

Remarks as to "The Assembly of God,"
in Its Rule and Mode of Self-Regulation.

from Memorials of the ministry of G. V. Wigram.

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In this paper I take it for granted that my reader has learnt from Scripture the elementary truths about the (so-called Church or) assembly of God upon earth; that he knows that it was formed, first, at Pentecost, on the descent of the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father; who thus made good the power and testimony promised by the Lord to the apostles, when it was shed abroad by Jesus as already made Lord and Christ in heaven; and that the glad tidings, which accompanied it, were but fruits of expiation accomplished, and righteousness established in heaven for each individual believer (2 Cor. 5: 21); viz., to as many as believed and repented, present forgiveness of sins made known and the gift of the Holy Spirit. There were two new things to be received — God's dealings with the individual believers, and then the place of such in the assembly.*

*The New Jerusalem in glory will be, likewise, an assembly of persons dwelt in by God and the Lamb.

This new company (in all about three thousand souls, gathered out by the preaching of Peter and John at Jerusalem), became "God's assembly on earth," called out by the power of the Holy Spirit, to wait on the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, and to await Himself coming back. The characteristic marks of each individual in the assembly, and of itself as a whole (given at the close of Acts 2, 4) are not those common to fallen humanity, but are divine and heavenly.

My desire is to call attention to some things connected with the internal characteristics of this assembly and its unity,* things which did and were to characterise it in its activities and sufferings. I want to consider (not so much the external marks of it, but) what the unity of the Spirit in itself is, and what betokens this in its existence and actions. The term "Holy Catholic Assembly," if rightly understood, is simple and correct enough; *holy*, as set apart in itself to God, which the assembly as a whole, and the individuals also who form it, are; and catholic or universal (that is, in howsoever many places any parts of it may be found, they are all parts of *one whole*). This results from its unity being a unity which is inseparable — the unity of the Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in every part of it makes it one. But this definition does not suffice to guard against the wanderings of men's minds. Perhaps, if we added, "gathered through faith, and by the Holy Spirit, from among Jews and Gentiles unto the Lord Jesus Christ on the throne in heaven, during the time of the Lord's being earth-rejected," it might be better. For many there are that look at the holiness and catholicity of that congregation, or convocation, which was called to be one on earth, and will be one when Israel as a whole shall be saved; and it will be under the Lord Jesus (not then absent, but) come again as the king that cometh in Jehovah's name. The one who is now espoused to Him will then have been owned as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and be with Him in His court on high in heavenly resurrection glory, the new Jerusalem. But the land of Israel, married to Jehovah, will have upon earth its city "Jehovah Shammah" (the Lord is there); nor Jews (my people), nor Gentiles on earth, will then be in resurrection bodies.† For Jews and Gentiles will not be blended then, as now, in one. Such is God's doctrine about His Church or assembly. Reader, do you know and own this assembly?

*The various titles given to this assembly in Scripture carry with them, and present to our minds,

each of them, a unity (as in Ephesians, where it is looked at as the Body (Eph. 1), and (Eph. 5) as the Bride of the Christ, who was Himself its already glorified Head; and, note it, the *head* of a body, and the husband "*head of the wife*" — give two different meanings to this one word *head*, and *head over all things* gives a third; (all of them are true of Christ); either as the habitation of God, or as the people of the Lord — His flock (Peter's great subject) passing now through the earth to heaven; or as the family of God (John's), of which Christ is Firstborn among many brethren, or as the temple of God on earth (1 Cor.) in contrast with the heathen temples. Each of these figures gives the idea of a unity. But how different a thing is this Church or Assembly, from what men mean when they now speak of the Church, or the congregations upon earth.

†The New Jerusalem above and over the other (Isa. 4: 5) will be "*the court*" in heavenly places to, and of the *kingdom* upon earth. The Christ has titles of glory; some of them belong to the people who are to be in heavenly places with Him, and others which pertain to the people who are to be displayed in earthly places. For the former see the note at the beginning; and for the latter, during the millennial kingdom upon earth, there are such as king of Israel, head of the Gentiles, etc. The court and the kingdom under one Head, as well as all the outlying subordinate dependencies.

We are not "the subjects of a King" as they will be, for the word that answers to "*king*" is "*subject*." But we speak of the *members* of a human body as being partakers of the same life and nature as the *head*. Ours, now, while suffering with Christ the glorified Head, it is to be "one Spirit with the Lord." Have I the Spirit of God and Christ and of sonship? I am then one in the Spirit with the Lord. Am I a son of God? Christ on high has not been ashamed to call such "brethren," and, as individuals, all such are in relationship, the one with the other; for the same Holy Spirit dwells in each of us (1 Cor. 6: 19) and the same relationship to the Lord and to God is common to all. But if God in His goodness puts any of these *together* in a place, they are, and ought to be, *in that place* a part of His one assembly. The son or child is now *in a family*.

The one assembly of God on earth has the Holy Spirit dwelling in it (1 Cor. 3: 16, 17; 2 Cor. 6: 16), though with somewhat different results than the individual believer. It has the Spirit for its power in all its activity and responsibility as an assembly, as also has the individual believer for his own life and responsibility. This as to the assembly is spoken of as *the unity of the Spirit*, which all are exhorted *to strive to keep*,* "in the uniting bond of peace." The Agent (or He who in the Godhead is called the Holy Spirit) is He who first formed the believer, and then the assembly for Christ, and He alone is the only power therein. For the assembly to suffer or to act as it should, He must be the spring and originator of its submission or activity, as He was of its very being. Come down from on high, and being God, and having taken up His abode in the assembly — no wonder that He should take the lead in all actions and all subjection of the company, He is here as witnessing to Christ. His motives are divine; and He works from, and around, and to Jesus, who is Lord and Christ, and who is on the throne. It is Himself (the Holy Spirit) who wrote the Scriptures too. And that instinct, too, of divine life — which (though never contrary to what is *written*) is yet of higher birth than conscience — it is He who forms it in us.

