

# Assembly Principles

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## Editor's Introduction

Mr. Frank B. Hole's *Assembly Principles* has been chosen as Volume Four of the *Christian Update Series* because of its logical, complete and unique approach to the truth of the Assembly — the true Church of God composed of all believers of this dispensation.

The truth of the Assembly as presented in Scripture is almost lost today as far as the masses of God's dear people are concerned. Believers are so caught up in the various denominations — the churches-of-men — that the truth of the Assembly as *God* sees it and as given in His Word seems out of place and even strange.

Even those of us who have some knowledge of the Assembly tend to slip into thoughts and practices that are not supported by Scripture. We need to have our thoughts brought into line with God's thoughts about His Assembly and I believe that this pamphlet by Mr. Hole will help us to clearly see God's thoughts, as well as to help others learn the basic truth of the Assembly.

Mr. Hole was born in England about 1880. For many years before his death in 1964, he was a well-known, beloved and respected Bible-teacher among the English assemblies. During his lifetime, Mr. Hole wrote a number of pamphlets such as *Assembly Principles* (which was first published about 1920). He also wrote three well-known books, *The Great Salvation*, *Foundations of Faith* and *Outlines*

of Truth. *The Great Salvation* is Vol. 5 of the *Christian Update Series. Foundations of Faith and Outlines of Truth*, the Lord willing will be the subject of future volumes.

Mr. Hole uses the word *church* and *assembly* interchangeably, which might cause some confusion. The Greek word *ecclesia* is used in the New Testament to describe both the true universal Church of God, comprised of all believers, and also the local church or assembly. The word means *called out ones*. The English word *assembly* is thus a better translation of *ecclesia* than is the word *church*. But as long as we know its true meaning, either *church* or *assembly* can be used without problems. The main problem with the word *church* is that people get it mixed up with some *church-building* or some *denomination* (the Baptist church, etc.). Neither of these is a correct use of *ecclesia*.

I pray that the Lord will further use this 1977 edited edition of *Assembly Principles* to help many of the Lord's dear people to more clearly see both the *truth* of the true Assembly (Church) and whether or not their own *Church-position* is pleasing to God as a part of His Assembly.

All Scripture-quotations are from the New Scofield Reference Bible. Old word-endings have been updated to their modern equivalents. Also, the old-English pronouns *thee*, *thou*, *thine* have been updated to their modern equivalents except where reference is to Persons of the Godhead.

Every effort has been made to include many references throughout the pamphlet. Therefore, please read this pamphlet with an open Bible. You don't want to get Mr. Hole's or my opinion *about* the Bible *but the clear truth of Scripture which can only be obtained by making sure that everything that you read is solidly backed up by the Word of God as revealed to you through prayer and study by the Holy Spirit.*

Roger P. Daniel

## ASSEMBLY PRINCIPLES

The question of what ground we should meet on in our church-gatherings was very important to many Christians of the past century. At the same time, that part of the Word of God which gives God's thoughts and purposes concerning the Church became remarkably clear to them and they obeyed the truth that they discovered. But as a result of the failure that marks all that is entrusted to man's responsibility, many of these early truths have been lost to many. Thus, today, the same question is being asked with added urgency. Therefore, we will attempt to answer it again in what follows.

Our answer must still be the old one. *We should meet on the ground of the whole revealed truth as to the Church of God, whether considered in its universal or local aspect.* These are easy words to read but not as easy to put into practice. Therefore, we propose to investigate the matter step by step, dividing what we have to say into clearly marked sections.

### ***God reveals truth to us so that we may obey it .***

God does not reveal truth to us to satisfy our curiosity or to give us topics for discussion or even to simply enlighten our minds *but that we, being enlightened, may obey what we learn.* If the gospel is preached, it is "for *obedience* to the faith" (Rom. 1: 5). If the mystery of the Church is revealed, it is "for the *obedience* of faith" (Rom. 16: 26). If believers turn aside to *law* after making a start in *grace*, the question asked is "who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth" (Gal. 5: 7)?

This fact should solemnize us. We thus can understand why our Lord said, "Take heed, therefore, *how you hear*, for whosoever has to him shall be given; and whosoever has not, from him shall be taken

even that which he seems to have" (Luke 8: 18). There is a feeling of exhilaration as the truth of Scripture opens out to our minds, but such exhilaration tones down into sober and even deep exercise *when we face the responsibility of a walk that expresses the truth in practice. Truth may be as sweet as honey to our mouth but when digested, the power and even the bitterness of it are felt* (Rev. 10: 9-10).

***A considerable part of God's truth deals with The Church of God and we must obey this part as much as any other part of the Bible***

Much Biblical truth deals with us as individuals and we stand singly (but not alone) in many relationships. For instance, each of us is a child of God although we also are part of the family of God. A time came in the ways of God when all His children were brought into a new unity. The unknowing prophecy of Caiaphas (John 11: 51-52) spoke of it. He prophesied that "Jesus should die for that nation and not for that nation only but that also *He should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.*" This gathering together took place by the coming of the Holy Spirit shortly after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1 and 2).

The Church of God was thus formed. We were brought into it by the reception of the Spirit of God and thus belong to the Church whether we realize it or not. The New Testament epistles unfold to us the Church's calling, privileges, order and our responsibilities attaching to it. That calling, those principles, its order and its responsibilities *must be answered to in a practical way by each of us.* No epistle is simply an exposition (a giving) of truth. Every epistle *applies* the truth expounded and brings it home in a practical way. *In some cases, much more is said by way of practical instruction in the light of the truth than in the giving of the truth itself.*

We are a part of this wonderful corporation, the Church of God. Therefore, we should diligently seek to learn about that to which we belong and then obey the truth as to it.

***We do not need to go outside of the Bible for any detail of the truth that demands our obedience. All truth is found in the Holy Scriptures.***

Regardless of what some "churches" may say, the Bible says that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine . . . for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be *perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). The Bible is fully sufficient to perfect (completely equip) believers who are even so spiritually advanced as to be called "men of God." Had the verse stopped at the perfecting of the man of God, men could have argued that Scripture perfects as to broad doctrines but not to the details of practical conduct. But no, Scripture completely equips the man of God in a detailed way unto *all good works. It covers all work that God can call "good."*

This is very important because some would set up standards for the Church of God that go beyond anything stated in Scripture. But even a *love* which is more loving than the love commanded in Scripture, or a *holiness* more holy than the holiness commanded in Scripture is neither true love nor true holiness.

***The Biblical truth as to The Church of God mostly falls under two headings: The Body-of-Christ and The House-of-God.***

The first of these two headings is completely a New Testament idea; the second finds a place in

the Old Testament. The first mention of the house of God is in Gen. 28: 17, although that house was not even typically (in picture form) established among men on earth until redemption was typically accomplished (Ex. 15: 2, 13, Ex. 25: 8). From the moment that the children of Israel were redeemed as a nation, the house of God was found in their midst and when the house ceased to be in their midst, their national existence ceased. Then, shortly before the Roman armies destroyed the house of God (the temple) on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem in A.D. 70, God formed His house in a new way altogether. Believers in Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, became as *living stones*, "*built up a spiritual house*" (1 Peter 2: 5). They (Jew and Gentiles) were "*builded together for a habitation of God through the (Holy) Spirit*" (Eph. 2: 22).

