

HOW TO MEET

As believers, we are encouraged to not “forsake the assembling of ourselves” or, in other words, to not stop meeting together (Heb 10:25). This admonition leads us to believe that it is important to God and to us to continue gathering together in His name. However, how should we do this? What guidelines should we follow? How can we meet together in a manner which is pleasing to Him and edifying for us? These are questions which we will explore in this writing.

To begin, we must firmly establish one essential point. That is that Jesus must be the head of what we do. This means that He must be in command. He must be the one directing ALL that is said or done in our meetings.

It is no secret that the Father has given Jesus to be the head of the church (Col 1:18). It is His body. He is to have the preeminence in all things (Col 1:18). Although Jesus today is invisible, He is not absent. He is not “far away in heaven” waiting for us to do things for Him in His name. Instead, He is present here with us at all times. Since this is true, there is no need for us to substitute for Him. There is no need to “take up the slack” and take the initiative about what we should do when we are together.

We have no necessity to plan what goes on, to lead meetings ourselves, to organize how we get together, or to do any other things without His leadership.

If you stop to think about it, it is your head which leads your body. It is this thinking organ which directs every function, every movement, and every word. No other part gets to be in command.

For example, the liver never gets to lead the body. It, no doubt is an essential organ. But as important as it may be, it cannot think for you or direct your life. The heart and lungs are also necessary. But they too are not qualified to lead. The eyes and ears may assist us. Our legs may move us. Our arms and hands may do many things. But they do not initiate anything. In a coordinated body, all the individual members respond to the leadership of the head in harmony with Him and each other. This is what makes us live and move in a coherent fashion.

When someone's head loses control of their body, many strange, frightening, and even dangerous things result. This can even include someone becoming paralyzed. A paralyzed person still has a head, but it has no control whatsoever over the different parts of the body.

How much of this could apply to the church of Jesus today? How much of what is being said and done in His name has its origin with Him? Or how much is just individual members or even groups of members doing what they imagine is best without so much as consulting the Head? How much of what we see today which passes for "Christianity" is being done without any authorization from God at all? How much is just independent members doing things "in His name" which do not express the will of the Head? Perhaps this lack of divine

leadership could explain the lack of life-changing power in the church today.

Although all this could and should be applied to the activities of the body of Christ in general, it also applies to our meetings together as His body. When we get together, who's running things? Is it Jesus or some pastor, group of elders, or some other such arrangement? Is it the Holy Spirit who is directing everything, or are we following some pre-planned formula, "Church bulletin," or liturgy? Is it man who is running things or God?

The evidence of the source of the meetings is in the results. Are we knowing the powerful presence of God? Are people being changed into Jesus' image? Are they being liberated from sin? Are our meetings truly edifying, or do many leave feeling unsatisfied and hungry, while perhaps not even understanding why this is? If the life-changing glory of God is absent then it must be that men are in charge. It is quite probable that the leadership of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by the ideas, plans, and directions of mere humans. Although such meetings may have a form of religion, there is no power present to change lives.

If and when our meetings fall into the same pattern week after week this is a possible sign that humans are in control of something which has been reserved for Jesus alone. Very many "church services" go like this: first some singing, then some preaching, and then perhaps an "altar call" and prayer. Is it the Spirit of the living God who is leading all of this? Can it be that our Lord has nothing new to say or do when we are

in His presence? Or is it possible that we have shut Him out and are merely going through some religious motions in His name but without His presence?

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

We are taught by Jesus that the worship which pleases the Father is worship which happens “in the Spirit and in truth.” We read: “But the time is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking these kinds of worshippers. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship *him* in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24 FLNT). What does this mean to us?

First of all, let us examine what this doesn't mean. To be in the Spirit, does not mean that we have some kind of special feeling. It does not refer to the “mood” of our gatherings. It does not indicate excited emotions. It doesn't mean that different members show off their various talents such as singing, dancing, prophesying, or eloquent speaking. It doesn't mean that everyone is entertained or informed.