*The unity of the Spirit is a self-existing unity, for it is God who, dwelling in the assembly, makes this one. But this may be forgotten, or we may (through selfishness and worldliness) not keep it. "The uniting bond of peace" is the only way of keeping it known to God's children.

I cannot doubt, first, that everything which springs up in the individual believer, or in the assembly in its collective character, which is not from Him (the Spirit of God) will tend to lead us down either to self-judgment or to shame; or, secondly, that whatsoever leads up to fellowship with

God by the way, from the starting-point to the end, working in us the being willing and the acting energetically of His own good pleasure (which is our full blessing in the end), is ours through Him down here. He is our keeper all through. For there is no origin or source of good but God. And all that God gives us He gives in and by Christ, while the Holy Spirit is working in us.

On the one hand there is a uniting power to the individual believer; namely, fellowship with the Father and with the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit, who reveals the things of God and His Son to and in each, and so produces also fellowship among them through the objects of *the faith* common to them all, on the other hand, it is of the assembly that its unity is called "the unity of the Spirit."*

*It was true of all who acted upon Peter's sermon (in Acts 2), that each of them received, and knew that he himself had forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thereupon openly entered into the fellowship of the apostles.

Having called attention to the individual believer, and also to the assembly in which he is placed by God as one part of a whole,* I would now speak of the assembly as under the guidance down here of the Holy Spirit, who presents Christ on high as the object of faith, and the polar-star in our journeyings. And the assembly has to seek to know and to do the will of the Lord Jesus, and in order that it may be able to do so, it must watch against everything that would grieve the Spirit, and so leave itself in dimness of sight and in weakness. I repeat it, Christ is the object of faith always, as God presents Him to us. And the Spirit is the power in us while our hearts and minds are turned to the Lord Jesus, and we reckon ourselves dead to sin, and alive unto God.

*The difference between a soldier when looked at as an individual, or as in his regiment as part of the standing army of a country, may help some minds herein.

Let me ask here, ere I go on, do you, my reader, know that God looks upon you as an integral part of His assembly, where Himself dwells on earth? It is so written of each believer, and of the assembly too, and each should know it and act upon it.

Some may say, But *how will* God show his mind? To this I answer, Did God ever find any difficulty in revealing to any one, or in leaving on the mind of an Abraham, a Jacob, a Job, a Saul, etc., or on any assembly whatsoever, that it was unquestionably *Himself* who had been with them? In Old Testament times the mind of God was revealed to His servants often with a "Thus saith the Lord." From the time of the Lord, revelation of new truth has flowed through, but from within, man (the book of the Revelation excepted). Peter's, and John's, and Paul's epistles were largely the result of their watchings of things around them: the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and giving them God's view of everything, and the want of harmony between them and the truth revealed to them. And by the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, God has given forth all His mind about things down here where we are, and up there where He is, and what is to come to pass too; so that *we have* His mind, in these writings of the Holy Spirit, given to us, — and we may "be taught of God." God and Enoch; God and Noah; God and Abraham; God and David; God and Paul — the living and true God and the feeble vessel, knew one another; and the guardian Vicar (the Holy Spirit) down here, and the guardian, our Lord Jesus Christ on high, are thoroughly acquainted with each dependent and obedient one down here. Do you, indeed, live to Christ and live to God in heaven, and know nothing of what pleases and honours them, and of what displeases them, because contrary to the written Word? The Holy Spirit wrote the Acts and epistles, and knows where, therein, everything is to be found, and how to apply it to conscience and spiritual instinct. No; the difficulty is not *there*, but must exist, if anywhere, in our own selves.

If I can say, "It is written," I, having found the written Word to be the seed of life eternal to me,

bow to it. It judges me, and it traces for me the path of life, and, as when it was the instrumental means of quickening me into life, it judged my death and sins, so, now that I have eternal life, it shows me the pathway of blessing, and judges every departure therefrom; the Spirit of God using it upon a heart humbled in God's presence. As to everything else, I must judge it, ere I receive it. This, to every believer, makes the Bible to be a peculiar book, and no book like it. God gave blessing to Adam until he should eat of one tree. (Gen. 2: 17.) God was with His word; Adam ate, and was judged. I, a man, cannot judge God, or His word; it judges me, and makes manifest to me the real character of everything. The same is true as to the declaration of Gen. 3: 15. The Scriptures also ("it is written") tell us (Acts 1 and 2) of the coming down of the Holy Spirit from the Lord Jesus Christ on the throne; and of His setting up, by the preaching of new truths, an entirely new system of things among God's people upon earth, a new system in a new people — a new system of government and worship. And these new things were to abide *in Christ's name* — until He comes again. The Spirit was to abide, and is found so abiding. (Rev. 22: 16, 17.) - So I bow to God and His word, and acknowledge that the Spirit is abiding down here still. God is not now between the cherubim, but dwells in His holy assembly upon earth; and when Christ comes back, those that are alive and remain (1 Thess. 4: 17) will be glorified without seeing death.