The house of God now involves a nearness to and an intimacy with God not possible in earlier times. We read, "You are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God" (Eph. 2: 19). Those who are of the house are also of the household of God, and by His Spirit, God now dwells in His house in a more intimate and vital way than was ever possible before.

In Old Testament times, there was no thought of the body of Christ because Christ was not yet revealed. However, Christ has now come and having died and risen, the Holy Spirit came and baptized believing Jews and Gentiles into one body — the body of Christ. Previously, the Lord Jesus could say "A body has Thou prepared Me" (Heb. 10: 5) and He suffered in that sacred body. There was "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once" (Heb. 10: 10). *Now, He sits in heaven in a spiritual body, and the only body that He acknowledges here on earth is the ONE BODY produced by the baptism of the one Spirit Who came from Himself, its glorified Head.* In that body, Christ is to be displayed in His moral features in this world.

***Both the Body-of-Christ and the House-of-God express what the Church is in actual, practical fact on the earth, and not as a mystical and theoretical idea for heaven .***

We commonly hear or read the phrases *the mystical body of Christ* and *the invisible Church*. Those who use these words may mean what is right but the phrases are misleading since they obscure or deny the truth that the body of Christ is *actual fact*. It exists on earth today as much as in the apostolic age although its manifestation is marred by the intrusion of man's will and ways. It is true that the body of Christ can not be pointed to in concrete form as in the time of the apostles (when it was also one *in practice*), and thus must be abstractly thought of by us. But, these thoughts must be formed by what we find in Scripture since *truth* which can only be perceived in an abstract way is as true and real as truth which can be seen in concrete form. Consequently, *Church-truth* is intended to regulate our relationships with the Lord Jesus, with God and with our fellow saints here in the world.

***The truth as to the Body of Christ puts special emphasis on the supremacy of Christ as head and on the pervading energy of the Holy Spirit as power with the consequent unity, love and spiritual growth of the body.***

The above is evident in the verses where the body of Christ is mentioned. The first passage is Rom. 12. Here, the truth of the body is only briefly alluded to, to emphasize the variety of spiritual gift found among its members.

In 1 Cor. 12, the body of Christ is explained in detail. By the illustration and analogy of the

human body, the Church is shown to be an organic unity composed of various members. It was formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Those brought into it were submerged as to their human characteristics (whether natural or social) and consequently made *one* in the all-pervading energy of the one Holy Spirit. Of course, those thus formed into unity also remain individuals. Thus, the gift of the Holy Spirit also means an individual "drinking into" the one Spirit so that each member is possessed and controlled by the one Spirit Who animates the whole. Thus, in 1 Cor. 12, we see the Holy Spirit manifested in the Body. The various gifts are manifestations of the *Spirit* (v. 7).

But the Holy Spirit Who brings all this to pass is the Spirit *of* and *from* the ascended Christ. The body, therefore, is Christ's (v. 12, 27) and He rules in it. In the age to come (the Millennium) His administration as Lord will cover the whole earth. However, at present, the Church is the sphere of His rule as far as the earth is concerned. *The will of God is found in the Church on earth* (v. 5).

The practical application of Christ's rule in the Church is seen in the *care, consideration and sympathy* seen in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 11, in the *love* of 1 Corinthians 13 and in the *directions* of 1 Corinthians 14 which regulate the use of *gift* in the assembly. 1 Corinthians 12 gives us the power of the Lord and of the Holy Spirit residing in the Assembly. 1 Corinthians 13 gives us the *love* ruling the body and chapter 14 gives us the *sound mind* regulating the body (See 2 Tim. 1: 7). All this sets before us the divinely functioning body of Christ here on earth.

*Ephesians*, we have the body of Christ viewed in the height of its privilege according to the eternal purpose of God. The Cross is the basis of its formation (Eph. 2: 16). Its function is to be "the fullness of Him Who fills all in all" (Eph. 1: 23), i.e., to be Christ's complement or counterpart — that in which He is fully expressed. The height of the Church's privilege will be publicly displayed when Christ is manifested as "Head over all things, *to the Church*" (Eph. 1: 22). There was a type (picture) of this when Adam was set as head over the animal creation and when he also became head *to Eve* (being made of his body), as sharing in his dominion.

In Eph. 4: 2-3, 15-16, we get more practical applications of these truths. It says, "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" Hence, we will grow up "into Him in all things, Who is the Head, even Christ," and the body making increase "unto the edifying (building up) of itself in love."

Lastly in *Colossians*, the *body* is only briefly spoken of since the great theme of *Colossians* is the glory of the Head. However, the responsibility of each member to "hold the Head" is insisted on (Col. 2: 19). We also see the Apostle Paul, a member of the body, rejoicing in sufferings for the sake of the body (Col. 1: 24) and we find the gracious and beautiful features of Christ, culminating in love and peace, coming out in the saints.

Thus, the truth of the body of Christ includes all saints. There is absolute unity in union with and in subjection to Christ so that He as Head, is expressed in His body.

***The truth as to the House of God puts special emphasis on the presence of God by His Spirit in the Church and consequently on the Order, Godliness and Holiness that befits His dwelling place, for the House must conform to Him Whose House it is.***

The above can be seen from the verses where the *house* aspect of the Church is presented to us. Two expressions are used: *house* and *temple*. There is a shade of difference between them but both present the same general idea and thus have a similar practical meaning.

In 1 Cor. 3, the saints are "the temple of God" because the Spirit of God dwells in them *collectively*. Consequently, holiness is imperative (v. 16-17). This thought of holiness is greatly expanded in 2 Cor. 6: 14 to 2 Cor. 7: 1. These verses demand holiness with no unequal yoke — a definite separation from the defiling world, without even *touching* the unclean thing. This involves the refusal of all filthiness of both flesh and spirit.

In the closing verses of Eph. 2, the one adjective used in regard to the temple, is *holy*.

In 1 Tim. 3: 15, the Church is called "the house of God . . . the pillar and ground of the truth," and the whole epistle is full of instruction as to the order and godliness which becomes those who are of it. The character of God should be seen in those who comprise His house.

Lastly, in 1 Peter 2: 5, the house is called "a spiritual house," comprised of all those who, having come to *the* Living Stone, are living stones themselves. Each is a *Peter* (a little stone) built upon the *Rock* (Christ).

The truth of the house of God excludes all evil that would defame the character of, or compromise the holiness of Him Whose house it is. The exclusion may even have to involve *sinning people* as shown in 1 Cor. 5 (which follows the truth as to the *temple of God* in 1 Cor. 3). The same thing of a practical-action-following-a-truth is seen in 2 Tim. 2: 15-22, which follows the truth of the house of God given in the first epistle: only here in Timothy, the practical action is in purging *oneself out from evil associations rather than purging out the evil-doer*.

***When we see the truth of the Church as presented in Scripture and we think about putting it into practice, we become aware that the present general condition of Christendom (professing-christianity) is a total denial of these church truths.***

Certain things are obviously not according to Scripture, such as the multiplied denominations which deny the unity of the Church, the deliberate union of state-churches with the world, the complete setting aside of the Lord so that *man* closes up the Bible and then claims to create saints and release souls from purgatory (as seen in the Roman Catholic religion) and the almost total lack of discipline so that every kind of doctrinal and moral evil goes on under the cover of nominal Christianity.