To be in the Spirit means that we are, in fact, in the presence of God. It means that He is filling us and leading us. Without His authority, we cannot genuinely be in the Spirit. Rebellious believers cannot remain in His presence for very long.

Therefore, it means that we are yielded to Him. We are submitted to His person and direction. We are not proud and self-sufficient but humbly allowing Him to be everything to us.

This same truth applies to “meeting in Jesus’ name.” Most Christians know the verse which says: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). To be in His name does not mean that we use the phrase “in Jesus name” when we get together. It also does not mean that we have His name written over the door. It means that we are in Him. We are experiencing the reality of His presence. He is our Lord in every aspect of what we are doing. He is both filling us and leading us. This phrase is just another way of saying that we should be “in the Spirit.”

If we are not truly submitted to Him and subject to His leading, we are not really meeting in His name. Instead, we are really (whether this is intentional or not) meeting in our own name(s). Therefore, we express ourselves and not Jesus. We minister human things such as logic, intelligence, emotional appeal, entertainment and/or information, but not the Spirit of the living God.

When we get together, we are not free to do whatever we want. We are not supposed to just sing our favorite songs. We are not free to express our own opinions, thoughts or ideas. We read in 1 Peter 4:11 that: “If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracle of God” (FLNT). An oracle is defined as: “A priest or priestess acting as a medium through whom advice or prophecy was sought from the gods in classical antiquity.” In our case, it means that it is God who is speaking through us and not merely ourselves who are speaking and offering our own thoughts and words.

If we wish to know God's presence in our meetings, we must follow His guidelines. We must be submitted to and filled with Him. When we sing, we must sing the songs His Spirit is selecting. When we speak, we must speak the words which He is giving us at the moment. When we prophecy or teach, we must be sharing the words which come from Him and not from ourselves. This must not be mere Bible knowledge, but words spoken from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If this is not the case, we will find ourselves with an empty religious shell which is devoid of the presence of God. We will not be blessed. We will not be built up. We will not be strengthened spiritually. Without the presence and leadership of God in our meetings, they are just a farce. They are useless. They are worse than nothing. Such meetings just produce hypocrites who imagine they are right with God but in fact are not.

How many times have we left meetings unsatisfied? How many times have we not been fed or built up? How often we have gotten together with the expectation of something genuine happening and left empty and disappointed? This is a result of us not meeting God's criteria. Somehow, we have not submitted to Him. In some way, we have done our own thing instead of His. We have not followed His leading. Therefore, He has not blessed us. He has not revealed Himself to us. Instead, since we have done what we think is best instead of submitting to Him, He has left us with our own results.

We read: "Therefore, I say this – and I am confident that this exhortation is from the Lord – that you should no longer walk

in the same way that the Gentiles walk: i.e. in the futility of their own intellectual reasonings” (Eph 4:17 FLNT). Such reasonings do not result in the ministry of God’s life, but only futility and death.

We also are taught: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God” (Ec 5:1,2 NIV).

In order to have truly spiritual meetings, we have to have the fear of God. We must have a holy, reverent respect for His authority and His person. Without this reverent fear, we all too easily do our own thing. We speak our own words. We share our own ideas and opinions. We minister from what is in our own heart, but not from what is in the heart of God. All such “ministry” can produce is puffed up believers but not ones which are truly built up by the Spirit of God. It is a very healthy thing to fear expressing what comes only from ourselves when we are together in His presence.

Although some may like to emphasize the love of God, the fear of God also must have a very real place in our meeting experience. We read in Leviticus 10:3 “All who serve me must respect my holiness. I will reveal my glory to my people” (NSB). If we do not have a reverent respect for God’s leadership and His holiness when we get together, His presence will not be powerfully known in our midst.