I may now refer to the differences of spiritual powers from the spirit of man, and how their workings make manifest themselves and their sources and their characters. When a demon or demons took possession of men (see, alas! many instances of this in the gospels), it or they seem to have made nothing of the human beings they entered into. Them they used as but mediums by which they would express their own malicious, murderous, lying character, and their delight in displaying man and creation degraded in God's own land. The human vessel lost all its individuality, and power, and character; the demon displaying his. But in contrast with this, the apostles and prophets and faithful, taken possession of by, and filled with the Spirit of God, did not lose *their* individuality, or power, or character. They had to act under known responsibility and order, however much the glory displayed might surpass themselves, or the weakness of themselves be made manifest thereby. Through the agency of the Spirit they might be, and were, lifted up in ecstasy beyond themselves as unto the Lord; or brought down in sober judgment to care for God's people and things down here, etc. The proofs of this are many. But observe it, not Peter, nor Paul, nor John ever failed to read aloud the mind of God and of Christ about persons or circumstances. Walking in the Spirit, their souls were up to the Lord Jesus, and in obedience to and dependence upon God, they could see and read His mind as to everything in the assembly, and did so. (See Acts, and the case of Simon Acts 8; and Acts 13: 10, and Acts 16: 16-19; and 1 John 4: 1-6, and 1 John 2: 19; Acts 5 again.)

I am NOT an apostle or a prophet, you will say. No; but *I have* their writings in my hand written by the Holy Spirit; God has commended them to me and to us, and (in 2 Tim. 3) shows the sufficiency of them. And our Lord (John 6: 45) is our warrant for trusting God to be the teacher to us of His own word. And who is it, according to what is written, that acts in individual believers and on the assembly? Whose is the power that works in, and that works out to be willing, and to act energetically but God? and so also as to the edification, government, and service of the assembly. Scripture assigns all down here to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. (See 1 Cor. 12, 13, 14, as to the edification; and 1 Cor. 5, 6, as to government and service.) It was, at times indeed, through an apostle, or an evangelist, or a prophet as a medium, but always based upon the word of God, and applied by God to the individual. But the assembly and all in it have the responsibility of His being in it, the power of order and of edification, and they have the ability to act, He being ungrieved, and having God for their guide, and the interests of the Lord Jesus in view. The assembly of God was *set up* and *ruled over* by the Spirit of God, through inspired apostles; its doctrine given to it through New Testament prophets; its glad tidings heralded, at

first, by evangelists, and then by any loyal-hearted ones led thereunto by love and circumstances. Those scattered abroad (Acts 8: 1) went everywhere preaching the Word. God's dwelling-place in Israel, until that particular Pentecost, had been between the cherubim, first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. From that particular day of Pentecost, He, without at once breaking up the temple or the nation (so long-suffering is He), took up with and put forward another temple. The assembly formed at that very Pentecost — there would He dwell — and there He did dwell. Reader, do you really accredit this, and act upon it, that the living and true God, who made heaven and earth, has not left the earth, nor left it without a dwelling-place, a place of abode for Himself? And that is the assembly of God, the dwelling-place of His Spirit down here. So it is, so He does, and this makes the assembly of God a very blessed, and yet a very awful place to be in, and be connected with. As a living stone does God say that you are an integral part of God's house on earth? But the responsibilities and the privileges of this cannot be avoided — the one rests upon us, and the others, freely given to us, lie at the basis of the responsibilities. Oh that we knew more of this, the true God dwelling in His assembly, and that we might walk in the power of the faith of it. God has not left the earth; He dwells in the midst of His own holy assembly, and abides with it, the living and true God. What a blessed reality, if known to any!

But God being here, He *must* be the spring of all that should be done in any assembly, as a part of the one great assembly, and the power and end of it all too. So far I am clear.

I come now to the distinctive peculiarities of the assembly.

Its constitution is unique. Nothing on earth is or can afford a precedent as to it. First, as to the standing of an individual in it, and then of his knowing how to blend his standing as an individual with the standing of the assembly as a whole.

When Paul wrote to an individual believer (even about the work of the Lord in the assemblies for which he had engaged a Timothy or a Titus) his introduction wishes them "grace, mercy, and peace;" just as when he speaks of himself as an individual, remembering the law of sin and death in his members, he writes (1 Tim. 1 - 5): "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (or first). Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy;" and in like manner, looking at himself individually, he could say (and did say), "I do so and so lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." As descendants of the first Adam, this is the aspect in which we are set, in mercy; though able, through the faith, to say, thanks to the humiliation of our Lord, we have been crucified together with Him, died together with Him, and been buried together with Him. (Rom. 6) So that as He died, then as to sin once and now liveth unto God, so we also can now reckon ourselves to be indeed dead to sin but alive unto God. But still it is the same truth, though the one looks at the character of God — mercy; and the other shows out the way in which the Lord Jesus in His humiliation has met everything that was contrary to God and us, on God's behalf, so that guilt is all gone. Still it was God meeting upon Christ, in judgment, what we were or had of our own from Adam the first. What was old and of us was met. When, on the other hand, he addressed assemblies, his words are "grace and peace." For the assembly as such had no existence apart from a quickened, risen, and ascended Christ, and, as Paul writes (Eph. 2: 1-6), God who is rich in mercy (v. 4), drawing out of the Ephesian pit, you sinners, and out of the Jewish pit, us children of wrath, quickened us together with the Christ, raised us up together, and made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.* Here, it is what is altogether new and in Christ. These are matters of faith to him who receives that which is written.

