

## 9.

# MEETINGS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

God is Spirit (Jn 4:24). He exists in a realm which is not physical. It is a "place" which is outside of space and time. It is a spiritual dimension. Since His resurrection from the grave and His coming in the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:28), Jesus too lives in this spiritual sphere. Although He is certainly present in this world right now, His presence among us and within us is not physical, but spiritual.

Furthermore, we too, after we are born again, become spiritual creatures (Jn 3:6). Having been "born of the Spirit" we have entered into this new realm which is not earthly or physical, but spiritual. This spiritual "place" is somewhere where a believer can go and in which they can live. Since we have this new spiritual capacity, we can enter the sphere where God is and have contact and communion with Him.

If we wish to experience the presence of God, we must enter into this spiritual realm where He is. Although God can be observed in His creation and by His visible acts, including miracles, healings, etc., He cannot be actually known personally except in this spiritual dimension. For example, the children of Israel saw God's "acts" since they witnessed them during their exit from Egypt and their

journeys through the wilderness. Through these signs, they learned a little bit about God. But Moses was privileged to know Him intimately. He knew His "ways" since he spent time in God's presence (Ps 103:7). We read that the Lord spoke to Moses "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex 33:11).

The realm of the "Spirit" is the only place where God is knowable. There is a great tendency among human beings to think that He can be found through some series of formulas, teachings or practices. Others imagine that He can be found in some kind of cathedral, temple or religious building. Yet, this is not true. Jesus Himself explained this to the woman He encountered at Jacob's well (Jn 4:21-24). She wondered about the correct location to worship. In her mind she was perplexed about which physical place or doctrinal position was proper to please the Most High.

But Jesus told her that a change had taken place. A new era had dawned. Through the work of Christ, human beings were no longer confined to the physical plane but would, and in fact should, contact God in a new way and in a new position. From now on, true worshippers must worship God "in spirit and truth."

Jesus explained that the presence of God cannot be found anymore in "Jerusalem" or on "this mountain." This means that today entering into the spirit is not a question of location, practice, doctrine, creed or artifice. Entering into the spirit does not depend upon being in a certain place (a religious building for example) or upon where we stand concerning a series of Bible doctrines. Being in the spirit is a question of actually entering into the presence of God which is in the Spirit.

Being "in the spirit" does not signify that we have some special kind of emotional experience. It does not mean that we are overcome by ecstasy, joy or physical sensation. It is not a result of working up some kind of feeling by loud singing, dancing, clapping, shouting, etc. Instead it means that we are entering the presence of God in our spirit. It means that we are in spiritual communion with Jesus. Although God can and sometimes does give us pleasant

emotions when we are in His presence which we might begin to associate with this experience, such feelings are not a dependable sign that we have arrived. They are not what we should seek.

Being “in the spirit” does not signify that we are in a certain mood or that we are being carried along with the emotion of a particular situation or event. It does not mean that our feelings are aroused or that we are somehow stimulated by our surroundings or by being together with a group. It does not imply that we are simply in harmony with others around us or with our environment. Being in the spirit simply means that, due to our openness to Jesus, we have entered into the realm where He is and are in communion with Him. This experience may or may not come with any specific sensations or feelings.

Being “in the spirit” also is not a rational, logical, intellectual phenomenon. It does not depend upon our being “right” about many things. To arrive at this experience, does not require that we study, memorize and analyze various doctrines and Bible passages. It does not depend upon our understanding. Although, when we are in the spirit, God does speak to us and we may receive much enlightenment in our mind, entering into His presence is not a mental exercise.

The key to being able to enter into the presence of God and remain in His presence is that our hearts and lives are yielded completely to Him. Instead of our mind and emotions, our will is the important ingredient here. When our entire being is submitted to the control of the Holy Spirit, when our soul and body are His, when we do not have secret barriers, resistances, fears and sins, then we can easily and frequently enter into the Spirit. We can live in God’s presence.

As we come to a place in our Christian experience where we have given our entire life completely to Jesus, walking in the spirit becomes easier. When we are confident of God’s love for us and so entrust ourselves totally to His leadership and care, when our faith is such that we are ready for Him to do anything He wishes within us and

through us, then entering into and living in the Spirit is easy and natural. Unless and until every believer arrives at a point of complete submission of their will to Jesus, they will have trouble entering into and remaining in the presence of God.

So we understand that there is a specific “realm” or sphere in which God dwells and into which we can enter and even live. This is like a kind of “fourth dimension.” It is the place the Bible calls being “in the Spirit” (Rm 8:9). This is where the reality of God is and where God becomes real to us.

We will not have space to examine in great detail what it means to be “in the spirit” in this volume. Therefore, I would like to again encourage any readers who are unsure about what this signifies to read my previous book entitled *From Glory to Glory*, especially the section about the dividing of the soul and the spirit. There you will find two entire chapters devoted to this important subject.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH

All of this has a very real application to our present topic: the experience of the church. The church too is a spiritual being. She also exists in the spiritual plane or realm. Although there is a physical manifestation of the church in the tangible world in which we live, the reality of, or the experience of the church is only in the Holy Spirit.

Yes, since believers have physical bodies, the church does appear in the natural world. What her members say and do has an effect here on this earth. But the source of her life and inspiration is spiritual. In essence she truly belongs to another realm. The natural part of her that appears physically today, i.e. the natural bodies of the members, will soon pass away and be replaced with a spiritual one with corresponds to her true nature.

Therefore, in order to be of value in God’s kingdom, all the words and actions of this spiritual being must originate in the Spirit. The source of her speaking and doing must emanate from the presence of her invisible Head.

