presence here of the one Spirit? "There is one body, and one Spirit," Eph. 4:4. The assembly here, the one body, is *not an aggregate of separate assemblies*, assemblies independent one of another; such an idea is con-

trary to Scripture. On the contrary, the assembly exists as the result of the baptism by one Spirit of all believers into one body, involving a vital unity which should be maintained practically, and in the recognition of which all believers should walk, even in this day of outward departure. We not only are to walk so in our respective localities, but universally. On what other principle can we walk together? Is everyone to do what is right in his own eyes? Such a course would involve the practical denial of the authority of the *one Lord* with whom every believer has been linked by faith and confession, and from whom he has received the Spirit.

I would ask you now to consider the question of committal to fellowship. Eating is used in Scripture as a sign of fellowship, in connection both with evil and with good. An instance of fellowship in evil, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, is the worship of the golden calf by the children of Israel; it says, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play," *v.* 7; a most remarkable expression of fellowship in awful circumstances of idolatry. Then we get a happy illustration of fellowship in the case of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, when he came to Moses in the wilderness, and brought burnt-offerings, sacrificing them to the one true God, Jehovah, whereupon we find that Aaron and the elders of Israel ate bread together with him before God, *Exod.* 18, which was a most beautiful suggestion of what God was going to bring about later in Christianity,

Jew and Gentile being found together in the unity of fellowship in the presence of God.

In the gospels of Matthew and Mark we find that it was "as they were eating" the passover that the Lord took bread, and instituted this new feast, the Lord's supper. Hence we may understand why 1 Corinthians 10, which speaks of fellowship, precedes chapter 11, which refers specifically to the partaking of the Lord's supper. In partaking of that bread, and in drinking of that cup there is the most distinct committal to fellowship to which we all must be true. We cannot take the supper in an isolated way, as an individual act. There is no meaning to the "we" of chapter 10:16, 17, unless we can take up in faith a *collective* position. Hence, if the partaking commits us to a fellowship, it involves very solemn obligations; but with the support of the Lord and of the Spirit we need not be afraid to face the obligations. Partaking of the supper avows fellowship in the death of Christ, and, too, with all who partake of it with us; we eat together.

Hence, in chapter 5, when the incestuous man had to be dealt with, the apostle tells the Corinthians to put away from among them that wicked person, and "with such an one no not to eat," v.11, for eating is the symbol of fellowship. They were to refuse fellowship with one who openly and avowedly recognised the flesh which Christ died to set aside. So in every such case we must jealously guard the holiness of the house of God.

Defilement is very easily contracted, and has far-reaching effects, as Numbers 19 : 22 shows ; firstly, there is the defilement of the person who has become unclean ; secondly, whatever he touches becomes unclean, and thirdly, “the soul that toucheth *it* shall be unclean.” So that not only was the wicked man at Corinth defiled, but the local assembly was defiled, and until they had dealt with the evil, any who might have participated in fellowship with them would also have been defiled.

Scripture is most clear on this point. Intercommunion implies fellowship, and fellowship with evil means defilement. How carefully we must guard our associations ! There is only one fellowship, the fellowship proper to all Christians ; there is only one body ; we must be true to both. Our responsibility is great. You say, It is impossible to walk according to these principles *to-day*. It is very difficult, but it is *not* impossible. What other path can you take that will be pleasing to God, and in obedience to the Lord’s commands as enjoined in this epistle ? May the Lord greatly exercise us on the subject of fellowship, for His name’s sake !

THE ASSEMBLY CONVENED AND THE ORDER PROPER THERETO

1 Corinthians 11:17-28; 12:12-14, 27; 14:1, 12-17,
23-25, 33-40

MY desire is to complete the line of thought that has been before us, and I purpose considering the convening of the assembly, and what is proper to its conduct and order as convened. Before speaking of that subject, however, I feel it is necessary to explain how it is possible for us to act on the instructions given in such an epistle as this; for we must recognise that we are not in days such as those in which the instructions were first given. Things that were set up in order by the apostle in regard of the assembly, are to-day found in utter confusion. The will of man has worked havoc in divine things. Gross departure soon marked the assembly. Scarcely had the active ministry of the apostles ceased, when, as was foretold by the apostle Paul, men arose speaking perverted things; all the later epistles indicate that elements of apostasy were already present.