Other things are not so obvious. The distinctive sin of this present dispensation has been *the practical ignoring and consequent setting aside of the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit in the Church*. Christian services are conducted in ways that show complete disbelief in His presence in the Church (while perhaps admitting that He is present in individuals). For instance, one man is *appointed* as the mouthpiece for the congregation. By such actions, 1 Cor. 12 and 1 Cor. 14 are reduced to dead words. The effects of *redemption* on our approach-to-God are denied by the building of holy places on earth with altars and priests who serve a *laity* or common-people who are shut out from God and often kept in greater ignorance than was the average Jew before Christ came. Human order and arrangements have displaced the simplicity of the divine order which was established by the apostles at the beginning of the Church. To human thinking, this human order may be very orderly and a deterrent to any disorder which might result from an attempt to follow what the apostles established *but all order which is not divine order, is disorder*.

Most denominations and churches are based on certain truths (baptism, for instance) or on certain views-of-truth or as identified with godly men of past times. Consequently, these churches lack a divine *inclusiveness* since they only seek believers who share their views or who become followers of

the leader in question. These churches also lack a divine *exclusiveness* because they are generally so zealous to build up their system that false teaching and other unfaithfulness to Christ and to His truth are often treated with an easy going tolerance.

***These things being so, are we still obliged to put the truth of the Church into practice? Wouldn't it be better to simply mentally hold the truth and avoid all further complications by just staying where we happen to be in our church-connections?***

The Scriptural answer to these questions is *yes* to the first and *no* to the second. The epistles which contemplate days of difficulty do not for one moment suppose that the truth has become a matter of mere theory, divorced from any practical expression of it.

For instance in 2 Tim. 3: 16-17, Paul speaks of the profitableness of Scripture, not only for doctrine but for correction and instruction in righteousness. If any think that both the correction and the instruction apply only to the mind, we point them to the next verse (17) where the object of all the correction and instruction is plainly declared to be "that the man of God may be completely furnished unto *all good works*." This is extremely practical: it involves our actions!

In 2 John and 3 John, John says much about the believer's walk. He speaks of walking *in truth* and *after* His commandments. *To walk in something is to put that thing into practice*. God emphasizes this point just when anti-Christian teachers were becoming common and Diotrephes was asserting himself and causing confusion in the Church.

The fact is this: *The more that confusion and defection spread, the more important it is to walk in the truth — to put all the truth into practice, even if only a few will do it.*

***Can the truth of the Church be practiced under present conditions? How is it possible today?***

It would be impossible to walk into any building where religious services were being performed according to a liturgy (a formal order of service) or by an ordained minister and try to gather according to the principles laid down by the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. Any who attempted it would be considered disorderly. The only way to practice the truth as to the Church *is by ceasing to practice what is not the truth. This can only be done by withdrawing from all that has no approval from Scripture. Being free from disobedience, we then can be obedient*. Thus, we must first cease *to do evil* and then learn to do good. Any attempt to go on with both would be a great disservice to the cause of truth. It would say, in effect, that there is no basic, real difference between what is purely human and what is divine and, consequently, we can go on with either or both.

Some argue that withdrawing from evil only ends in making one more sect. *But there is nothing sectarian in meeting in the way that is obeying the truth*. (A sect is a group of persons adhering to a particular man-made religious belief, Ed.)

***Have we Scriptural authority to withdraw from Church-organizations unless they advocate or tolerate fundamentally false doctrines?***

Let me answer with a question. Is a human organization or system, introduced into God's order for His Church, sufficiently evil that we must forsake it even if it costs much to do so?

Many of today's religious systems contain a very pretentious form of infidelity based on great claims of scholarship, called modernism. But, there are a large number of smaller and more or less independent organizations that stand on the basis of sound (correct) foundation-truth although ignoring the order of the Church as presented in Scripture. Those supporting these organizations are generally earnest and godly people. Should we stand apart from such organizations?

First of all, the intrusion of any human system or organization into the divine order, to where the divine order is eventually obliterated, is a very grievous sin! It is not a sin to be attached to any one individual since it has crept in slowly: still it is a serious evil. It is a striking fact that at the close of a long passage on the divine order for the actual assembling of the church in 1 Cor. 14, Paul warns, "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*" (14: 37). In this way, the Holy Spirit anticipated the careless tendencies that invariably come out whenever carnality (natural human, worldly ways) prevails, which tendencies are prominent today.

When spiritual power is low and worldly principles come into the Church, the tendency is to find divine order irksome because it makes certain demands on a good spiritual condition — a condition not present. It also exposes the worldly-weakness which *is* present. So, the strong temptation is to be careless as to the instructions of Scripture: useful on many occasions, interesting, instructive but optional — something that *may* be obeyed, not something that *must* be obeyed. *All this, however, is entirely swept away by the fact that these instructions are "the commandments of the Lord."* We thus are not at liberty to alter them according to our tastes and feelings:

As an analogy, think of what was instituted in connection with the Law of Moses which only gave "the example and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8: 5). When Moses was about to make the tabernacle, God told him to "make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount" (Heb. 8: 5). Moses strictly followed God's pattern. Later, when the permanent house was to be built in Jerusalem, "David gave to Solomon, his son, . . . the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit . . . all this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing" (1 Chron. 28: 11-19). Again, every detail was divinely ordered *in writing. In the New Testament, we have in writing the divine instructions as to the order of God's spiritual house.* Are we given any more liberty to tamper with these instructions than was allowed of old as to the instructions for the material, earthly-house? Certainly not!

At a later date, the Jews *added* to the divine regulations for the material-house. What was the result? The Lord Jesus, when He visited it, said, "It is written, My house is the house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves" (Luke 19: 46). They also tampered with the divine Word generally. Consequently, the Lord accused them of "making the Word of God of no effect through your traditions which you have delivered; and many such things you do" (Mark 7: 13). The strong language used by the Lord on these occasions shows us how He felt about these sins.

Next, let's look at the plain Scriptural instructions as to the believer's position in relation to a system of outward religion.

The epistle to the Hebrews was written just before the whole Jewish religious economy was swept away by the destruction of Jerusalem. In Hebrews, the Holy Spirit encourages the Jewish believers by showing them that the former system of visible religious symbols (Judaism), instituted in connection with the Law, was only a system of *shadows*. They who had turned to Christ possessed the *realities* by faith. The Holy Spirit ends with a call to them to cut their last links with the worn out system of earthly-religion and then He sets before them the Christ Who "suffered outside the gate." The Holy Spirit's exhortation is, "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him (Christ) outside the camp, bearing His

reproach" (Heb. 13: 12-13).

We are to go forth to Christ outside of the *camp*, not outside of the city. *Hebrews* consistently refers to the order of things connected with Israel's wilderness journey — the tabernacle and the camp. *Hebrews* views Christians as a company with heavenly associations and on their way to a heavenly rest but still in wilderness-conditions on the earth. Israel's wilderness circumstances were typical of our present journey. Further, in the wilderness tabernacle, God set forth His purpose to dwell in the midst of a redeemed people and to gather that people around Himself. Thus *the camp* was Israel, in an orderly manner, surrounding the dwelling place of God — *Israel viewed religiously*.

When the book of *Hebrews* was written, the Shekinah-cloud which had been the glory of Israel's camp, had long since departed. Yet, the camp — Judaism, Israel's religious system — still remained. However, it had sealed its doom by crucifying Jesus outside the gate. The time had thus come for every true Jewish believer to cut his last link with that system of earthly religion *even though at its beginning, it was divinely-instituted*. There was now nothing left but "weak and beggarly (worthless) elements" (Gal. 4: 9).