AN IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT

In order to be successful in meeting in the Spirit, we must also be daily walking in the Spirit. This means that He is leading us every day. There is no way we can lead our own lives and do our thing during the week and then, when the time for a meeting comes, we can suddenly succeed in entering the presence of God.

It is impossible to have a meeting led by the Spirit without the participants knowing how to walk, and actually be walking, in the Spirit themselves. How can they know the direction of God when they wish to minister to others in a meeting situation if they don't know His direction in their daily lives? How can they suddenly become spiritual in a meeting when in their daily living they are carnal? How can they submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit on the day of the meeting when they are resisting His authority the rest of the time?

When we fail to walk in God's presence during the week, there are reasons for this. It may be that we are disobeying Him. It could be that we are practicing some activity which does not please Him and offends Him. (This is called sin.) It may be that we are proud and self sufficient. It may be that we have not been seeking Him daily, but instead are preoccupied with living our own lives according to our own desires. It could be that we have never really yielded the control of our lives to Him completely and so, even though we call Him "Lord," He is not really our Master. We have never truly become a "living sacrifice" to Him (Rm 12:1).

When our individual lives are not submitted to Jesus, when we are not daily walking in His presence and know His leading, then we cannot have truly spiritual meetings. Getting a group of rebellious, proud, stubborn, worldly, self-centered Christians together does not attract the presence of God.

If we wish to meet together in God's presence, we need a change of heart. We need to repent of everything which is blocking our individual relationships with Him. We must allow Him to search our hearts and then we must deeply repent of anything which He exposes as being against His holy nature. Unless we are in a right relationship with Him outside the meetings, we can never succeed in having spiritual meetings.

True meetings led by the Holy Spirit will not consistently be the same. They will not always follow the same pattern. When our gatherings fall in to a pattern, this is a sign they have also fallen away from the presence and leadership of the Lord.

In our meetings, our Master may wish us to spend our time in prayer and intercession. Perhaps we will be occupied with praise. Possibly He will lead us to repent together. We may be led to have some teaching. Maybe some will give their testimonies of how God has worked in their lives. It is possible that they share a word or revelation they received from Him. Even a time of silence in the presence of God is a possibility.

How do we know what is on God's heart for us to do when we meet? It is by being intimate with Him. If we are not intimate with Him during our daily lives, we can never have truly spiritual meetings. We must allow Him to expose our sin and work to cleanse us from everything which offends Him. We

must also become disciples of His. This means that we learn to know and follow Him all the time.

How many believers spend their time serving themselves and seeking their own pleasure and interests? Then, when the time for a meeting comes, they go hoping that someone else will have spent time in the presence of God and be able to say something which will feed them. How often do Christians get together to rejoice in how right they are about many Bible doctrines and (perhaps secretly) feel superior to others who are “less enlightened?” How frequently do believers meet to have their emotions stimulated by ever louder music, more and more “prophecies,” preachers who shout and scream ever more loudly and/or be entertained by spurious signs and miracles?

Much of what passes for “Christianity” today is just an expression of the fallen soul life. Frequently, it has very little, or nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. Instead, it is the natural human being trying to act spiritual.

MINISTRY IS FOR EVERYONE

Ministry in our church meetings is not the responsibility of one person or even of a few selected individuals. Instead it is the responsibility of everyone. We read: “You can all prophecy...” (1 Cor 14:31 NKJV) which means “speak for God”. We all can and should be ready and willing to share

what God has spoken to us, what He has done for us, or even what He has done in others with whom we have fellowship.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26 we read: “What is *the proper way to conduct your meetings* then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a psalm; has a teaching; has a revelation; has *a message in an unknown* language; has an interpretation. Let everything be done for building up the others [not glorifying yourself]” (FLNT). So we see that in a genuine church meeting many different members minister to the others in a great variety of ways. All this is done according to the leadership of our Head and King.