Anything which has its origin in the natural, earthly realm is of no value in promoting the eternal purposes of God. Only that which springs from her communion with Jesus in the spirit will stand the test of judgment Day.

## THE CORPORATE EXPERIENCE

As we have been discussing, it is possible and even necessary for every believer to know, enter into and even live in the Spirit. But even more than that, it is possible for believers to enter into the Spirit together. When two or more Christians enter into the presence of God collectively, then this is the experience of genuine church (Mt 18:20). This is the substance of what the true church is. When believers succeed in opening their hearts to God when they are with one another, they can enter into His presence corporately. They can be "raised...up together and made...[to] sit together in the heavenly places" (Eph 2:6).

This fact is critical. The only place where the reality of Christ is, is in the spirit. So too, the only place where we can know the reality of His bride, the church, is also in the spirit. This reality is simply not found in any other place.

Those who are in the spirit are being guided by and filled with the Holy Spirit. It is this leadership and sustenance which produces the church. This is the essence of the one true church.

It might be that some Christians are meeting together. They might sing songs. Perhaps they pray and preach. It is possible that they have some kinds of "ministries," such as outreaches to the poor, youth groups, a choir or any number of other activities which are frequently associated with "a church." But if these things are not the result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, if they are not being sustained by the real presence of God, if they are not truly an expression of the Divine Life, then they are not really church. They are only a human imitation.

I do not mean to offend anyone by saying this. It is only that I have a yearning within me for all of God's children to experience His fullness. It is so important for every

believer to know both the reality of God's presence and the wonderful experience of the true church. To know this, we must know where to look. We must know how to arrive at the destination which we are seeking. We must enter into the Holy Spirit, into the very presence of God together.

Today, there are many, many merely human substitutes. There is so much which is being done in Jesus' name which seems good. There is a great plethora of Christian activity which is being hailed as "a work of God." So many of these things may appear to be "scriptural" from an earthly point of view. They may seem to be right and good.

Yet literally millions of believers all over the world are walking away from their "Sunday morning services" unsatisfied. Their spirits have not been truly nourished. While the leadership and even those around them might proclaim that this is the will of God, countless numbers of believers are still going hungry and thirsty for more of the reality of Christ.

This is simply because they are looking in the wrong place. They are seeking the solution in the wrong realm. They go from church to church, ministry to ministry, looking for a "church home" – somewhere that makes them feel right and satisfied. But the solution to this is not in a new place, a new preacher or a new practice or creed. The answer is in the spirit. The realization of their desires is in this other dimension: the very presence of God Himself.

How much believers need to learn to live and walk in the spirit! What a great necessity there is today for believers to apprehend how to enter into the presence of God together! How enormous is the urgency for Christians to know how to meet together, being led by and filled with the Holy Spirit! We must enter into the spirit when we are together so that we can experience the reality of the church.

When we are in Him, and only when we are in Him, will we be satisfied. This is because all that He is is only available to us, individually and corporately, when we are in this invisible, spiritual dimension.

Such a corporate or "together" entrance into the Holy Spirit can be effected by two or three believers. For exam-

ple, whenever we are with other Christians and all are walking in the spirit, there will be the sweetness of spiritual communion. Spontaneously, we will be sharing with the others what we have been seeing, hearing and knowing about our God.

This is almost automatic. When the others are open to the Lord and we are also, this flow of life from one to another is natural and instinctive. No one has to organize anything. Such things do not need to be pre-planned. When we are walking in the flow of Divine Life, when others around us are also open to this same flow, spiritual communion with them is spontaneous.

When two or three are together, they can pray, they can sing, they can share the wonderful things which God has done for them, they can minister their portion of Jesus to the others. Such spiritual encounters can happen any place and at any time. The only requirement is that the participants be in the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, it is possible and even common for believers to get together and never enter this realm. They might eat a meal together, play some sports and even engage in interesting conversation. They may even sing, pray and listen to some discourse about a biblical subject. But if they fail to enter into the presence of God together, all this has no eternal value. They have not experienced the one true church. This failure is because they remained in the natural, physical, soulish realm. They did not succeed in entering into the Holy Spirit.

## **JESUS CAN LEAD OUR MEETINGS**

One important key to enjoying spiritual meetings when we gather with a group of Christians is that Jesus can lead our meetings. He can actually conduct our corporate activities just as a conductor might direct a symphony orchestra. This experience is not meant to be something which happens once in a while, but something which should be a normal and constant part of our church experience.

When we and others with whom we are meeting are in the presence of God, we can sense His directions. In the Spirit, we discern when He wishes us to speak, sing, pray or even to be quiet. In our spirit we realize what it is that Jesus is doing and saying at any particular time. In this way, we can flow along with what He is wanting, harmonizing with the will of God moment by moment.

Such direction by Jesus in our Christian gatherings is essential. Without it, we are only left with human guidance. When we fail to enter into the spiritual dimension and discern the authority and leadership of the Holy Spirit, we can only employ natural techniques to conduct our meetings. Although we might seem to approximate the spiritual reality, such church experiences are ultimately unsatisfying and useless. Truly, "the flesh profits nothing" (Jn 6:63).

Today, Jesus is invisible yet He is very real. Although He is intangible in the natural, physical realm, He is abundantly perceptible when we enter into the Spirit. When He does come to our Christian gatherings, He does not come to watch or to be entertained. Neither is He intending to sit in the "back pew" to make sure we are doing things correctly. Instead, He comes into our midst as our Leader and King. He comes not to watch but to lead. His role is not to observe, but to guide and direct everything.