*As to the anointed man and what was in Him (Eph. 1: 10; Col. 1: 20), the counsel of God about Him, as revealed to us was from before the world (was), and the new heavens and new earth were then foreseen and appointed. Partakers of His life, one Spirit with Him, seated in heavenly places in Him,

etc., and the whole of the assembly-doctrine looks forward to what *shall be*, and is all found secured in Him; and God Himself will make it good for Him. The elements which God will work out through the cross and death of the Christ, unto that eternal glory, entrusted to man at Pentecost, man has, as ever, failed to hold. Satan, the world, and self-confidence, have turned Christianity into Christendom. But, if we think of the assembly, it is God's assembly, responsible to Him as to its fruits, and, alas! its abuse of the grace given. There the living members of Christ's body are, and ought to be, by faith, found and fashioned by grace.

Now each in the assembly of God, at first, had to know and carry with him these two truths; the one, as to himself as an individual, "God has had mercy and compassion upon me, my sins are all forgiven me, and I have received the gift of the Spirit from the Lord Jesus, and am a temple of God; and the other, as to the place in which I find myself, it is the assembly of God, the habitation down here of God through the Spirit, who had come down to bear testimony to Christ." The holding and rightly using both these truths is safe, and the oversight of one or the other is a cause of weakness both to individuals and to the assembly. As we shall see.

It is a serious error to speak or pray about God's holy assembly as nothing but an assembly of poor weak sinners. Looked at as God's holy assembly, *that* is not the truth of Scripture; and, on the other hand, Paul, as in the assembly, never forgot the mercy which rested upon him as an individual. The mercy keeps the conscience clear amid all the movements of sin within, and the soul is thus free to go forward, in the power of the new life which it has in Christ Jesus, in all holiness. These can never, on this side of the glory, be safely separated.

The apostles had been formed for the testimony by the descent of the Holy Spirit; the assembly was brought into existence by the testimony to the Lord by the apostles.

Paul shows us the sort of people who were gathered.

Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things, and things despised, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are. God's object was that no flesh should glory in His presence. For the gospel was the gospel of the cross of Christ, and these were fruits of faith in it. To preach it with wisdom of words would have been to make it of none effect; it was the power of God to salvation. God would destroy the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent, and, by salvation by the cross, He made foolish the world's wisdom, even as also by the foolishness of preaching He saved those that believed. But herein God's power and wisdom stood out in relief, and no flesh could glory in His presence; glorying could alone be in Him, and joy in what He had provided in the Saviour that had been crucified. How do the power, and wisdom, and grandeur of that which was of God shine out! For the cross of Jesus — measure of man's wickedness, and end of Christ's humiliation — to contain the only salvation of His murderers! And if Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God, and the Holy Spirit were to be displayed in God's assembly, we see that those in it had no light or wisdom or power of their own to display or boast in.

A foolish, silly, stupid sheep,* each and every one of them, and each one, too, had been lost as a runaway from the owner, and had had a wandersome nature of its own, besides the injuries it had sustained while wandering.

*An amateur sheep-owner (his own shepherd) told me he could find no creature so stupid as a sheep. It is said, too, that such a thing as wild sheep are not known to exist

God has one flock and one Shepherd. There is but one assembly. It is made up of all the smaller ones, and comprises them all. He has a trustworthy Shepherd, now on high, the Lord Jesus the Christ, and has also down here One who acts as guardian for Him and them, the sheep of His pasture. While the sheep under Him down here are subject to Him, they ever look up to the Lord Jesus, their Shepherd, their Guardian, there on high; and, forasmuch as their Guardian down here, and their guardian Shepherd up there, are both of one, and have but one mind, the sheep, if subject and dependent, follow out His footsteps in the pathway which Himself trod when He was down here. For will and ability to do so they have that other guardian, the Holy Spirit, with them.

As to blessing, they whom Peter knew in the assembly all came in after repentance, made willing by the Lord, through forgiveness of sin, and the gift to them of the Holy Spirit, to become dependent and obedient.

Questions might and did arise about their practical consistency with these truths, and their fellowship with the assembly of God. If any did submit and walk as the apostles walked, it was a blessed fruit of the Spirit's keeping. If any swerved from the narrow path, and walked as men and the world around them, they, in so doing, were led away by him that mastered them — Satan. But the Spirit of God was in them (if, indeed, they had believed unto eternal life in Christ Jesus), and He was in the assembly too. The Holy Spirit being thus with them and in the assembly, the word of the Lord was not, could not be, bound.

Each has to be, so far as he can, the bearer of the Father's name which is upon himself and the rest; and so his brother's keeper; and in the assembly each has his part in the responsibility of God's honour and glory, being connected with the assembly. No one is deterred from using the Word, if he can do so as in the Spirit. Man's will and mind, and energy, have no place to be allowed to them in that scene. What is God's will and mind? Where are we, each of us who are in the assembly, if sin be allowed? How shall we, as those that have eternal life and live to Christ, meet His mind in the matter? What, Lord, wilt thou have me to do? And what are God's thoughts about the assembly as having evil in it? These would be godly thoughts; if any evil appeared in anyone in it, and they would be in harmony with the written Word, and, as I should say, have been brought by the Holy Spirit to mind. If I discovered evil at work in myself, I ought to purge out the leaven. If another discovered it in me, I should lay the matter before the Lord, and in His light discern all about it, and act accordingly.

So, if Paul had to withstand Peter to the face, it was to be done in *the Spirit* and not in the flesh; and Peter had then to act as with God. In some cases two or three might go with the one; and if well chosen, they are often a help; for both conscience and instinct are often roused and strengthened by the presence of the faithful. The matter is still in private. I am aiming to get one awake, or into self-judgment. Have I or we as individuals succeeded? Blessed success! the matter stops. Have we failed? Is leaven among us? It will spread. Is it spreading itself to others? Is the assembly in danger of becoming a hiding-place for sin? I may mention it to the godly walkers. But if it is really sin and leaven it must, if not met otherwise, come before the assembly; that is, if the Spirit's mind, as given in the written Word, is to be followed. In all the steps referred to above, I may have acted in dependence upon Christ on high as Head of the assembly, and may have done so with judgment of myself, and in lowliness of mind. But if all has failed, then I must appeal to the assembly as that which through the presence of the Spirit has both responsibility and power. The heart and affections, the mind and the intelligence of the Lord Jesus, are there in His Holy Spirit.