That which was ordered by divine command very soon became regulated by human ideas, and instead of that which bore the name of Christ being composed of true believers only, evil men crept in of whom Simon the sorcerer is an example,

see Acts 8. The enemy had sown tares among the wheat, "while men slept," Matt. 13 : 25. If there had been proper watchfulness and care there would not have been the opportunity given for this. Such was the case, however ; and a vast system of profession sprang up as the result, a profession characterised by false teaching ; and it is impossible to-day for any believer with accuracy to say who are the Lord's and who are not. The master of the harvest, in the parable, did not allow his servants to root out the tares. Both had to grow together till the harvest.

In this vast profession we find ourselves to-day ; the only way out of it is by apostasy ; we do not wish, surely, to apostatise, to give up Christianity altogether. We desire to be among those who call upon the name of the Lord "both theirs and ours." But the question arises : What is the path of the believer in this mass of profession ? It is not for us to determine who are believers and who are not ; we can leave that to the Lord, who alone "knows those that are his," 2 Tim. 2 : 19. Our concern should be to bear the marks proper to those who call upon the name of the Lord out of a pure heart, and discover others with similar moral features. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." The light of Scripture enables us to discern between truth and error, and to avoid everything inconsistent with that Name. As found in a scene of departure from the truth, the believer has to depart from iniquity.

Iniquity is a word which has particular application to that which is a departure from what is of God. The one who would be faithful must revert individually to a path which the assembly should never have left, and as he does so, he finds others doing the same, see 2 Tim. 2:19-22. Thank God that He has given us light in this difficult day! If there are but two believers in this path, they may *seek* to possess the moral features proper to the assembly. How thankful we should be that the Lord has brought down the possibility of collective experiences to even "two or three," Matt. 18. Provided there are the moral conditions in keeping with His name, the Lord has promised His presence in the way of support. The Lord grant that we may be found among that number. It is but assumption to claim any ecclesiastical position; it is now a question of *moral conditions*, without which the privileges proper to the assembly cannot be enjoyed.

I have referred to this matter because we must face the fact that we are not in the circumstances in which the assembly was when the epistle to the Corinthians was written. There are other epistles beside 2 Timothy which take account of the departure which has come about. John, in his second epistle, warns the elect lady lest she should be defiled by evil associations. To bid God-speed to those not bringing the truth, or to receive such into her house, would render her

a partaker in their evil deeds—a very solemn consideration. In his third epistle, addressed to Gaius, John calls attention to the great assumption and clericalism that marked Diotrophes, who loved to have the pre-eminence, and refused the apostle, casting out of the assembly those who would receive him. Where were the features proper to the assembly in these cases? Surely with the elect lady who refused the evil, and with Gaius, who recognised the good, and did what he could to support the brethren, and received the apostle.

Though conditions have altered since the days of 1 Corinthians, the Lord's command stands, and should regulate everything collective. If there are but two or three who have separated from evil, and seek to walk in keeping with the light regarding the assembly, they may turn to this epistle to the Corinthians and learn the order proper to it. In this connection there is a particular interest attaching to the books of Chronicles, in that they were written in the days after the captivity. It might have been argued that it was of no use in such days of brokenness to write an account of the order of the temple in the days of David and Solomon; but if the people of God who were brought back from captivity desired to order their course aright in days of outward ruin, they must bear in mind God's thoughts, which found expression at the beginning in relation to the temple and the ordering of the

service of God. It is this with which 1 Chronicles deals. They also need to profit by the account given in 2 Chronicles of God's governmental ways which lay behind the circumstances both of prosperity and of defeat, in regard to which the writer of the book invariably indicates the reason.

Turning now to 1 Corinthian 11, I regard the Lord's supper as the normal occasion of the convening of the assembly. In it we hear the voice of our Beloved, appealing to our hearts. It is a call to the assembly to come together. I wonder if everyone here has responded to that voice of love. The Lord says, "this do in remembrance of me." In telling us that he received the instruction as to the supper from the Lord in glory and giving it to the assembly in Corinth, the apostle gives the supper an assembly setting, which is different from that known to the disciples as having received it from the Lord while He was here. Nevertheless, the apostle tells us that it was on the night of the Lord's betrayal that the supper was first instituted, suggesting that the moral conditions of treachery would continue in that which professes His name. Though Judas was about to betray Him, Peter to deny Him, and all to forsake Him, the terrible circumstances that crowded in and pressed upon the Lord's spirit did not deter Him from instituting this memorial feast. His heart's desire was and is that His people should always have Him in remembrance.