When we succeed in entering into His presence and thus allow Him to fulfill His role in our midst, these meetings will be extremely satisfying. He knows the need of every member. He understands how to minister to every heart. So, when He is the leader, He can inspire someone or other to speak, pray, prophecy or even sing to minister to these needs. Probably He has prepared these people beforehand to fulfill this very task.

Only God knows what is in every soul. Only He understands the aches, the needs, or even the joys which are there. Therefore, when He is orchestrating all that is said and done, true spiritual ministry is effected. Human needs of every variety are truly being met. This truth applies to our worshipping and/or singing as well as to

any preaching, teaching or other ministry which occurs. For example, each one can have a psalm, hymn or song. When a person is inspired by the Spirit to suggest a song or to begin singing, then singing it will be an anointed, spiritual experience. It will be a blessing to all. It will be something which Jesus has chosen, with words which will meet some needs and an anointing which will uplift every spirit.

We read: "How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, *each of you* has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (I Cor 14:26).

If, on the other hand, people merely call out their favorite tune or someone selects everything in advance, the opportunity for Jesus to lead is diminished. Consequently, the blessing also becomes less or even nonexistent. The more we can succeed in allowing Jesus to lead us when we meet, the more blessed and uplifted our experience will be.

The same thing is true concerning any preaching or teaching. No one should be dominating every meeting with their eloquence and gift. There must be room for all to have a chance to contribute. We read: "For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged" (I Cor 14:31). The word "prophesy" here means "to speak for God," which can include preaching and teaching as well as ministering "prophetically."

No one man has all revelation. No one besides Jesus Christ has all the gifts and ministries. God has designed the body so that members are dependent upon one another. The portion of every member is required so that the whole can be edified. Therefore, when two or three or even more are together in the presence of the Lord, there should be opportunity for each one, guided by the Holy Spirit, to minister their portion of Jesus with the rest.

As the Spirit of Jesus moves among the members of His body, He will lead one or the other to minister according to his or her gift, ministry or revelation. Following the direction of the Holy Spirit, each "joint" of supply (Eph 4:16) can be used to edify the others.

Here there should be no confusion. Everything should occur “decently and in order” (I Cor 14:40). Since there is one Head which is directing the activities of the various members, a divine harmony is seen. When Jesus is the author, then there is a supernatural synchronization of everything which occurs. Although the Director is invisible, when all the members enter into the spiritual realm where He is, then everything is done in an orderly manner.

## THE LOCUSTS HAVE NO KING

There is an interesting verse in Proverbs which speaks to this subject. We read: “The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks” (Pr 30:27). These swarms of insects have no visible leader, but they move together in harmony as if they did. There is some invisible impulse which is guiding them. In the same way, the Leader of the body of Christ is not seen by human eyes today. But, if and when the members of His body move and minister following the leading of His Spirit, and they are tuned in to His authority, then there is a wonderful harmony seen. There is nothing contradictory or discordant. There is no need for believers to be competing to be seen or heard.

We are taught that each one can “prophesy” or contribute their portion. “But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent” (I Cor 14:30). You see, when the Spirit of God is leading a meeting, then everyone must be sensitive to His every direction. No one can dominate the others, using the time for only their revelation and ministry, but always must be ready to yield to someone else who takes up the thread of the revelation which God is giving and contributes his portion also.

There is no need for human organization. There is no requirement to plan and program everything in advance. There is no necessity for someone or some group of men to try to control the rest. In fact, such efforts will be shown on judgment day to have been a great hindrance to God’s work. Jesus is infinitely capable of leading His church in her meetings. It is only essential for every member to learn

to enter into and be led by the Holy Spirit. It is necessary for each one to be moved by God's eternal Life. When the members are directed by the one Head, then all their movements and ministries are in harmony with each other.

A person who is moved by the Spirit in a gathering of believers should minister or speak "as the oracles of God" (I Pet 4:11). They should be careful, according to their spiritual maturity, not to include any fleshly opinions, ideas or directions. They should only minister according to the proportion of their faith (Rm 12:6). Further, they should be vigilant not to continue on talking or singing when the Holy Spirit has already moved on.

It is very common for someone, when they feel the attention of the group upon them, to become enamored with a feeling of importance. It is easy for the flesh to be stimulated when we are used by God. Consequently, it is not infrequent for different members of the body to go beyond what God wishes to say and continue rambling on, enjoying the limelight. This is detrimental to all.

On the other hand, sometimes it is hard for a more timid member to say anything. Perhaps he or she is naturally disposed to be reticent or shy. Such members need to be encouraged to contribute what they feel the Lord is giving them. They need to be taught that their part, be it ever so small, is something of value to all.

If and when the stronger members of the body dominate any and all gatherings with their gifts and ministries, it is almost impossible for the weaker ones to grow in sharing their portions. Therefore, the stronger ones should be very sensitive to give the weaker members an opportunity to function in the meetings.

## **BUT SOME ARE BLESSED IN OTHER PLACES**

Some Christians will no doubt dispute the necessity to meet in the manner which we have been describing. They may argue that they and others have certainly been blessed and received ministry in meetings which were structured and organized. Perhaps a "one man ministry" situation has

brought them some spiritual benefit. These meetings did not match the “body” experience which we have been describing, yet they were beneficial.

In no way would I dispute such an assertion. God certainly is not confined to any particular way or formula. The “way” we meet is not the key. In many locations where believers get together, there is, from time to time, some opening for the Holy Spirit to work and move. We are not insisting that unless things are done according to a certain pattern, God will not be present. On the contrary, He will work in and through the organizations of man as much as He can. Since He loves all of His people, He will use every opening and opportunity which presents itself to edify them.