*Thus, if in the first century of Christianity, it was God's will that believers who had been inside a divinely-begun earthly religious system should cut their last links with it and go outside of it to Christ, it can not be God's will today for believers to remain inside earthly religious systems which are purely human in their origin and never were at any time instituted by God!*

Christ is thus *outside* of any religious system of human origin (although, of course, He may be much loved by, and be very near to many dear saints who remain entangled in the human system). Thus, we have divine authority to withdraw from any religious organization of human origin so that we may walk according to the divine order as laid down in Scripture.

### ***Separation from evil and from evil men is always the duty of all who fear the Lord and Who Name His Name .***

This fact is powerfully stated with full apostolic authority in 2 Tim. 2: 14 to 3: 5 where separation is commanded six times under six different terms, as follows:

- *Shun* profane and vain babblings (2 Tim. 2: 16)
- Depart from iniquity (2 Tim. 2: 19)
- *Purge* himself out from these (2 Tim. 2: 21)
- *Flee* also youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2: 22)
- *Avoid* foolish and unlearned questions (2 Tim. 2: 23)
- *Turn away* from such (2 Tim. 3: 5)

*If something is presented to you and you shun, depart from, purge yourself from, flee from, avoid, and turn away from it, you have certainly adopted an attitude of uncompromising separation.*

Let's open our Bibles and look at this passage in 2 Timothy 2 in detail.

### **Verses 14 and 15**

Paul tells Timothy to remind believers of the truth and to charge them not to argue over points of

no profit and which merely have the effect of mentally overturning the hearers. Then Timothy's personal aim should be to be a skilful workman in God's service, handling the word of God with understanding and accuracy.

### **Verses 16-18**

Timothy was also to avoid an even worse evil — profane (common), worthless talking that leads to more ungodliness and spreads like gangrene or cancer. Such evil talk will increase in both intensity and extent if allowed to go on unchecked. So that no one could mistake what he was talking about, Paul names two men who were leaders in this profane babbling — Hymenaeus and Philetus. They were saying that the resurrection was already past. Paul points out the seriousness of this error: some had listened to it and their faith was overthrown. The error was fundamental and subversive to the faith of those who accepted it.

### **Verse 19**

In contrast to false human teaching, the firm foundation of God stands sure. Everything that is really founded by God is immovable. God's foundation has a two-fold seal: the first is connected with God's sovereignty and omniscience (all power) which guarantees the eternal security of His own, and the second is connected with the responsibility of all who profess subjection to Christ as Lord *to depart from iniquity*.

All the above is stated in general terms but there appears to be an allusion to Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Num. 16. They rose up against the Word of God as presented by Moses and Aaron and overthrew the allegiance of some. The Lord's message on that occasion also was two-folded: "Tomorrow, the Lord will show who are His" (v. 5) and "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men" (v. 26).

Thus, this Old Testament passage throws light on our subject passage. However, our verse simply states general principles; yet the believer is *always* to depart from iniquity. Iniquity takes different forms so the necessary "departing" may be accomplished in different Scriptural ways *but the believer is never to go on with any kind of evil. He is to depart from it in all its forms*.

### **Verse 20**

Having clearly laid down the general principles governing the believer's attitude towards all evil, Paul now illustrates the matter. In a large house, there are many vessels made from various materials and used in many different ways. Some are made from gold and silver; others from wood and earth. Some are for honourable use and others for dishonourable use. The picture is of the (professing) Church which has become like a great house containing men like Hymenaeus and Philetus — men who were like vessels put to dishonourable use.

### **Verse 21**

Paul now applies the general principle of verse 19 to the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus given in verses 17-18; an application made in the light of the illustration of the great house given in verse 20. Let's look at verse 21 in detail.

*"If a man."* These words show that Paul had the *application* of the illustration before him

regarding the sad condition then being manifested in the Church. The term "a man" is used because, even though the command applies to all, the responsibility rests upon each individual believer to *personally* obey God.

"*Purge Himself from.*" The Greek word translated "purge" means to purify or to cleanse-out. Its only other occurrence is in 1 Cor. 5: 7 where it is translated "purge out" and applies to the *normal work* of purging evil out of the Church. Here in 2 Timothy, we see the *abnormal work* of a man purging *himself* out of an association which has become dominated by evil.

"*From these.*" We believe that "these" refers to Hymenaeus, Philetus and their associates. However, if any believe that "these" refers to the vessels-to-dishonour of the previous verse, the meaning is unchanged for the dishonourable vessels simply illustrate these sinning men.

The rest of verse 21 clearly adopts the language of the illustration in v. 20. A believer who faithfully clears himself from all fellowship and complicity with the teachers of fundamentally false doctrine is like a vessel to honour, sanctified and useful to the Master and prepared for every good work.

## Verse 22

"Flee also youthful lusts" is another application of the general principle "to depart from iniquity." But this exhortation demands personal holiness, without which, separation from evil men would be mere hypocrisy. The phrase "youthful lusts" is used because Timothy was a young man. Of course, we are to flee from *all* sinful lusts and then follow (or pursue) "*righteousness, faith, love, peace.*" The world is full of sin, spiritual blindness, hatred and strife, and the saint is to wear the above four-fold character of Christ in the midst of it. Moreover, these good things are to be *pursued* in a practical way "*with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*"

"With" means *companionship*, not isolation. To "call on the Lord" means to profess subjection to Him. To do this "out of a pure (or purged) heart" (essentially the same word as "purge" in v. 21 ) means to sincerely do it with the whole-man purged from evil by both personal holiness and holiness in associations.

Notice that we are not told to follow with *all* who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. That would be impossible under present conditions. Many godly Christians who fit this description might, for instance, decline the company of others equally fitting the description due to prejudice or wrong or incomplete information. However, we can "follow . . . with *those* who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" — as many as are available; and truly, the more who are available, the more we shall rejoice.

## Verses 23-26

These verses show that the saint who obeys the above instructions must avoid foolish questions that cause strife. At the same time, he must expect opposition and then meet it in the lowly spirit of Christ so that he can be used for the blessing and recovery of the opposers.

Even though the Holy Spirit took the opportunity created by the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus to give these instructions, it appears that the evil hadn't reached the stage that compelled Timothy to withdraw from the mass of professed believers. Rather, it appears that the evil was met by the energy of the Holy Spirit and that some were recovered "out of the snare of the devil" (2 Tim. 2: 26), while the false teachers, repulsed in their efforts, "went out from (them)" (1 John 2: 19). However,

the God-given instructions remain and the time has long since come when withdrawal has become necessary. *In fact, to pursue union at the expense of truth is treason against the Lord because no union which involves complicity with evil is of God. God's unity is found only in separation from evil.*

Remember that the above separation is an *individual* responsibility even though the individual who faithfully obeys God in this, is led in v. 22 to expect to find associates in the position he thus takes up.

***Believers who go forth to Christ without the camp and who also purge themselves from false teachers and their teachings, must now gather according to all the truth of the Church, while always remembering that they are only a few of those who belong to it.***

Believers who have separated from evil have done so as the result of individual exercise and action but they are not left to proceed alone as if everything of a corporate nature had ceased to be. The body-of-Christ and the house-of-God are still realities and believers today are as much as ever members of that body and living stones in that house. Hence, the privileges and responsibilities which are attached to the body and the house are theirs as much as ever.