What an appeal it makes to every heart that knows the Lord ; for though there is a very great deal connected with the Lord's supper, standing as it does as a centralising ordinance, it is pre-eminently an appeal of love to love, and is only answered to by love. Have *you* answered to it ? It is not merely an appeal to individuals or to an aggregate of individuals, but an appeal to the heart of the assembly, and it is responded to normally by those who have assembly feelings and features. We must get out of the habit of thinking of ourselves as so many units, for we cannot rightly take the supper until we learn what it is to come together in assembly ; but I would appeal to every young believer here. If you have never availed yourself of this blessed privilege proper to the assembly, why not do so at the earliest opportunity ?

There are some Christians who are much grieved because they are not allowed to break bread with those who desire to walk in separation from all that is contrary to the Lord's name. They contend that the verse, "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat," places all the responsibility with the one who desires to break bread ; but if that were so, the instructions given in 1 Corinthians 5 would have very little force. The notoriously guilty and incestuous man was yet found among the Corinthian believers in the breaking of bread, and the apostle stirs up the conscience, not of this offending man, but of

those with whom he was associated, and tells them to put away from among themselves the wicked person. Clearly it was *their* obligation to deal with such a situation, and the man rightly had to be excluded.

I have taken an extreme case to show the principle, which is, that those with whom a person desires to break bread have the right and responsibility to inquire as to his associations as well as his personal conduct ; otherwise entrance may be given to the "evil men and seducers" of whom the apostle Paul speaks in 2 Timothy 3 : 13. It would stamp believers as having very little regard to the Lord's glory if without the most careful inquiry they would receive any believer to the breaking of bread, in this most difficult day of the assembly's history.

Supposing a man offered himself to me as a partner in connection with my business, I should not accept him without carefully ascertaining his financial position and personal character. Are we to be less careful with regard to the holy things of God ? Is whoever offers himself to be allowed to express fellowship by breaking bread without a moment's hesitation because he says, I am a Christian ? Such procedure would evidence utter indifference to the honour of the Lord's name, which we must jealously guard.

On the other hand, it is surely necessary for each one who partakes of the Lord's supper to examine himself before doing so. It should be

our habit to get to the Lord daily, yea, constantly, about our course, not leaving it to the last minute as a mere confessional practice. May the Lord give us to eat in a self-judged spirit, for only thus shall we do so in a way pleasing to Him.

The apostle brings in the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 11 as the introduction to a very important section of the epistle. Up to this chapter there is no reference to the coming together of the assembly, with the exception of chapter 5. The apostle had been occupied with general conditions—the schools of thought and divisions at Corinth, with matters of this life, with dangers of idolatrous associations, and in chapter 10 the important question of fellowship, which applies to us continuously, is spoken of. We must always be true to fellowship, for thus only can we be found rightly at the supper. But in chapter 11 the apostle refers to the saints as “come together.” It was the Lord's desire that His people should assemble. The supper is a call of love on the part of the Lord to call His assembly together, not only together in one place, but to be “in assembly,” and we cannot rightly take the supper unless we are together, and “in assembly.”

In Genesis 49, in the New Translation, two words occur which may help us regarding this thought. Jacob says, “Gather yourselves together”; then he adds, “Assemble yourselves.” Similarly we must not only come together, but learn what it is to be “in assembly,” to function

as one. A member of Parliament is just as much a member of Parliament in his domestic or business life as when he sits in Parliament, but in the latter case he acts in his collective capacity with others, and ceases to be a mere individual; and, functioning together as one, Parliament can do what no number of members of Parliament could do as individuals. Similarly, we do not come to the Lord's supper as an aggregate of individual believers. The Lord's supper is a privilege proper to the assembly, and unless we come together and are "in assembly," and have the moral conditions normal to the assembly, we cannot avail ourselves of the privileges proper to it. Any attempt to break bread purely locally would destroy the thought of the assembly, and I venture to say that it would not be the Lord's supper.

The one loaf symbolises the unity of the "one body" which is universal, as stated in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "we, being many, are one loaf, one body," and is also clearly implied in Ephesians 4:4: "There is one body (not "will be"), and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling"; as also in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." The Corinthian assembly was to have the features characteristic of the body; hence the careful change, in verse 27, of the pronoun from "we," including all believers, to "ye," referring to the Corinthians. It is most important to accept

what Scripture says ; there is a constant tendency with us to insert our explanatory clauses. The apostle says, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord," 1 Cor. 14 : 37.