Of course, we must insist upon the truth that all ministry of any eternal value is done in the Spirit. But it is true that sometimes, in various circumstances, “organized” groups of Christians do succeed in entering. To some degree or another, they manage to allow the Lord to lead them. Perhaps the pastor or preacher has received a message from God. Possibly the leaders of the worship know how to flow along with the Holy Spirit. These and other situations can provide some amount of spiritual ministry.

*The following truth is extremely important:* To the degree that any group of Christians succeeds in entering the presence of God together, to that degree they experience the one true church. To the extent that they manage to submit to the leadership of Jesus together, to that extent they will know the spiritual reality of His presence. If and when someone is ministering something which they received from God and following His guidance, the others will be benefitted. Any gathering of believers, anywhere, can enter into and know these blessings.

What we are seeking here, however, is how to maximize this experience. Instead of these blessings being sporadic and unpredictable, we want to know them all the time. In the place of merely stumbling occasionally into God’s presence, perhaps not knowing how we got in or why we stepped out, we need to understand how to enjoy

this continually. We wish to maximize our experience of the Holy Spirit.

In order to accomplish this, one thing we must do is to remove all the hindrances. Any merely human obstacles must be discarded. For example, human organization will surely limit the ability of Jesus to lead. Pre-planned, formulated "worship" will inhibit this also. The dominating of the meetings by one man and ministry, no matter how anointed he may be, will at best be only a very partial manifestation of the body of Christ. All the merely traditional, religious props which might substitute for, or interfere with, the true reality of Jesus' presence must go! In this way, we can open up the opportunity for our true Head to take His place among us.

### REMOVING OBSTACLES NOT ENOUGH

Nevertheless, we are not insisting that merely removing obstacles will be sufficient. Much more than this is involved. We must also succeed in entering into the presence of God. We must actually *be* in the Spirit. We must truly submit to the leadership of Jesus. If we do not, then simply meeting together in an informal manner, without all sorts of religious props and formulas, will not benefit us. Jesus is not attracted to some kind of "anti-religious" stand which we might take.

Here too, we will encounter a question of how much a group actually does enter into the Spirit. This will depend upon the individuals involved. It will vary according to the spiritual state of the participants. If these believers are walking with Jesus, if they are obeying Him in their daily lives, if they have no barriers and hindrances to His authority, then their corporate experience will be wonderfully enhanced.

But, if and when the participants do not enjoy a genuinely spiritual walk, if the members are soulish, self-centered, stubborn, proud and resistant to God, then the gatherings will also suffer because of this lack. Merely "meeting in homes" or "coming out of dead religion" will not

compensate for this deficiency. Once again, I would like to repeat: to the degree any gathering of believers succeeds in entering the presence of Jesus and discerning His leadership, to that degree they will be blessed with the experience of the one true church. Conversely, to the degree that they fail to enter in and miss the leadership of their Head, their church experience will suffer.

Through approximately thirty years of witnessing "home church" and other sorts of informal gatherings, we have enjoyed many wonderful experiences. We have been privileged to know many meetings which were led by and filled with the Holy Spirit. These God-filled meetings have given us a burning desire to have even more and for others also to enjoy this blessing. It has given us a taste of the genuine house of God.

Yet, through the years, we have also seen many "home" meetings which were devoid of the presence of God. They weren't stiff, religious and formal, but they weren't blessed either. While the participants had perhaps succeeded in coming out of what they termed "the religious system" this seems to be as far as they got. They had not managed to come into anything more valid and real.

In many of these cases I suspect that the cause of the deficiency was that the individual members were not truly submitted to Jesus in their daily lives. They did not know how to, and so were not walking in the spirit, day by day. Perhaps they prided themselves that they had escaped some kind of ineffective, formal religion, but they failed to enter in to the spiritual realm, the Spirit, where the reality of the one true church is. Perhaps they had left Egypt, but they had never crossed over the Jordan and entered into the promised land.

### ANOTHER ARGUMENT

Perhaps some may argue that many, if not most Christians are not mature enough to meet without human structure. They may assert that a majority of believers do not know how to enter into and live in the spirit, let alone

meet together in this way. Therefore, they conclude that such spiritual meetings will not work. They believe that man must take a hand in these things and provide some structure and organization.

It is unfortunately true that many believers are not spiritual people. Only a few succeed in entering into the Spirit frequently and even fewer live in this spiritual state. But there is a good solution for this. Instead of providing a human, superficial structure to compensate for the problem, we must seek God for how to resolve the lack. We must be able to lead others into a relationship with Jesus Christ which is truly spiritual.

Those who know the secrets of a genuinely spiritual life, must hear from God about how to minister this reality to others. They must pray, seeking the face of the Lord, to have an anointing and the necessary wisdom to lead others into the presence of God also. They need to become servants of these others, showing them through their words and actions a "more excellent way."

One of the best ways to teach someone something is by showing them an example. In English there is an expression: "A picture is worth a thousand words." If a group of believers, be it large or small, can begin to enjoy the kind of truly spiritual worship we have been describing, then others visiting the meeting can see for themselves how such a thing could work. They can witness firsthand the possibility of the Head leading His body. Such a dramatic witness is much more powerful than a book full of teaching.

It should make a tremendous impression on us that God, our Father, is seeking such spiritual worship. He is actually looking diligently for men and women who will worship Him in this way which we have described. We read: "...for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (Jn 4:23).

If this is something which is important to Him, if this is something which is on His heart, then shouldn't we too be seeking it? Should not we also devote our time and attention or even our lives and ministry to this end? If something is important to God, is it not reasonable that it

should be important to us also? No doubt the answer must be a resounding "Yes!"