Now, I beg you to observe that if in some sense the assembly seems to take the form of a court of trial, it is a court of a most peculiar kind, and its mode of action and objects are unlike those of any

other court, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, *there am I in the midst of them.*" Christ the Lord of all looks down on them from above, and His Spirit is there among them; and the first question is *not* about the individual who has failed, much less of what punishment he is to bear. No; but what does God and Christ think of the assembly in this matter; and what of any individuals who being in the assembly have had to do with the grief? It is a solemn question, for individuals and for the assembly too, whether or not the spirit and mind, bearing and aim, of the action of individuals and of the assembly are in harmony with those of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, note it well, the sin being plain and evident — so far as there is a trial of any one — the first questions are, not, Who did this sin, and How is it to be punished; but, Are we compromised to God's mind, according to His written word, in all this as an assembly? and are we, by silence, to compromise the honour and the name of God? And then each individual, instead of having (horrid thought) to vote against another man, has to humble himself, and see whether he himself may not have been heedless as to God and Christ and the Spirit, and as to God's assembly, so as to have given occasion to the adversary, and through negligence and want of spirituality (which might have prevented the evil) be blameworthy. The mind has to rise up above itself, through faith and the Spirit, to God, and His mind and word, which judges man, and all his ways and thoughts. The honour, too, of being in such an assembly in its present dignity (habitation of God) and destiny, and having forgotten it, may have to be thought of. Not till then can any of the assembly, or itself, be justified in, and fit to speak of, the person who has sinned. And then, too, this is arrived at, not as though self were above the conduct of the failed one, but as forced by God and His word — self-judged as an individual; and then the assembly, having cared for God's name and honour, which it carries and must vindicate, it has to deal with the channel by which the leaven was first introduced, but always with salvation in its heart and mind.

The assembly should have the mind and heart, thoughts and affections, of Christ Himself in it; for it has His Spirit, and is inseparable from Himself.

The Saviour God rests in His love upon the Man at His right hand on high. That Man's eyes, in all His perfection, look down on us in love, but in holy all-revealing power. Dwelt in by the Holy Spirit, we in God's assembly have to bring all our ways and doings under those eyes of our Lord, shining out their rays of light; and whilst looking unto Him we know that all, as to ourselves and the assembly, have a bearing upon the honour of the name of the Saviour God, one way or another.

If the differences peculiar to the assembly of God, which distinguish it from every other association upon earth are not seen, everyone must fail in the attempt to live in it properly, and to partake of the sufferings incidental to it, and to carry out its activities. Its essential distinctive peculiarity is, that God the Holy Spirit dwells in it to animate it in all its parts, and to direct and regulate it as something dear to Christ Jesus, who is on the throne in heaven. It is God's habitation on the earth. What other assembly but it, can be called by Him who is its all-pervading Spirit to walk worthy of these its characteristics.

Though I have rested most on the action of the assembly in the cases of failure, what I have said applies equally to every part of its life and responsibilities down here, active or passive. The mind of God alone has to be met.

It is clear that every company must have a government and principles of its own, if it is to continue in well-being and to thrive. The object of these, and mode of action, will tell out its character, and to whom it belongs; and all that flows forth from it will manifest relationship with the same. And so it is with God's assembly. Dwelt in by the Holy Spirit, in the world though not of it, on the earth, and passing from heaven's side of the cross on to the Lord returning upon the cloud of glory — it is of God;

and its calling is, to show out, in its walk here below, the privileges grace has bestowed upon it, the same character and walk as did the Lord its head, and the hope of glory. It is in time, and has a course to run in time; but it is of eternity and for everlasting. It bears upon it as united to the Lord Jesus Christ, the name of the Lord Jesus — spite of world, and flesh, and Satan. Of what other company can these things be said? Are we awake to these things? Has the unity of the Spirit its right place in our souls? Do we see that each assembly is but a part of the one whole? that its walk depends upon the Spirit and Our subjection to His written Word? That it is He, in His offices and working, who alone could have kept it up to its responsibilities; and would have done so, had it but honoured the Lord Jesus, and so walked in the Spirit. And who now is sufficient under Christ to put us who escaped professedly at the Reformation into a path and walk which, amid all the ruin around, would have led, and may yet lead, us to be to the glory of God in the little while till Christ shall come. Yes, that would have been the gain, had the Scriptures, then afresh put into man's hand, been studied, and had we all been taught therein of God.

If I take other companies acting under kings and rulers, the army and navy, the law and the church (so-called), schools, the prison and reformatory, the hospital and lunatic asylum, etc. etc.; all these are quite different from God's assembly; are of quite another kind; have another mode of working; another order of things, and have another *level* of things too. They are of this world and for it; earthly and not heavenly; for time, and have no eternity. The very best things of Caesar's they may be, into whose hand God (not Christ) has put the sword of government,