When purged and separated believers gather together, they should gather just according to what they are and then act as directed by the Word of God. They should do this even if they are only two or three and all the other Christians in their locality remain in "the camp" or in complicity with evil. Christ is still their heavenly Head and He can be counted on for direction. The Holy Spirit is still here and He can safely be counted on for power. Further, the Bible can still be counted on for instruction.

Consequently, separated believers can still enjoy a measure of fellowship according to the apostolic pattern. They can rejoice to look upon other believers simply as members of the body of Christ and can receive *according to the Word* all who desire to be received, providing they are not disqualified by evil practice, evil doctrine or evil associations. Every sect receives saints who are formally-prepared to "join" them, *but to receive saints simply because they are members of Christ (and are not Scripturally-disqualified) is to receive people according to the truth.*

However, one part of the apostolic pattern is no longer available. This is the *official appointment* of elders and deacons for rule and service in the assembly. We today lack apostolic authority to appoint them. But officially appointed elders are not essential for an assembly. Evidently, there were none at Thessalonica when Paul wrote this second epistle to them. He said, "We beseech you, brethren, to *know* those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord" (1 Thess. 5: 12-13). The meaning of "know" is *recognize*. This instruction would only be possible if real elders existed but were without official appointment. Even today, elders may be *known* where they exist. Note that in 1 Corinthians (the epistle of assembly-order), bishops or elders are not even mentioned. Further, in correcting the disorders at Corinth, Paul never once even suggests that elders should be appointed.

***For some time now, believers have endeavoured to gather together in the above ways. But experience has shown them that certain dangers constantly threaten to turn them from the truth. Some of these dangers are:***

### **Sectarianism**

It is very easy to slip into sectarianism (the adherence to a particular set of views and qualifications for membership). Those who have sought to gather in the Scriptural way have necessarily found themselves outside of today's religious organizations and, consequently, *externally* separated from the great mass of their fellow-believers who adhere to such organizations. How easy then to become *entirely* separated from them in heart and affection! *How easy to lapse into becoming a select community, compact and self-contained and with no interest in anything lying outside the community boundaries!*

This danger of sectarianism has been increased by the great knowledge of Scripture so graciously given to those who have gathered in practical obedience to the Word of God. Consequently, the natural tendency has been to use this great knowledge in the same way as the early Corinthians believers used (or abused) their gifts. They used their gifts for *themselves* instead of for the profit of the whole body. Great Scriptural knowledge may be misused in the same way: to give credit and distinction to the *community* possessing it instead of using it for the good of all saints. Then, such knowledge becomes the *badge of a sect* and the community becomes *sectarian* and light becomes darkness. Then *light* (or what passes for being the *light* at any given time) becomes the test-of-*communion*, and willingness to become a member of the community is the all-important thing. Then, all thought of receiving saints (not disqualified by evil behaviour, doctrine or association, or complicity with either) simply as members of Christ is ruled out and we find ourselves back on sectarian ground, only with much more exactness in our mode of meeting and in our Scriptural knowledge, but for that very reason, the more condemned by our sectarianism!

Saints who gather in obedience to the truth are often accused of being a mere sect and a small one at that! Being only a very small part of the Church, they may find it impossible to refute the charge. But, let them flee from sectarianism both in their spirit and in the principle of their gathering, regardless of what others accuse them of.

### **Laxity of Principle and of Practice**

This laxity is the opposite danger to the one we have been considering. *Sectarianism* is the special danger to those who are rigid, narrow and intellectual whereas *laxity* is the danger of those with large, universal ideals, and kind and generous hearts. The first type of person *tends* to preserve the truth and maintain holiness by exclusion of all but the most select while the second type of person *tends* to promote love, harmony and union by an easy-going tolerance of wrong things.

Such laxity is fatal to true assembly practice because it seriously weakens the taking up of the place with Christ "outside the camp" since it compromises and hangs on to the outskirts of the camp for the sake of gaining more people. Further, *laxity* weakens or destroys a clear and uncompromising rejection of both *fundamentally* unsound teaching and separation from those who spread it (2 Tim. 2: 15-26, 2 John 7-11). Laxity allows undue tolerance and thus (while ultimately taking action against glaring evil) allows evil to be present in a modified or disguised form.

When laxity is allowed, the way is paved for abandoning a walk according to truth, not by one decisive step but by slow stages. History furnishes us with many illustrations of how laxity works. Whenever the Church has been confronted with fundamental evil, some have strongly met it without compromise but others have pleaded for tolerance and compromise and when their pleas were heeded, many were led away from the truth.

### **Ecclesiastical Assumption**

The danger of ecclesiastical-assumption (church-authority) is mainly an out-growth of sectarianism. Unmindful of the fallen state of the professing church, people may assume authority for which no divine authorization exists — authority that is perhaps honestly felt to be necessary to preserve the community in its proper form. Decisions and actions of an assembly-character, even though hastily conceived and executed under personal or party pressure, may be given great sanctity and made the subject of extravagant claims. Authority may be established in certain localities or in certain cliques and thus a system of central-oversight, metropolitanism, bureaucratic-control (or whatever else you may call it), may gradually creep in *and then pity the individual saint who has the rashness to question what is arranged or decided under such conditions!*

### **Ecclesiastical Independency**

The pendulum may swing to the opposite extreme, away from the high claims of ecclesiastical-assumption. To avoid the evils connected with ecclesiastical assumption, the system of *independency* may be restored to. In *independency*, each meeting becomes a self-contained unity, standing on its own basis, independent of any other gathering. The Church as the body of Christ, the house of God, *a unity composed of all saints everywhere, outside of all questions of locality*, is entirely overlooked or is treated only as an *ideal*, thus not demanding a practice in accordance therewith. *But to adopt an order of things that gives us a number of independent local assemblies, whether closely affiliated or not, so that the largest possible measure of personal freedom is allowed, is to practice something that falls far short of Scripture!*

### **Extravagant, Unscriptural Discipline**

Extravagant discipline is the natural outcome of sectarianism and ecclesiastical assumption. A sectarian position nearly always calls forth an outburst of zeal in its defence. No spirit is fiercer than party-spirit and under its influence, the most extreme defence-measures are adopted. Even in the days of the apostles, the Church was threatened by all kinds of internal evil. Consequently, God gave clear and detailed disciplinary instructions by His apostles. Now, it may have the appearance of great holiness and zeal to enforce more severe discipline than required by Scripture, but it is really only presumption and self-will, as if we were wiser than God. *The substitution of stern discipline for pastoral care and faithful dealing in love (which things tax our spiritual powers) has been a major cause of grievous failure.*

### **Lax Discipline**

Lax, careless discipline is the natural outgrowth of general laxity and independency. If *universality* is all-important, one must be very tolerant. If the independent, self-contained local assembly is before the mind, then any discipline is limited to that local community and even that

discipline may easily be rendered useless by the contrary action of another nearby independent assembly. When Paul wrote the Corinthians and urgently called for severe discipline (1 Cor. 5), he addressed his letter to "the church of God which is at Corinth . . . *with all who in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord*" (1 Cor. 1: 2). The local assembly at Corinth was primarily responsible for the discipline *but the whole Church was implicated in it*. Therefore, if the saints who seek to gather on assembly-ground and to walk in the light of the truth are called on to use discipline, they act according to this Scripture.