Under the old covenant, the Jews were required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for festivals or “feasts.” They had three “national meetings” every year. Yet, there was a certain requirement put upon them. We read: “No one is to appear before me empty-handed” (Ex 23:15 NIV).

During the time between these festivals, the people were supposed to be busy. They were planting, raising cattle of various kinds, and other types of activities. When they came to the feasts, they were supposed to bring an offering gained from what they had been working at in the meantime. This has a very important application to us today.

As believers, we are supposed to be seeking the Lord all the time. We are required to be occupied with His work and His word every day of the year. In this way, through our communion with Him, we gain insight, understanding, words of encouragement and exhortation, and many other such things. Through our intimacy with Him, we have experiences

of conversion of others, of people being healed, of prophetic insights, of God using us to serve others in an infinite variety of ways. These experiences then can become testimonies of God's work which will edify others.

Then when we come together to worship Him, we have something to offer. We have something real and living to share with the others which comes from our intimate relationship with Jesus. If we have nothing, it reveals our spiritual poverty. It shows that we are not really intimate with God and therefore have not been spending time with Him. We are fruitless and unprofitable servants.

This condition should alarm us! Jesus teaches us that those who do not bear fruit will be cut off from the vine. This means that they will be cut off from the flow of His life which we only find in Him. We read: "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who continues in me and I in him, that one bears much fruit. For separately from me you can do nothing. If someone does not continue in me, he will be thrown aside as a *useless* branch and dry up. And they, (*those who are unfruitful*) will be gathered up, thrown into the fire, and burned (Jn 15:5,6 FLNT).

This unfruitful condition is very clearly seen when we meet together. If we have nothing to offer, it shows that we are not continuing to have intimate fellowship with Jesus. The results of such a condition which Jesus promised to us should be very sobering.

Although there should be opportunity for everyone to share in our meetings, no one is free to offer anything which originates from themselves. We are not free to offer, as Cain did, our “vegetables,” which are the things we ourselves think or feel. Also, we are not at liberty to offer our own “strange fire” before the Lord as Nadab and Abihu did (Lev 10:1) which was inventing a new way to worship God. How many brothers and sisters introduce into church gatherings “new” ideas? Perhaps they have a dance routine, some flag waving, a theater piece or mime, a chorus routine or solo. Maybe they have read some interesting book or heard some new ideas which they wish to share. Possibly, they have seen or heard of some new thing another group of believers are doing and want to introduce it in their meetings. They are bringing their “strange fire” into the presence of God.

Many who bring such things which God has not authorized into the church are offering their “best” just as Cain did. Without a doubt, he offered his finest vegetables. But all these things which man can produce and invent are rejected by God. As with the offerings of Cain and Able, only one offering pleases Him. It is the offering of the Lamb of God, His own Son.

In order to offer the Lamb, we must have become intimate with Him and have spent time in His presence. We must be led by His authority! If not, we will only be offering vegetables which are rejected by Him.

Does this seem very narrow and restrictive to you? It is! God’s way is very narrow. It is extremely restrictive. Only His Son

passed the test and if we and our meetings are to also pass the test, it can only be done by being one hundred percent in Him.

In order to have a truly spiritual meeting, we must have the fear of the Lord upon us. This means that we must be consciously very careful to follow Jesus in our times together. If we wish to get together to visit, share opinions, etc., there are certainly other times and places for this. But when we desire to come into the presence of the Lord and have Him lead us, we must have the highest respect for His authority.

I am not saying that we will never err or miss His leading. Our meetings will never be “perfect.” I am only insisting that we must have a holy, reverent fear of the Lord. We must have a deep desire to say and do only what flows from Him. Only that which flows from His throne will be edifying and therefore of any use to us, His people.

Our church meetings should not be dominated by one person or even a few people. Jesus lives in every member of His body and therefore, each one should have something to share. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 we read: “What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up” (NIV).