A colonel of a regiment,* a commander of a ship, the chief officer of a prison, or a schoolmaster — none of them originated the company under him, or supposes for a moment that he can either inspire those under him with his own mind, or thus carry them with him. The position he is in gives him authority to guide outwardly. Let each of them act upon the laws and principles laid down for those in their official spheres. But if any use their own earthly position as a precedent in God's assembly, he is (though unconscious of it, and, perhaps, doing it through ignorance) guilty of dishonouring God and His assembly. He is a prelate, self-appointed, and gets into the position of being Lord over God's heritage. Caesar's duty, and the magistrate's, is "not to bear the sword in vain." *The chiefest and most useful man in God's assembly has to be the will-less servant and burden-bearer for all, under Christ.* There will be also, where the assembly is in spirit carrying out its Lord's mind, a congruity or consistency traceable in what it does with that which is in God's mind and Word. Impatience and a restless seeking to be quick do not accord with, "He that believeth shall not make haste."† Paul's mind was decided enough as to what had to be done (1 Cor. 5) but he gave the assembly time to wake up out of its criminal slumber. If any seek for evidence, let them remember that God the Holy Spirit is Himself in the assembly. If the action has commenced with God Himself, what place has mere *suspicion*? Moral evidence and legal are very different. The former is to heart and conscience, the latter to mentality. A looking for unity of *consent* instead of a general conviction of *conscience* would soon show itself, and is of nature. God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. And this I must say, that it is a very solemn thing for one with a sinful nature still in him, though having found mercy and been saved by grace, to have to do with the putting away of one who has failed to walk worthily of the Lord, and to have to do it in His name and presence. If it does not humble us down into self-judgment, and judgment of all our own ways, it will harden heart and conscience fearfully. And we do well to consider our own selves, and to be softened before Him who alone has preserved us. But if the Holy Spirit be in the assembly, sin must be thrust out of it, and with it the sinner too, if he loves it better than God and His own place in God's house, and prefers to be put out of the house to the giving up of his sin. God and sin abide not under the same roof; and this is well rolled in upon our own souls in every act of excommunication. For Christ's honour and God's and the Holy Spirit's it must be done; and for

our own too, and for the sake of the failed one, and of the world around. But still it is a very solemn, humbling, and heart-searching duty — imperative duty though it be — and, be it remarked, the sooner God's name is really cared for, the sooner does His saving power and presence show itself.

*An officer whose regiment had been his pride was at a large meeting of believers (from three to eight hundred present). He came to me and asked, "What in this? There is a constraint and a control over this whole meeting? Is this the presence in power of the Holy Spirit? I know what it was to have my regiment, as one, well up in my hand; but this is quite another sort of thing. I do not understand it, and never saw such a thing before."

†Observe it. Between the announcement that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3: 15) and the full accomplishment of it (Rev. 20: 10) seven thousand years run their course. God needs not to make haste. In this case His glory needed delay. On the other hand, sometimes He acts so soon as the ground of His acting is before the people of His love — as in the cases of Achan, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira. He that is led of God, as was Moses (Ex. 32 and 33), may be quick in interceding when with God in the mount, and quick in judging the people on his descent from it. In Paul there was quickness enough in announcing God's thoughts about covering over incest; but he had also a God-possessed patience to leave to the assembly time for it to learn and do God's mind. Who is sufficient for these things? God alone. But He will reveal, to those that are His, His mind and His time for action.

Observe, too, while a man may take hours to write out what he has learnt from God's Word; and, while a soul without God can see nothing aright of God, the moment it is quickened, what a change. The dull Samaritan woman could see nothing at first; but what a change when she knew Him who had been talking with her: "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did — is not this the Christ!" and more than this, for she had intuitively dropped into the wake of his mind — for she went to call the Samaritans to come out and see the wonderful One.

Coming up, as we all are, out of the depths of ignorance from the (so-called) reformation, when God in His good providence gave us back the Bible (alas! how little have any of us fully searched its contents) - I judge that God would have us very patient the one with the other as to our want of intelligence, and as to our want of power also* to know what is written, and also how *to communicate* it the one to the other. How patient has He been towards us! As patient as powerful! Nor has He left us to our own complacency and self-sufficiency, but is bearing with us, and seeking still to lead us on. Look up to heaven, no change has taken place in God since Pentecost. No change in Christ. We are in the same way the assembly has been in since the beginning; onward, each and all, from the cross of Calvary until we meet the Lord coming for us. And down here the Spirit and the truth are just what they were at the beginning. May we learn and be guided, as Peter, John and Paul each was, to walk, in his own day and sphere, surely led by the Spirit, and under God and the very eyes of the Lord Jesus.

*Though ignorance and want of power may both be sinful. The former, if we have the book in our hands, and the latter, if the Spirit of God has not been looked to as God's provision for the believer.

Paul was in grace given to us as a model man; one in whom we might see *how far* a man of like passions with ourselves could, down here, follow out the life of the perfect One. From his conduct in 1 Cor. 5 we may learn much. For as formed, and led, and sustained by the Holy Spirit, Paul lived to Him who had given Himself for him; and had died for him, in order that he Paul, constrained by Christ's love to him and His people, might live to Him. And thus he lived to God; God had *the first* place with Paul through Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit's power. The assembly was to him God's assembly, standing in His wondrous grace and favour; and God and Christ ministered to it grace and peace; for it