If saints are outside human religious organizations and are walking separate from evil and are practicing truth and walking according to the truth of the Church as found in Scripture, we believe that they will be approved of God as to the position they take since they are meeting on divine ground. In all the above, however, don't ever let it be forgotten that our *personal* moral and spiritual condition is the most important thing. Correct ecclesiastical *position* without a correct spiritual *condition* is as sad a sight as can be imagined. If the *condition* is wrong, the correct *position* will also soon be lost. Thus, above everything else, let us seek practical godliness, unworldliness, communion with God and devotion to Christ and His interests. *Only these things will make correct position a witness to the truth and something for the glory of God.*

***Those who have endeavoured to gather on scriptural ground have failed and divisions have resulted. These divisions have hidden the outward expression of the truth of the Church and have consequently given rise to questions about "a circle of meetings." What is the truth as to a circle-of-meetings?***

We must first understand how things were at the beginning of the Church. There were only three things that had a definite status (or standing) — only three distinct, Scriptural entities. These were:

1. The individual saint.

2. The various local assemblies at Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, etc. These local assemblies each bore the character of Christ's body. Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12: 27, JND), "Now, you are Christ's body; " not "the body" as in the King James translation. The whole Church is the body but each assembly bears the character of the body in its own locality. Each local assembly also has its own state (condition) and responsibility before the Lord and may be scrutinized by Him separately from other local assemblies (Rev. 1: 11-3: 22). *In short, each local assembly has a definite status of its own.*

3. *The whole Church on earth at any given moment, which is the one body of Christ, animated by the one Holy Spirit (Eph. 4: 4).*

In what follows, we will refer to these three things as the *individual saint* the *local assembly* and the *whole Church*. Let's now look at a number of points to help answer the above question.

## **Point One**

At the beginning of the Church, when things were still according to the divine Mind, there was no other entity which had any Scriptural status in between the individual saint and the local assembly. The attempt to create smaller circles than the local assembly at Corinth ("I am of Paul, etc.) was sternly rebuked (1 Cor. 1: 11-13, 1 Cor. 3: 1-8). There *were* assemblies in the homes of different saints (Rom. 16: 5, Col. 4: 15, etc.). We don't know whether these were the local assemblies in their localities or

simply a number of saints in some part of a large city meeting thus for conveniences' sake. Maybe those praying in the "house of Mary" (Acts 12: 12) were such an assembly but, if so, it had no status except as being a *part* of "the church (or assembly) which was in Jerusalem" (Acts 11: 22).

Neither was there anything which had a definite Scriptural status of its own in between the local assembly and the whole Church. We do read of the "churches of Galatia" and of "the churches (or possibly "church") . . . throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (Acts 9: 31) — the church or churches within certain geographic limits. But there is no such things as "the church of Galatia" which might serve as a precedent for state-churches such as the church-of-England.

## Point Two

When we look at things today, it isn't too hard to find the individual saint. However, both the local assembly and the whole Church have receded (outwardly) into the realm of abstract-truth. They can not be found in any definite, clear form that can be seen and appealed to.

In the early 1800's, many Christians around the world withdrew from various unscriptural religious and worldly connections to meet as members of Christ's body on the simple ground of the Church of God and its original principles. As a result, there could be seen in various places a definite meeting together of saints who were gathered and formed according to the Scriptural principles of the local assembly. *Yet, they were by no means THE local assembly in their various localities since most believers in those localities were not gathered with them.*

As these local meetings grew in number, they got in touch and sought to enjoy practical fellowship with each other according to the pattern of the apostolic Church. They commended to each other by letter, etc. Thus, just as there were saints meeting locally and acting according to the *principles* of the local assembly (although not THE local assembly), saints also had fellowship with each other world-wide and were thus acting according to the *principles* of the whole Church, although not the whole Church.

Things continued this way for some time. Then Satan worked, and division resulted with its effect of scattering, both as regard to the local meeting walking according to the truth of the local assembly and in regard to the large number of saints walking according to the truth of the whole Church.

Due to the confusion and distress caused by division, some Christians now condemn the thought of saints attempting to walk in the light of the truth of the whole Church. They regard such an attempt as merely maintaining a *circle of meetings*. At the same time, they approve of and support *their* local meeting, even though that meeting is far from being THE local assembly since it is only one of several other meetings in the same locality, each having little or no practical fellowship with each other because of the divisions which have occurred. They then claim that since there is no Scriptural entity in between the local assembly and the whole Church, the remedy for our difficulties is to abandon any idea of a *circle* larger than the little circle of a local meeting. As to anything larger, each meeting and each individual in a meeting must be free to form their own "fellowship" or "circle" as they judge right before the Lord.

It is true that there is nothing Scriptural in between the local assembly and the whole Church *if* the term "the local assembly" means not some little meeting but THE local assembly which, however, has no definite form today. Of course, it is equally true that there is no Scriptural entity in between the individual believer and THE local assembly (but those who advocate the idea that we are considering never stress this fact). But, why not be consistent? The reasoning that forbids saints from having any

clearly-recognized fellowship *generally* with others throughout the world, so that they may walk together according to the truth of the whole Church, is equally valid against a few saints attempting to enjoy any clearly-recognized fellowship *locally* so as to walk according to the truth of THE local assembly. Thus, the reasoning that we are considering would force the conclusion that the whole movement of the early 1800's was a mistake and thus not approved by God.

If we have no authority to walk according to the truth of the whole Church, what authority have we for meeting according to the truth of THE local assembly? Remember that the local assembly today, we may say, is *accidental not essential*: it is provisional in view of the present condition of the Church.\* At the Rapture, every local assembly will instantly cease to be and only the whole Church, comprising all saints from Pentecost to that moment, will remain. *The whole Church is the abiding thing that is connected with the eternal purposes of God.*

Editor's Note: This *accidental-essential* statement simply shows the situation as it presently exists with the breakdown that has come in the Church's profession (which Mr. Hole calls *accidental*). This breakdown is not according to the perfect and flawless aspect of the Church (which Mr. Hole calls *essential*) as seen through God's eyes.

### Point Three

Some may ask whether Matt. 18: 20 is Scriptural authority for a local meeting of saints which may not include all those in the locality. We thankfully believe so. Although this passage is not primarily prophetic of the last days, yet the Lord so framed His words that they give even two or three authority to gather unto His Name in the days of ruin that have come in during His absence.

With equal thankfulness, we believe that 2 Tim. 2: 22 is the Scriptural authority for the purged-saint to walk *with* like-minded saints in a *general* way. That passage is not in a local setting. It was not written to a local assembly but to a gifted servant of Christ. Of course, Timothy must have been in some locality but he did not have a local office (such as an elder) but was a man endowed with gift (which is universal and not local). The "great house" of 2 Tim. 2: 20 illustrates what the professing church (Christendom) was fast becoming. Hence, the whole passage, including v. 22, must be read in a universal sense. Note however that in both Matthew 18 and 2 Tim. 2, a *condition* is found. In Matthew, it is "unto My Name" and in Timothy, it is "out of a pure heart." These clauses are designed to cause exercise-of-heart-and-conscience.