When only a few selected members share using their gift(s) the fulness of Christ is not seen. Although the more gifted members may have genuine things from God to share, they should never take up all the available time, but should be sure

everyone gets a chance to give their portion which they received from God.

The fulness of Jesus is in His body. No one member has everything. No one has all revelation and understanding. No one has every available experience. Therefore, it is only when everyone has a chance to minister by the Spirit that the fulness of Christ is seen. Although it is usually impossible for everyone present to say something in every meeting, the principle is the same. Every member has a portion of Christ. Everyone is called to minister their part to the others so that everyone can be built up. Even the smallest word or sentence from one of the believers can be a great encouragement and blessing to someone else.

If and when there are some especially gifted brothers, in the area of teaching for example, they are free to arrange times and places for them to do extended teaching. This is not really the same thing as a “meeting” of the church. We could call it a “ministry meeting.” In this case you have one person exercising their ministry for the benefit of all. Paul, for example, taught for a whole night on one occasion when he was to leave the next day and was greatly burdened to pass on to them what he had received from God before he left (Acts 20:7-11). He also arranged a place, “...the school of Tyrannus,” where he taught daily (Acts 19:9). Much of passes for “church meetings” in our day seems to be more like the ministry of one individual than an expression of the body of Christ.

A similar thought could be applied to those who have gifts of healing, prophecy, and miracles. There is absolutely no need for such things to only take place in church meetings. These and other ministries can be conducted any day at any time throughout the week. They can be done from house to house. There is no need to make a spectacle or show out of prayer for healing, prophetic ministry, or even teaching. There is no necessity for these things to be done only on our gatherings. Our meetings should be an expression of the authority and Person of Jesus, not a place of entertainment and showing off our gifts.

Besides not expressing the fulness of the body of Christ, meetings dominated by one man or a few men result in frustration for other men who are not allowed to grow up in their gifts and ministries. When one man leads, any others who begin to show signs of anointing immediately become a threat to the one in charge. Perhaps they can be shunted off to teach "Sunday school" or to go to seminary, but when such men begin to exercise spiritual authority, it can easily be seen by the leader as "competition" and therefore must be "dealt with".

All too frequently, such brothers who are beginning to grow in their gifts are labeled as rebellious and gotten rid of. The leader, finding one excuse or another, manages to send this brother off to somewhere else. This often causes pain and confusion for the one who is rejected.

One evil which such human authority produces is that many men, not being able to grow in their gifts in the church, look

for other forms of fulfillment such as devoting themselves to their work, sports, or other entertainment. Furthermore, many congregations are left full of women (since the men have left, being unfulfilled) who, by nature, are more submissive and less resentful of human authority.

MAINTAINING GOD'S AUTHORITY

Although there is no place for human authority in the church, there is a place for men to be used by God to transmit His authority. These men are the older, more spiritually mature brothers who carry a responsibility before God to help maintain His authority in the meetings. These are also known as "watchmen." These are men who are mature and walk in intimacy with God.

Therefore during the meetings, they have a certain responsibility to see that God's authority is maintained. When some immature ones or newcomers begin to say and do things which are not in harmony with what the Spirit is saying or doing at the moment, then they must act. In ways that are not offensive or overbearing, these men must say or do something to bring back the direction of the meeting to the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Far too many people come to a meeting without superficial human structure and see it as an opportunity to offer their own opinions, doctrines, personal feelings and other equally useless things. Failing to discern the leadership of the Spirit,

they quench the Spirit by offering things which do not originate with Him.

Also, young believers can become excited or stimulated by something other than God (by the flesh, ego, and even evil spirits) and begin to talk without Holy guidance.

This is the time for the mature brothers to bring correction to the situation. Perhaps they can ask for a pause and a time of prayer. Possibly they can gently suggest that this is not the time or place for such things to be expressed. There are many ways in which the mature brothers can and should help to maintain the leading of the Holy Spirit in the meetings.