## MATURITY BRINGS RESPONSIBILITY

It is only natural that in any gathering of believers there will be a difference in the level of spiritual growth among them. There will be those who are more mature and those who have little spiritual maturity. While they are meeting together, there will be those who are more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and those who have less discernment. One consequence of this is that mistakes will be made. Once in a while, someone will miss the guidance of God. They may speak from their own heart or experience and not be led by the Spirit.

This then is where those who have more maturity have a part to play. Those who have true maturity and keen spiritual discernment must know how to keep the meetings on the Holy Spirit track. When someone goes astray and begins taking up a lot of time with something which is not flowing from heaven, they must gently, with much love and kindness, guide the process back into the Spirit. Their responsibility before God is to exercise a sort of "oversight," a kind of spiritual watchfulness so that the authority of Jesus will be maintained.

I am not saying that these more mature believers have their own authority. They are not to be in control of the meetings. Yet there are always some who are more sensitive to the Holy Spirit than others who do not have the same growth in Life. It is essential that the authority of the Head be maintained. When it is not, then the entire meeting will descend from the heavens to the earth, from the spiritual to the natural. So those who have this maturity become responsible to help guide those who may not possess equal discernment to stay in the Spirit.

For example: let us suppose someone new comes into a meeting. Perhaps they have no clue about only following the leading of the Holy Spirit. So, at an opportune moment, they begin to speak. Perhaps they give their testimony or

some other thing. It is good that they have an opportunity. No one should be cut off quickly. But if someone begins to wander endlessly around some subject which is not springing from the Holy Spirit and therefore is not edifying to all, this must not be allowed to continue. The authority of the Holy Spirit must be maintained if we are to enjoy truly spiritual meetings.

So, someone with discernment can, in a natural and inoffensive manner, turn the direction of the meeting back to the Spirit. Occasionally, they might need to say something like: "I believe that we have missed where the Lord would have us be at this moment. Let us pray together and try to see what God would say or do now." Jesus can show them how to, in a kind and gentle way, bring the meeting back to His direction. Often a simple word or prayer, not necessarily directed at the offender, might be sufficient.

Of course, we will never have perfect meetings. We will always make mistakes. No one is perfectly mature and attuned to the Holy Spirit. But this is not fatal. This does not need to be a huge problem. We do not need to be extremely worried about this.

Our goal is to allow our Head to have as much leadership as is possible, given our particular spiritual growth and situation. If and when we make mistakes, our Lord understands this. He is aware of our weaknesses. The next time we are together with other believers, we will have another wonderful opportunity to seek His face again.

Another fact of which we should be aware is that often meetings will be different from each other. Probably no two will be the same. Since our Leader is a living person, His will is always new. Perhaps in one gathering we might spend our time praying. Another time, we might use most of our time in worship. In another instance, perhaps the ministry of God's word would be emphasized. The next time, possibly all three of these things or even something else would be in evidence. Any meeting which falls constantly into one pattern should be a warning to us. Those believers need to seek God for more of His leadership among them.

You cannot limit or predict God. He will never fit into our little box. It is impossible to know what He will do next. The more we are able to open up to Him and allow Him to be our source and guide, the richer and more satisfying our meetings and times with other believers will be. Each time we are gathered in His name, He will be there in our midst to guide us into what He has for us at that moment.

By the way, to meet in Jesus' name, does not mean that we have His name written on the door. It does not signify that we merely add the phrase "in Jesus' name" after our prayers etc. To be in Jesus' name means that we are actually in Him, and to be in Him means that we are in the Spirit.

If we take His name without the reality of His presence, this is empty and vain. There is no special magic in some words. We should never use Jesus' name as if it were some kind of incantation or magic spell. The power of the gospel is the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and therefore is present in this world today. He is the one who is powerful and real. To be in Jesus' name is to be in Him. It is in Him that the true power lies.

### **LAMB-SIZED MEETINGS**

We have spoken about the importance for every member of the body to be able to share their portion when they are together. Obviously, this is only possible when the number of persons is limited. In a large crowd, it is impossible for everyone to participate. Due to this limitation, one brother has suggested "lamb-sized" meetings. The thought behind this is that in the Old Testament, the Israelites were instructed to kill a passover lamb. If their family was too small to eat a whole lamb, they were to join together with someone else. That way they got enough people to consume the whole lamb.

If and when a group of believers grows to a size where the participation of everyone is no longer possible, they can then split up. There is no necessity for all believers to meet together every week. In the New Testament it seems

that the Christians utilized homes for many of their meetings since these locations were available and convenient. A good sized home can contain any “lamb-sized” meeting.

Some may inquire about when believers should meet. This too should be subjected to the leading of the Holy Spirit. If and when Christians are walking in intimacy with Jesus, they will have a constant desire to gather with others. They will have a spontaneous urge to be with brothers and sisters who too love God. They will be desiring to share what God has been doing in their lives and what He is revealing to them. They will have a hunger to know how the Spirit is working in the lives of the others.

If such an urgency is not in evidence, this shows that the believers’ relationship with the Lord is also needing attention. Simply organizing meeting dates and places will not solve this fundamental deficiency.

When several, or even many believers are seeking this, meetings will happen frequently. One brother might telephone a few others, inviting them to his home. Others may simply feel an urge to go to the house of another brother some evening after work. Perhaps they will be surprised to encounter others there who also sensed the same leading. Such meetings may occur at any hour or in any place. As we are following Jesus, He will orchestrate all of this.

In the book of Acts, we read that the converts met daily, from house to house (Acts 2:46). These people were enthusiastic. They had come to know the God of the universe in a personal way. This really impacted and changed their lives. It was important to them. It had glorious, eternal consequences. Therefore, their desire to be with others, receive ministry and share with the rest was insatiable.