### Point Four

We may also be asked whether we claim that all those saints with whom we enjoy fellowship possess that pure heart and whether all outside lack it, and whether we claim that only those who meet with us locally, gather to His Name. We make no such claims *but* rather make it our aim to *personally* meet *both conditions* while awaiting the coming day-of-review when the Lord will determine the measure in which we have succeeded in our aim. Neither question should frighten us from making it our aim to walk according to the truth of both the local assembly and the whole Church.

### Point Five

We may also be asked to give a clear "Yes" or "No" answer to whether we believe in a *circle-of-meetings*. Our answer is "No" *because we believe in something far greater than a circle-of-meetings — the true Church of God.*

Paul's labours in the first century produced what had the *appearance* of being a-circle-of-Christian-assemblies, yet it was not that because it was more than that: he was being used to bring the body of Christ into clear evidence.

The labours of godly men in the early 1800's also produced what had the *appearance* of being just a little circle of meetings, yet it was not that because they believed that they were being used by God to lead some saints back into practical obedience to the truth of the Church, both in its local and general aspects. Since then, much confusion and division has occurred but we do not desire any different or lesser aim today. Our desire is to walk according to that truth and not to form or maintain a mere circle of meetings.

## Point Six

If we now look at those who claim to have completely abandoned the idea of a circle-of-meetings (in favour of independency, etc.) what do we find? We *find that, in practice, they can not get away from some kind of a circle*. There are so many and such a variety of meetings that however highly-inclusive a believer may be, he can not possibly embrace them all and thus has to be content with a *circle* of some kind. What they *have* abandoned is the idea of collectively settling questions of fellowship in favour of settling them individually. Whether saints meeting here or there should be recognized as gathering in the truth and thus fellowship with, is, they judge, an individual decision no matter how conflicting the consequent decisions may be. In abandoning a circle of meetings, they are abandoning any attempt to obey and practice the truth as to the whole Assembly.

Editor's Note: You may be confused by the seeming contradiction between points 5 and 6. Points looks at a circle from the abstract, *theoretical, doctrinal* side. We do not find a circle in Scripture: only THE local assembly and the whole Church. Thus, our thoughts *and aims* should not be restricted to some circle. But, as seen in Point 6, because all saints won't walk the Scriptural pathway or don't agree with us on something, there are those who are with us and those who aren't. Thus, even though it should not — must not — be our aim, we can not *in practice* get away from the fact of a circle-of-meetings.

## Point Seven

We are keenly aware that there is considerable ground for someone saying that we have so deteriorated from the understanding and practice of the truth that we all have become only just so many circle-of-meetings — just warring factions, each contending for its own view-point-of-truth or its own ecclesiastical actions and decisions. If that were true, the path of faith would be quite clear. A person would have to stand outside of all parties of this sort.

In 1 Corinthians, where the schools-of-opinion were all inside the one assembly, those who are approved would be those who, while excluding evil-doers (as in 1 Cor. 5), moved freely among all saints, entirely above and outside all parties. But today, the situation is much more serious because the *internal* divisions of Corinth have now become *open* splits which, *if not approved by the Lord, are very serious sin*. Thus, today to move among *all* would be to condone all the sin which they represent.

We do not believe that *all* have fallen so low that there is nothing left but warring factions. The considerable exercise that exists in many hearts towards others testifies otherwise. But, if we did think so, we could not adopt the remedy of "intercircle-ism" (like today's inter-denominationalism). If we have become entangled in what has become *only* a circle-of-meetings, let us abandon the circle with

repentance (for repentance always opens "a door of hope") (Rev. 2: 5, 16, 21, Rev. 3: 3, 19) but do not abandon the aim of walking according to the truth of the whole Church in favour of everyone doing, in fellowship-matters, that which is right in his own eyes.

## Point Eight

Lastly, we realize that many things in general have cast much discredit on the truth of the Church and on any attempt to practice this truth. Consequently, there is an increasing tendency for believers to gather together outside of organized denominations, in little groups, often due to the labours of some earnest evangelist. These meetings have links with whatever body of Christians the evangelist is connected with but such links are often weak in the early history of the meeting. We believe, if the opening occurs for it, that special service may be rendered to such believers in instructing them so they may stand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God. But any servant who values fellowship should be careful to act as far as possible in agreement with those with whom he is walking.

***A final point should be raised due to the rise of Eclecticism. Among the ancient Greek philosophers the Eclectics were those who refused to subscribe to any recognized philosophic system but preferred to select certain ideas from various systems and then weld these selected ideas into systems of their own. We will use this word to describe Christians who pick out and bring together the most desirable persons to form a select company. Is it Scriptural to gather out a select company of more desirable and spiritual people from the less desirable and less spiritual people?***

Anyone who is well-informed about the Spirit-led divine movement that began in the early 1800's (which we have mentioned several times) knows that it resulted in the clear recovery and teaching of the truth as to the nature, character, present privileges, responsibility and future destiny of the Church of God. Also, saints were gathered out from many unscriptural systems so that they might assemble in practical recognition of, and in obedience to the truth thus recovered. If any argue that it was the aim of these brethren to gather together all the most select and spiritual to be found in Christendom into one body, their contention must fail in the presence of the still-available abundant writings of that period.

Editor's Note: This godly movement that began world-wide in the early-to-mid 1800's became known as the *brethren-movement* and it rapidly grew. The writings of its God-gifted and godly men such as J. N. Darby, William Kelly, C. H. Macintosh, F. W. Grant, etc; are still widely circulated and read even in denominational circles. Even though often called *Plymouth Brethren*, these brethren (small "b") refuse any titles or names that are not true of all believers. They simply consider themselves to be brethren in Christ who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18: 20) and who are seeking to obey the truth of the Church and the truths of the entire Word of God.

But, what does the Bible say? We believe that Scripture indicates that the only path approved by God for the last days of any dispensation is to return as *far as possible* to the *original principles and practices which characterized the dispensation at its beginning*. The history of past dispensations illustrates this principle, as we will see. God always sets up that which is according to His Mind. Hence, any deviation from His principles involves their corruption. On the other hand, *man's inventions* begin crude and are improved by change.

Thousands of years ago, God made His Mind known through Moses and all was perfect as far as it went. Israel, however, constantly disobeyed. Many prophets were sent to recall them to the things

that God had established at the beginning. For instance, Jeremiah prophesied, "Thus said the Lord, Stand in the ways and see and ask for the old paths where is the good way, and walk in it and you shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6: 16). But Israel refused and consequently went into Babylonian captivity.

Later, under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, many Jews returned to the land. The Persian King Cyrus opened the door for any Jew by saying, "Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem" (Ezra 1: 3). Now, this proclamation had a *selective effect*. Those "whose spirit God had raised" (Ezra 1: 5) were the ones who responded and went up. Undoubtedly these were the most godly Jews but the movement was not *deliberately* eclectic but simply a return to the land and to the knowledge and practice of the Law as given through Moses (Neh. 8: 1-13, Neh. 9: 3, Neh. 10: 29).

The returned-remnant soon spiritually deteriorated in a subtle way. They did not return to idolatry or disregard the "letter" of the Law. Rather, while venerating the letter, they evaded the *spirit* of the Law. They became filled with a proud self-satisfaction at possessing the Law. This deplorable state was exposed by the prophet Malachi. Even then, there were a few who "feared the Lord" (Mal. 3: 16). These were a remnant within the remnant but God told them to "remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statues and ordinances" (Mal. 4: 4). This remnant-of-a-remnant was referred back to *all* the words of God originally given through Moses and reminded that all the Word was for *all* the people of God and not only for themselves.