As coming together in the light of what is proper to the whole assembly, we must cease to regard ourselves as so many units, and learn to blend as one—"one body." Let me illustrate my meaning : I might bring all the parts of a motor car into a room, but it could not be called a car until those parts were "assembled." Then the multitude of individual parts would cease to be a multitude ; they would become an entity, each part of which is necessary to the whole, and moves in unison with every other part. But what more beautiful figure could we have than that of the human body, each part being necessary, and all moving as an organic whole ? Have we learned to act like that ? Do we recognise that when a brother gives out a hymn, or if he breaks the bread, it is not his own act (though there is a particular responsibility attaching to him), but what he does is on behalf of those who are present ? We need to feel and act in the light of what is proper to the assembly ; there is nothing more wonderful than to have assembly feelings.

I now pass on to the next three chapters, 12, 13, and 14, and would speak of them together. The illustration of a clock has been used with

regard to them, likening chapter 12 to the works, chapter 13 to the mainspring, and chapter 14 to the face. In chapter 12 the Holy Spirit is referred to as the source of all gift. The body is endowed with spiritual ability by the Spirit, who has formed the body. The next chapter shows that love is to be the motive in everything. Christ's love necessarily finds its response in the assembly: "Let all things ye do be done in love," 1 Cor. 16:14, in contrast to self-seeking, which is destructive of love.

The works and the mainspring of the clock are not apparent, but the face can be seen; and so we find in chapter 14 with regard to the stranger coming in, that "falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." Not only would God be there in the sense that He is dwelling in His house by the Spirit; but also because love is there according to 1 John 4:12. "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us." This would be no mere sentimental expression on the part of a stranger, but a definite expression of truth: "God is in you of a truth." Nothing gives such an expression of it as when people are moving as governed by assembly feelings.

We see in chapter 14 the place that understanding has in relation to the assembly as regulating every utterance. We do not move merely by impulse; though that may actuate those who are less intelligent; normally the assembly, as

composed of "wise men," chap. 10 : 15, is marked by intelligent and regulated utterance. It is important to take account of this. Those who take part should know why they say what they say. Love is to be the motive of all that is done in the assembly, and all is to be regulated by intelligence.

I would draw your attention to verse 23 of this chapter : "If therefore the whole church be come together in one place." For the supper it would not be necessary for a whole assembly to come together ; the number together for that purpose would have to be regulated by the family character which marked the institution of the supper, and which is still to be retained, and by the very character of the symbols, one loaf and one cup. This verse shows the possibility of occasions when the whole assembly in a locality might come together, and indicates the character of ministry that might be given on such an occasion : "If . . . all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad ? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not . . . he is convinced of all, he is judged of all," and the result is that he recognises that God is there.

We may be very thankful that Scripture does not say that the whole assembly *must* come together for there to be an experience of this kind, otherwise it would preclude our doing anything on these lines to-day. The whole assembly in

a locality embraces every believer in that locality, and in this day of breakdown it seems impossible to get them all together. But this chapter suggests the possibility of a large concourse of persons being found together, which number would preclude the taking of the supper in the order suitable to it; and if these conditions, normal to the assembly, were present, there would be power that would bring conviction to the stranger coming in.

Before closing I would like to draw attention to the expression, "the first day of the week," found in chapter 16:2 of this epistle. The actual circumstances referred to in this connection are the laying by at home of a store, a collection, in readiness for any demand which the Lord's interests may make upon one; but the expression itself is very suggestive. As in the epistle to the Romans there are expressions which are like windows through which we may see lines of truth not developed in that epistle, so in this case we get a glimpse of the highest possibilities of spiritual blessing proper to the assembly—privileges spoken of elsewhere.

John is the only one of the gospel writers who does not refer to the sabbath in connection with the expression "the first day of the week," N.T. and from John 20 and Acts 20, where the expression also occurs in connection with the breaking of bread, we may regard the first day as suggesting a region of experience of spiritual blessing that has

never had a precedent. While the coming of the Lord is that to which we look forward most of all; next to that our hearts should look forward with expectancy to the joys of the first day. The Lord may manifest Himself to us then; He may be known of us in the breaking of bread. There can never be a *second* "first"; to speak of "another first day" would spoil the thought. If conditions are right the Lord would manifest Himself spiritually to us in a fresh way on each of such occasions, leading us beyond the region of mere order, right as it is, into a sphere of spiritual privilege proper to the assembly, consequent upon having been convened for the breaking of bread.

May the Lord help us to understand the true character of the assembly, for His precious name's sake!