as an assembly points onward to the glory of the New Jerusalem, residence and wife of the Lamb; and to each individual in it there is grace, mercy, and peace. Paul claimed what God's connection with the assembly, and its blessing, and the blessing of each one in it, required according to God's mind; viz., that that (to which, on earth, the Father's delight in His Son and His service, had led Him to commit His own name and honour) should be holy, for He is holy; should *not* be a scene in which Satan displayed man's lawless will and selfishness, through deeds that were so (of the defiled earth and wicked world) that even the heathen knew not the like. Righteously roused by the wrong done, and indignant at the insult thus put on his God, he entered upon the service. Yet it was mercy that sent him thither; for God (1 Cor. 11) had been cutting off unrepentant children at Corinth before this. Paul knew mercy right well (how large a debtor to it was he himself); and how blessedly now do we find him the servant of God's mercy in the gospel, and how careful that, they that obtained mercy should walk in the unmixed enjoyment of it. But love and mercy never cover sin; God's mercy (1 John 4) to us came out to light with the gift of eternal life to them that were dead, and by Christ made propitiation for sin. The tokens of the love and mercy (1 John 4: 9, 10) bore the stamp of death and measure of sin which needed such an expiation, if eternal life was to be free in us; if grace was to reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ; but grace was not unmindful, after it took effect, of mercy in connection with the individual believers, and of Paul's standing as an individual in mercy; and that mercy was to all the individuals who were in the assembly — the incestuous person as well as others; and to the poor dark world around. God's mercy does not ignore sin. He looks to the whole wilderness and to the glory, when He shows mercy; and in that mercy there is life eternal given to us who were dead, and the blood, the measure of sin, which must be known if the measure of acceptance is to be enjoyed. Who but God could curse the sin and bless the sinner?

And mercy did make its voice to be heard, in the careless assembly at Corinth, and for the incestuous man, when once God's claim had been thought of, and when, through the Spirit, it had been met so far as to arouse the assembly. It is no question with me, Whom will God make use of *now* in such or similar cases? Himself is in the assembly. He can act, and it is according to His way to act, and to act in such a way as will bring out into light the existence of the assembly. Its state now is militant, the life possessed is energetic, Christ's will and glory are its aim, and the Spirit works thereunto. At the present time it is of far more importance that the characteristics of the assembly itself should be made manifest, than that individuals, having more spiritual intelligence than others, should be brought forward. What is of God will not be hid, but in this very way the superiority of Paul showed itself. Instead of himself taking up the question with the rod of his power, he waited and elicited the action of the assembly itself, and so identified himself more with God in His mercy than in the use of the power delegated to him of God. We have not the authority or the power which were really delegated to Paul for ourselves. And for ourselves he so acted as to make it plain that the very feeblest can, if walking in humbleness and holiness, clear themselves of the responsibilities of God's honour and name being cared for in His own house. To assume authority which we have not got, and to deny a responsibility which does rest upon us, is to be doubly blind. And to act in power is impossible for the weak. But God's strength still will perfect itself in our weakness. Life and holiness are what we must act upon, God being for us, The question (with any who are alive to God through Christ, and so awake to any shortcoming in the assembly, or to any positive evil in it) may begin with the instincts of the eternal life within, or with conscience enlightened, etc. It must begin with some individual or individuals in the assembly, God chooses by whom.

Much that would be weighty and unanswerable in a human court would be incongruous in God's assembly; for conscience before and under God's Word and spiritual instinct are not like the human mind reasoning and weighing evidence. A lawyer addresses himself to man's *mind* as competent to

weigh and decide upon evidence, and aims at putting out of sight all that would make against his client's case. God and His mind and truth are to rule in the assembly. Moreover God, too, in His assembly can, and often *does*, make men speak out as being in the light of His presence. No judge pretends to that. The assembly is not a jury weighing evidence and judging it, but a priestly company met, with God present, to examine itself and those in it. Self-judgment is a humbling, softening work.

And in all the business of the assembly — the mind and will of God and the Lord, alone has to be sought. It is this that makes *influence* (possessed by any individual over other minds) so wrong and evil and dangerous in the assembly. The *influence* of an individual, however amiable and devoted, or the will and control of a man, is not God's control in His own assembly. Many a godly man, on finding his influence and practical wisdom — tending to blind the saints in a place (as to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the duty of each saint in the assembly bearing his own individually conscientious responsibility) — has himself had to guard them against this influence; and some feeling inability to do so, have left the place, for the Lord's and saints' sake.

Do I see worldliness (fruit of self and flesh not having been judged and ceased from, through Satan's guile), in God's assembly? I do see it then. And am I not grieved? Surely that should be the case if these things (hateful contrasts as they are to the Lord) were found attaching to myself. They are as wrong in others as in me, and am I not one with all in the assembly, and one with Christ too, and dwelling in Him and in God? A feeling of pain and distress accompanies the discovery. The Spirit, too, is grieved. What is to be done? Consciousness of one's own littleness may lead to look round and see who there is, having avowedly more competency than I have, who is on the Lord's side. I cannot condemn this. But if to the question, Who is on the Lord's side in this matter? there be no answer — "Here am I, send me," for then, however incompetent, I must clear myself, and seek that the name of God be vindicated, such is the mind of Christ. I cannot excuse myself from the duty.

The Bible is God's letter to His saints. The assembly should be the mirror upon earth reflecting the "grace, mercy, and peace" revealed as in Christ Jesus, but thus presenting God to the whole world.

The idea of headship, or possession of the right to be accuser — we know where to look for him who acts thereon. The right to be the first to speak of sin, of failure! Monstrosity in a company made up, through grace, of those whom mercy picked up as utterly lost, at great cost to itself, though now, safe in Christ and all brethren together; a company under Him who being God became man, and obedient to death — the death of the cross for them all, and in and among whom the Spirit dwells. I have seen some (alas!) with Jehu's zeal, trying to outrun others, and show their zeal for the Lord, and their cleverness in accusing, and their readiness to be judge and jury. Executioner (thank God) they cannot be. They know not what spirit they are of. May I not ask, If a son or a daughter in a well-brought-up family had got into a line of conduct ruinous and disgraceful, and one of the children had to call the attention of the whole family to the shameful facts, dangerous to the well-being of the family, to the name of the father, and to the liberty of the delinquent, what would be the spirit and way and temper in which he, as the loving brother of the other, would enter upon and go through the painful duty? Imagine it to be forgery of government securities to an enormous amount, and the amount spent in riotous living, or forgery against his father. Firm he might be impelled to be for the sake of father, mother, brothers, sisters, and for the failed one's sake too. But brokenness of heart would mark him. We, in addition to all such similitudes, have to eat of the sin-offering ourselves ere we speak of the sin; have to do it, as for the Lord's sake, and for restoration's sake to the failed one.