No one was organizing these meetings. They were not being programmed, monitored and controlled by the apostles. These believers did not need to be urged, cajoled or commanded to meet. Their hearts and minds were captured by their experience with Jesus and so they met together as often as they could. They were constantly seeking this opportunity. Christians today must have the same motivation.

If believers do not have this desire to be with others frequently, this is a sign of spiritual problems. When fellowship with others is not something for which their heart yearns, this is evidence that their communion with Jesus is also faulty. If being with and serving the body of Christ is not a priority in the lives of Christians, this is proof that their heart has been captured by other things besides the will of God. When the cares of daily living, work, family, entertainments, etc. overwhelm the spiritual impulse to be together with other believers, then the "thorns," about which Jesus warned us, have choked His word (Lk 8:7).

### LARGER GROUP MEETINGS

When and if believers feel the leading of God to meet in larger groups, this can be a blessing. But it also brings with it some challenges. By necessity, when a greater number of believers meet together, only a few will be able to directly minister. This is simply a logical fact. Yet such meetings are not prohibited by any scripture.

However, the basic principle of everything being led by Jesus the Head is still the same. Those who are anointed by God to minister in worship, teaching, preaching, etc. in such situations must still be held to this same standard. Anyone who senses that they are led by the Spirit to use their gifts in such a circumstance, must be careful that it is the Lord leading them and not their own ambition and desire to be seen and heard. Their true aim must be to serve others and not to gain emotionally, psychologically or financially themselves.

One example of how such things might occur is the meetings of a Welch brother named Arthur Burt. Periodically he holds Christian conferences around the world. However, in his conferences, there are no invited speakers. Anyone present who feels that they have a word from God is allowed to speak. However, he imposes one restriction. He says something like this to the people gathered: "When you step up front, you have five minutes to pump. If you don't hit water within that time, sit down."

Larger gatherings of believers where only a few minister pose some tremendous, extremely serious challenges. One of these is that there is a very strong tendency among many believers to be passive and let others do the work. Such meetings can easily reinforce this tendency. Many Christians quickly come to rely upon others to take care of everything.

Another is that some more gifted members soon become a kind of hierarchy or clergy. Since they find it easy to lead and enjoy the opportunity to do so, they naturally begin to dominate the assembly. This very easily results in a situation which resembles the "clergy/laity" arrangement which is so rampant today which stifles the functioning of the body.

Another peril is that such meetings easily fall into patterns and with the passage of time the headship of Christ over ALL things fades away. Consequently, anyone involved in organizing any such gatherings should be constantly and acutely aware that they should avoid anything which becomes repetitious. They must flee at all costs everything which substitutes for the leadership of the Head.

Such larger assemblies of believers should only occur when Jesus mandates them, not on a regular, preprogrammed basis. The smaller groups, where everyone can participate must be the normal, frequent experience of believers. Larger meetings, when and if they occur, should merely be supplemental.

### **"MINISTRY MEETINGS"**

In the scriptures, we also encounter another sort of meeting which might be called "ministry meetings." For example, while the believers were meeting daily "from house to house" in Acts, the apostles were also teaching "daily in the temple" (Acts 5:42). These were not meetings where everyone participated but where the apostles exercised their ministries, teaching and preaching to larger audiences.

Elsewhere in the book of Acts, we are told about Paul preaching all night to a group of believers. Also, we learn that at one point Paul used a school building as a location to exercise his teaching gift (Acts 19:9). In still another situation, he rented his own house for this purpose (Acts 28:30).

These gatherings of believers were not “body” meetings. They were not situations where every member functioned, contributing their portion. Instead, they were circumstances where a man or men with special, anointed ministries were serving the others in a unique way. Perhaps this is what most “church” meetings of our time imitate.

But, instead of being an exhibition of the body, this is simply the ministry of one or more gifted men. We might refer to them as “ministry meetings.” This kind of gathering is both scriptural and important. If and when someone has a ministry which is so anointed, and therefore necessary for the body, he or she is free to do so. Again, this must be done according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Such meetings should never become a substitute for the meetings of the body. The “house to house” smaller meetings of believers in which everyone has an opportunity to participate are an essential, integral part of the one true church experience. These gatherings should be the main part of our church practice. The stronger, more talented members must never become dominant in a way that supplants the functioning of the rest in these meetings.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

When the ministry of one anointed member is exercised, it must be done at the expense of that person. Since it is their ministry, they are responsible before God for sustaining it financially. I do not mean to say that others cannot contribute. What I mean is that the church or body as a whole is not accountable for this expense. This is the responsibility of the person conducting the ministry. This person must have a genuine calling from God to do that

particular work and therefore have faith that God will sustain it. If not, then they should not be doing it.

In no circumstance should this person put pressure of any kind on other believers to help them financially. No hints, subtle inferences or outright pleas for money are allowed. They should never be taking up “offerings” before or after they minister. If an individual does not have the faith to conduct a particular work for God, then they should stop doing it. The body of Christ may certainly contribute to God’s work, but only as they are moved by Him to do so, not coerced by man.

It is actually scriptural for people receiving ministry to help financially those from whom they receive a blessing. We read: “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (Gal 6:6). This “sharing” could certainly include financial help.

But biblically, this help should never be in the form of a salary. While occasional gifts are allowed, the idea of salaries moves beyond what is healthy and scriptural. If and when someone receives a “salary” – that is a fixed, regular, dependable sum of money – then they no longer need to depend upon God. Little by little, they begin to trust in man. Their vision inevitably turns from the Lord to those who are paying their salary.