This was the last word from God in the old dispensation. From it, it is clear that the path-of-God's-will at the end of a dispensation involves a return to the principles that marked it at the beginning, *even if only a few will do it*.

The same thing is found in the New Testament, specially in the closing epistles of Paul, Peter and John. Among Paul's farewell instructions to Timothy was, "Keep by the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted" (2 Tim. 1: 14, JND). He also tells Timothy that *all* Scripture is our only safeguard (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). Peter writes, "I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and of the commandments of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour" (2 Peter 3: 1-2).

John speaks of "that which was from the beginning" and says, "Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son and in the Father" (1 John 2: 24). He also warns, saying, "Whosoever goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ, has not God" (2 John 9, JND).

In general, it *will be* the more enlightened and the more godly saints who will discern and respond to God's original will and purpose for His Church. Those who will discern and obey the instructions of 2 Tim. 2: 16-26 will undoubtedly be among the most spiritually-minded believers *but that is incidental and not the essential feature of such a movement*. The basis of the movement of the early 1800's was and is separation unto righteousness, faith, love, peace, in association with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. *Righteousness* begins by giving God and His Word their proper place of supremacy and authority. *Faith* embraces *all* the revealed will and counsel of God. Thus, the movement we are discussing is not basically an attempt to weld together a certain spiritual class of believers (although such may occur in practice). *It is a movement according to the holiness of God so that there may be something definite that can be seen and appealed to. Its scope-of-obedience is to the whole revealed Word of God, and such obedience is practical righteousness.*

In view of all the above, when meeting with a few saints to the Lord's Name, are we to regard ourselves as an eclectic company banded together by loyalty to certain religious procedures or decisions, or to a testimony that we believe has been entrusted to us, or by a superior mental condition which we think has made us more spiritual than others? Or do we meet as a few saints who value the Lord's Name and desire to acknowledge His authority and desire to walk in practical obedience to the whole truth, thus taking true assembly-ground while awaiting His return?

Now this is not a question of mere theological or academic interest. Very important practical issues depend on it. Our behaviour and actions of an assembly-character are much influenced by our answer. Misunderstandings on this point have been the cause of many sad mistakes in the past.

The matter of discipline well-illustrates the differences between the two positions in the above question. There is considerable instruction on discipline in the Epistles where discipline of varying degrees of severity is commanded, culminating as a last resort in some cases in *excommunication* (which is really the admission that all proper discipline has failed to stop the evil).

From the beginning of the Church's history, there has been weakness in its midst. The epistles show us that the churches founded by Paul were not models of all that an assembly should be but contained many "babes," many who were "carnal," many whose hands were hanging down and whose knees were feeble and whose feet were likely to be "turned out of the way." Also, there were "unprofitable and vain talkers," men who preached Christ "of envy and strife" and even Judaizing-teachers who tried to bring saints back into the bondage of the Law and of Judaism. Thus, it is not surprising that today, whenever saints gather together on assembly ground, a similar state of affairs is soon manifested in their midst. What is to be done?

The answer is simple for those who stand on eclectic-ground. Anyone who doesn't agree with their eclectic-association is thus undesirable and to be put out if possible. For instance, a brother can not agree with a certain ecclesiastical action or decision and he protests against it. As a result, he can not be allowed to remain in fellowship even though, having relieved his conscience by his protest, he is prepared to do so. Or someone else is unable to accept some much-advocated teaching as a sound and balanced setting forth of Scriptural truth. Since the eclectic-association is committed to this teaching, there can be no rest until he is removed from the "within" to the "without." Thus, *excommunication*, whether directly or by many underhanded and devious ways, becomes the remedy for all ills in an eclectic-system. *If you are not completely of their system, you place is outside.* This is both extremely simple and has the outward appearance of great holiness. It calls for no exercise. It doesn't try anyone's patience. There is no expression of the grace of Christ. It appeals to man's sense of his own importance and it allows freedom to the will of everyone who is a part of the eclectic-system. It is therefore not surprising that *eclecticism* has become well established in many minds and that some seem incapable of appreciating anything else.

However, the question is not so easy for those standing on assembly-ground. The very basis of their position is that the principles of the assembly are to govern them. Now, the assembly is the place where the *Lord administers* and the *Holy Spirit* operates (1 Cor. 12: 4-11). It is the place where the inspired Word of God rules and directs. In Acts 15: 13-29, (JND) we read, "Simon has related . . . with this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written . . . wherefore I judge . . . it seemed good to us, having arrived at a common judgment." *The assembly is the place where God's will as expressed in His Word is the only thing that counts.* Hence, it is never permissible to enforce a discipline that is more rigorous than Scripture directs. The question is not "What suits our company?" but "what is suitable for the house of God to which we belong and what is according to the principles in which we desire to

walk?" That question can only be answered in the light of the Word of God.

All this calls for much exercise so that Scripture may be rightly applied. Our patience will often be tried because we will find cases for which we have no clear Scriptural instructions. We will then have to wait in prayer on the Lord so that His will may be known, rather than taking the law into our own hands and acting without Him. Grace will continually be called for. All will be made to feel their own nothingness and mere self-will will be rebuked. After all, authority to use discipline in God's house only comes from God Himself. As gathered unto the Lord's Name, we have authority (Matt. 18: 18-20) but we can only act in His Name when we are directed by His Word.

Eclecticism has often rushed in and acted where those who tremble at God's Word have feared to tread because they didn't have authority to do so. The eclectic-company or its cause had to be defended so they felt that drastic action was needed and if they had no authorization from the Lord, they used some passage with remote or obscure application to the case. Thus, again and again, that which has been called the discipline-of-God's-house has only been used to support personal or party ends — *a very grievous sin!* By such acts, eclecticism betrays itself as being just plain sectarianism in a very pretentious disguise.

## Closing Remarks

When saints, however few or weak, really gather on the ground of God's Assembly, they walk according to the holiness of God's house as given in His Word. Yet, they never disconnect their hearts and affections from the whole Church of God. They acknowledge Christ as their Head above and the Holy Spirit as their Power here on earth. They know that they never need to go beyond the instructions of the Word to preserve that which is of Him (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). In fact, they are not greatly occupied with "saving" a cause or "the testimony" because they understand that the *Lord* knows how to maintain to the end His own cause and to preserve His own testimony. Their concern is to obey the whole Word of God. By such obedience, they insure salvation for both themselves and for those who may hear them (1 Tim. 4: 15-16).

Like the Psalmist, we do well if we can say, "Lord, my heart is not haughty nor my eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in great matters or in things too high for me" (Ps. 131: 1). There are great matters which are far too high for us and which the Lord holds in His own hands. He carries on His own work. He directs His testimony and preserves it when necessary. He orders and controls His servants. However, when well-meaning men attempt to do these things which they were never asked to do, they usually end up by failing in what God *did* intend them to do!

God wants us to do the less-pretentious but more practical work of walking in obedience to His revealed Mind. We are left here to obey the truth which is a sufficiently great and high matter for us. All truth has come out in Christ: He is the truth. All truth is revealed for us in Scripture, so the Word is truth. The Holy Spirit is given to us so we may know and obey the truth: He is the Spirit of truth. Thus, may we have enough grace to direct our spiritual energy in this direction of obeying the truth!

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