In order for this to happen in a healthy and loving way, there must be at least two or three men who are walking in unity. They must be of the same mind and the same opinion. They must have relationships which have been built by God and therefore, have arrived at a holy unity. Then they can speak and move in harmony with each other in such meetings. They, together, can act to bring the meetings back under the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Without such unity between at least a few men, truly spiritual meetings cannot occur. Perhaps someone will start talking without a spiritual anointing. When one brother tries to bring correction, the other disagrees. When one senses an error, the other takes the side of the one with the error and so a discordance is introduced. This causes a "friction" in the air. This lack of unity between the more experienced brothers will allow many different and unspiritual things to go on during our times together. This will also produce confusion among the

brethren. They will not know what is really of God and what is in error.

Such a situation will not be blessed by the Lord. It is an unstable construction. Its foundation is not secure. God cannot add much weight (which, in this case, is many more believers) to such a construction because it will not stand the test. Sooner or later such brothers who are not walking in true harmony with each other and with Jesus will enter into conflict. There will inevitably be a division. This will hurt and confuse the others. Therefore, God will not bring many people to such meetings. He knows how it will end and so does not bless it very much.

If the authority and leadership of Jesus is not maintained in our meetings, He will withdraw Himself. He will take away the lampstand out of its place (Rev 2:5). When we are in confusion and lose His leadership, we are no longer a testimony of Himself. He is not the one being expressed. He is not the one being glorified. Therefore, His presence will not be there and the whole thing will fall apart.

Men often compensate for this lack of Holy leadership with human authority and organization. Since God is not holding things together, they use human glue. They begin to lead and organize themselves. Thus is birthed one more religious sect, one more division among God's people.

There are more than a few Christian groups today that began, perhaps long ago, in the Spirit. They were brought together by the moving of God, but in some way strayed from His leading. They lost the thread of His direction. They deviated from His

authority. Consequently, the presence of God was lost and all that remains is just a shell of the past. They have only an echo of what was once the voice of the Lord.

It should be named “Ichabod,” since the glory of the Lord has departed. Yet there they are, still grinding along with only the memory of how God once lived and moved in their midst.

Meeting in the Spirit – in the very presence of the Lord – is a very serious thing. It is unfortunately, also very rare. The reverent respect for God, the intimacy with Him and the obedience to Him which are required are scarce today.

If and when we are privileged to be a part of such a thing, it is very precious. We should be very prayerful and watchful before God so that it could be preserved.

WHY DOES GOD NOT JUDGE WHAT IS NOT FROM HIM?

Perhaps some may question why God does not bring His judgment upon so many things which happen today among Christians which so obviously are not His will. They don't express His nature in any way. In fact, many are abhorrent and repulsive and even downright blasphemous. Why then, as He did with Ananias and Sapphira, does He not strike dead those who are corrupting His church?

One possible answer is that much of what is done “in His name” is not really His. Since it is not His work, He feels no responsibility to defend it. He senses no urgency to keep it

pure. Since He did not begin the work, it is not of Him and He has no need judge it at this time.

But if and when we begin to fulfill His requirements and come under His leading, then we must walk in reverent fear since we are experiencing the true house of God. It is then that the fear of the Lord should be something of which we are conscious.

One of the goals in meeting together is to build up His Holy Temple. We are co-laboring with Him to construct somewhere where He is pleased to live. We are working together with Him to build something holy and living, a sanctuary where He feels comfortable and at rest. This is not a small or unimportant task. This is truly serious business. As servants of God we are dealing with eternal, precious, eternally important things. Knowing God's will and then working with Him with this in mind is of the utmost importance.

Far too many believers are satisfied to have meetings which God seems to visit once in a while. If, from time to time, they sense the presence of the Lord or some anointing of His Spirit, they are satisfied. However brethren, we must never be satisfied with something which God occasionally visits, but only with something where He is pleased to live for eternity. May we give our hearts and lives wholly to this task.

David W. Dyer

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