It is virtually impossible for this not to occur. The person or persons who are supplying us with our daily necessities are the ones who control us. When God is in this position, all is well and good. But when men are the ones who hold the purse strings, then they are the ones in a position of power over us.

In such situations, the motives of the person ministering become compromised. They become a “hireling” (Jn 10:13) who must keep in the good graces of those upon whose money they depend. Instead of the necessity to maintain a good, intimate, obedient relationship with Jesus, they merely need to keep on the good side of those from whom they receive a salary.

They therefore are no longer free to say only what Jesus gives them to say. They become reticent to speak any-

thing which might offend someone who might then stop supporting them. They are gradually transformed into "men-pleasers" (Eph 6:6). If and when someone is genuinely "living by faith," it must be faith in God and not faith in the ability and good will of others to continue to support them.

## DOMINATING MEMBERS

It is a great mistake for someone who has a powerful gift or ministry to organize "a church" around it. Although it is a very common practice for such a person to become the leader of a group in which most activities revolve around their ministry, this is not biblical. While the calling and gifts of this person may be genuine and valid, they were not given so that this person could become the sole source of ministry for any special group.

This practice fails the scriptural pattern in several points. Number one: it limits the "members" to one particular ministry. To be healthy, these people need the portion of the entire body. Number two: it exalts a man to an unbiblical position, taking the place in the assembly for which only Christ is worthy. Unconsciously then, many will begin to look to and depend upon this leader instead of Jesus. Number three: it stifles the ministry of anyone else in the group whose gifts are also valid but not exceptional enough to compete for attention with the leader. Commonly, such persons become frustrated and seek fulfillment in other areas, or they set out to establish their own "church" where they can use their gift, sometimes dividing the first group in the process.

## THE NICOLAITANS

As far as I know, in the New Testament there is only one thing which Jesus Christ says that He hates. This thing is mentioned in Revelation in the letters to the seven churches. It is the deeds and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, mentioned in Revelation 2:6,15. Since church

history does not record any group of people called "the Nicolaitans" specifically, there has been much speculation about them. I believe the answer to their identity lies in the meaning of the word "Nicolaitan." Please bear with me as we investigate this possibility.

It is my understanding that the word NIKAO in the original Greek language means "to conquer, to subdue or to rise above," while the word LAOS (from which we derive the word "laity") means the "people at large" or the "people assembled." Therefore, the word "Nicolaitan," which is composed of these two words, would refer to those who rise above and subdue the laity or the common people. This seems to describe just the situation which we have been examining.

From our previous discussions, it is easy to understand why Jesus Christ would not want this kind of arrangement. Such a situation stifles the functioning of His body, which is His expression on the earth. The immediate effect of it is that most members of the church are kept largely inactive and a man or a select group of men is elevated to a position of doing almost everything. So we have a few men trying to live the church life for the many. Obviously this is not possible; and it greatly hinders God's work.

## JACOB'S DREAM

While Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau, he spent a night in the wilderness. There he used a stone for a pillow. While he slept, he dreamed a wonderful dream. In the dream he saw "...a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (Gen 28:12). When he woke up, he realized that this was a special place. He named it "Bethel" which means "the house of God."

You see, when we are truly being God's house, when we are fulfilling the requirements of being in the Spirit and led by our Head, in that place and at that time the heavens are opened. The presence of God becomes real to us. We

actually experience being the “house” or habitation of God in a corporate way – the “Bethel” of today.

At these times there is truly an open heaven. The presence of God is very real. His authority or “throne” is known to us. Revelation, enlightenment and spiritual understanding is occurring. Further, the ministering spirits, the angels, are coming and going – “ascending and descending” – bringing messages from the throne and perhaps “carrying” the praises and petitions of the members back with them.

Of course we are describing something spiritual here with earthly words. Perhaps exact details of this angelic traffic cannot be known exactly. Yet, in such heavenly situations, the proximity of ministering angels is very real. Perhaps we are not very aware of it, but it is occurring.

We, God’s people have the wonderful privilege of entering into His presence together. When we meet, we can enjoy an “open heaven” where the invisible things of His kingdom become real to us. As we enter into the Spirit together, the unimaginable wonders of Jesus and His will for us are available for us to possess. We, insignificant human beings, can enjoy the reality of being the habitation of the Most High God. May we never be satisfied with anything less!

Here I am including the testimony of a man, Nick Jensen who has come into contact with us. Although the following cannot be thought of as an exact example of what God would do everywhere in every situation, it certainly is a powerful testimony of what He actually did do in one place. Since our Lord can and did do this for these people, He can do it all over the earth in many different situations. I am including his letter, as he wrote it, with very little editing.

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March 2nd, 1987

Dear Brethren, Greetings in Jesus Name.

## GOD'S PILOT PLANT

Several decades ago a small group of Full Gospelers was congregating – as far as general touring maps are concerned – in absolute nowhere. Yet they were in the middle of the lush fields of Somerset in England, not far from the well known estate of Horlicks. The place: South Chard.

Their pastor had a call from the Lord to fast so that He could get through to his spiritual ears. At the end of several weeks of total abstention from any nourishment other than the bread from heaven, the Lord did speak to His servant. The outcome of that communication made South Chard known to believers from the four corners of the earth. What was that heavenly message? As with most orders from Headquarters this one was likewise short and sweet and read like this: "Leave your meetings to me."

So the next thing the South Charders knew, their pastor was striding in through the main entrance of their little hall on a Sunday morning at 10 o' clock carrying on his shoulder not a cross but a saw. He proceeded slowly to the front, to the free standing pulpit from where he had always directed the service and without much ado he proceeded to saw through it until the upper part fell to the floor with a bang. Satisfied with his work he sat down in one of the pews, never again to emerge as a conductor of a church meeting.