May we know how to act as integral parts of that assembly which stands now in grace and favour with God, chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world; and to blend this mercy, which

having found us at first, is still our daily, hourly, provision till the wilderness is past, with grace. God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy;" it is only those who can respond to this heartily, and those alone on whom His mercy will abide for ever. Israel knew not its own need of mercy, and so found no delight in mercy (Rom. 11: 23-36) as shown to them. Nothing but mercy would really have suited them. It was shown to them, and they turned from it as to themselves, and kicked at its extension to others, through unbelief, and so were locked up in unbelief. And we, that is Christendom, what has it done with the mercy which Christianity gave forth to us? It has forgotten it entirely, and will perish. As having no response to give to God's mercy it does not suit Him. Grace and peace it never knew. But, if he lock both Jew and Gentile up in unbelief, mercy will yet show itself forth in a more excellent way.

To blend that mercy which is in God, and in which my soul is set individually with the grace and peace in which God's holy assembly is set and stands, in a risen and ascended Christ, is the problem which we need to be taught of God how to solve. The Holy Spirit alone can show us, in this day, that path of eternal life in which we have to walk. No vulture's eye could ever trace it. I say now, for if I *have* eternal life, if Christ is our life, we have to live it out down here now, as much as fully to possess and enjoy it hereafter in its own more congenial scenes and clime above.

APPENDIX.

1. HUMAN mentality may show itself in mental clearness about, the word of God; but this is not enough without consideration of God's moral ways of dealing it to souls. I might be clearer in perception than anyone else; have intense decision in conduct, as being thus more clear-sighted as to texts; but if I drive others against both time and their measure of knowledge, I am not led by the Spirit, and what the good? The enquiry ends; a decision is come to; perhaps those most in blame are sheltered, but their consciences not ploughed up, and humble souls (not otherwise affected then) are shocked at the whole procedure. They wanted time for prayer and humiliation without which they could not act under responsibility and to the Lord.

2. Awful as it is, I have known persons looked up to, constitute themselves pleaders against others and judges in cases, and the judgment, *ostensibly by the assembly*, given against one that was innocent, and who was excommunicated for that which the pleader and judge had himself committed; and the same sort of thing is oftener still the case in domestic regulations of the assembly. Lord, what is man when left to himself? What are we when we play with thy name, and at making, maintaining, and governing in (so-called) churches?

3. Actings in the assembly should be, from first to last, from motives, and in an energy and to an end, that can bear the scrutiny of God's eye as identified with Himself and Christ. And it is easy to be deceived herein. Frequently unity of judgment, or the consent of all or of the majority, is insisted on or sought after. But this oft misleads. 1st, it is based on the principle *vox populi vox Dei* (the voice of the people is as the voice of God). If this be counted as authority from God, it would be an error; for fleshly concurrence of human minds, in pride acting upon worldly principles, would produce it. 2nd, it leaves out *the important question* of whether the matter so decided upon really is God's very mind for us or not.

4. In rebuke or putting away, I do not get rest or feel I see the whole case until three things are clear. 1st, the root sin; 2nd, the occasion; 3rd, the overt display of sin. 1st, David knew how to climb, using God, from the sheepfold to the throne; but knew not aright God's relative position to himself; 2nd, at rest on the throne, not going out to war when the kings go out, he saw, in his idleness, Bathsheba; 3rd, though on God's throne he defiled himself and dishonoured God by adultery, corruption, and murder. Thus he learnt David's self, and afterwards God. (Ps. 32) So in Solomon's case,

in Job's, in Peter's. This is important, because, until *the root sin* is judged, there is no real healing; and the overt sin is very unlike the root sin; not it at all, generally.

5. The love of ruling has been the ruin of the nominal church, not only in the bishops of old, whom Constantine set aside and supplanted, but in the bishops after Constantine; in the governments at the time of the Reformation, in all the Protestantism and Nonconformity, from wilful Diotrophes downwards. Had they but known what the assembly of God was and is, it could not have been so.

In some cases, and where the majority were willing to sanction it, some deficit or some sin has been known to one or another; but nothing has been done. And why not? On the plea, "I told it to So-and-so, and he did not see with me, or could do nothing." I answer, "Try what you can do, and then tell it to the assembly. Despise not your responsibility and God in it."

6. I have known cases in which one or two have unconsciously assumed to rule, by telling one that had sinned that "he had *better not come to the table*." Where is the authority and power of the assembly? A private opinion of one or two individuals is not the action of the one holy assembly, led by God and the written Word. It falsifies everything, and is the assumption of power. It is evil, too, for it generally hides the sin which God's word would have either cured or set aside. And what means suspended communion? It is either a refusal to have faith and act upon it according to the Word, or else to bear the shame of incompetency, through sin, to find out God's mind about the matter in question, and ourselves and the assembly.

Again, what is *the leaving of the table* of one's own accord, or allowing others so to leave it? It is self-will, love of one's own way, and the expression of blindness as to the true character of the table.

P.S. — Whatever you do in any matters of the assembly of God, do it as having the heart and mind of Christ, as well as being one spirit with Him.