To say that the congregation was stunned was probably a bit of an understatement. Question marks were to be seen on all faces. Some even feared that the prolonged absence from food had disturbed some of the natural reflexes of their poor pastor. But there he sat. And there they sat, for quite a while, so they reckon, till one charitable old soul started to discreetly hum "Silently now I wait for Thee." With that a handful of God's people on earth had made their first faltering steps towards a true church meeting!

Reverend Sidoby Puree had abdicated in favor of the heavenly Conductor. Did it ever work?

Well let an outsider [Nick Jensen] describe what he experienced on an ordinary Sunday morning in South Chard.

The hall was packed with hugging, chuckling, laughing, shining, happy people. You would never have thought that this noisy place was the setting for a “church” meeting. Some stood, others sat and still others seemed to be all over the place telling jokes or something.

I was looking for the pastor or the choir leader to calm down the revelers and announce the opening hymn but no one ever seemed to be bothered with the general disorder, and no one ever came around to announcing anything. All of a sudden every one seemed to have fully taken in the presence of the others when a holy hush followed the happy throng and a remarkable unprovoked silence became the sequence to the sounds of a market place.

Presently we heard the feeble voice of an elderly sister who on her own embarked upon the song: “Break forth into joy oh my soul, break forth into joy oh my soul; in the presence of the Lord there is joy forever more, break forth, break forth into joy oh my soul”. And please notice this: no one joined her in her overture – not even the organist! Only when she started her second round did the others join in, and only then did we hear the organ for the first time, as if to say: “I never initiate, I always follow”, and it religiously kept to that statement throughout the service.

Now, the chorus that had started so faintly quickly turned into an ever mounting crescendo stimulated by rhythmic, sustained clapping. No one in there seemed to have any respect at all for the universally accepted Pentecostal allowance for repeating of choruses, which is once or at the most twice. They just carried on enjoying the presence of the Lord and “broke forth” so repeatedly that I totally lost count of the encores. They all seemed to be heedless of the presence of the other worshippers for their singing was visibly directed solely by the Lord.

How they ever arrived at bringing an end to that opening chorus I really don’t know, but stop they eventually did. Barely had they done so when a prophetic word

came from Heaven – loud and powerful – with the Lord inviting His people to enjoy His presence to the fullest, and wow, what a fullness!

They sang both hymns and choruses all by heart, for there were no hymnbooks, chorus-sheets or overhead projectors of any kind. For learning they simply used the primeval means of repetition. In their opinion (I later learned) song books and projectors keep you from true freedom in praise and worship. Why? Because with the constant use of crutches you never learn to walk, and in this case dependence on texts represents a sure obstacle for complete release and abandonment to the Spirit.

They were seated in round-table fashion with quite a big open space in the middle, the reason for which I soon had to discover – with my eyes as big as the Round Tower in Copenhagen – for presently a quite corpulent young man seemed to float to the center and began dancing as if he barely weighed a hundred pounds. Many others joined in, but this time around the chorus must have been repeated some 37 times at least and Heaven became more real than Earth. Repetition wasn't the correct word to use, rather it was a continued buildup for joy expressed in song and dance.

After this jubilee a period of silence “broke out,” the length of which I was unable to determine, for it was only after a good while that I realized that we had - children and all - moved into something akin to eternity. Apropos children, they were sitting by themselves in the only reserved seats of the hall from where they had a better view of the proceedings. They were otherwise totally one with the grownups and quite a few contributions came from their quarters and they were never ushered out for special children's sessions, probably because prepared speeches, commonly known as sermons, were anathema at Chard's Church meetings.

Prophecies were in abundance. Scripture readings also occurred and short testimonies or exhortations were thrown in here and there in quite a varied but orderly fashion.

The meeting was dismissed just as mysteriously as it had once been opened, for when a certain brother had shared something from the prophets and gotten himself seated again, they – one and all – stood to their feet as we do when the chancellor’s retinue is leaving the hall, and that was it. The meeting was over. For the Heavenly Conductor had delivered His celestial manna and left, so why stick around for mere terrestrial morsels? And here again, please notice carefully, that no one was invited to say a closing prayer.

While the meeting was still in its progress I repeatedly asked myself the question: “Where are the leaders of this group of people?” “Where are those in charge?” For such men were genuinely conspicuous in their absence and that feature was quite a disturbing fact for an ex-Lutheran turned Baptist, active member of the thoroughbred, charismatic FGBMFI.

I battled with this phenomenon for quite a while till it eventually dawned upon me that the whole thing had been meticulously “tele-guided” from Heaven all through. I, a spirit-baptized, Bible studied believer of 26 years’ standing had to concede defeat to a full blooded pagan who would immediately have proclaimed: “No human heads in there – God is amongst them for a truth!”

I left the South Chard assembly visibly shaken to the core of my being, for if this was what God wanted – and there could be no doubt in my mind about that – then we were all, to a man, guilty of manipulation [of the church].

“Father”, I said, “please give me a word for comfort”, and here is – of all Scripture in the Holy Writ – what I got: “HOW IS IT THEN, BRETHREN WHEN YOU GET TOGETHER, EVERY ONE OF YOU HAS....”, and I couldn’t but proclaim: “God’s Pilot Plant has been established and is to be found at least in one place on Earth, not on the map for sure, but gloriously real anyhow”.

The only question still hovering in my mind was: WHEN ARE WE GOING TO FIND THAT NEW PLANT IN THE PLURAL? [By this he means: “When are we going to find this happening all over the earth?”]