

**THE PATH ONWARD**

*"These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."* Rev 14:4

Since we find ourselves in the midst of present-day Christianity, with all its attributes and problems, what should our course of action be? How can we as believers live in love, unity and harmony with all the members of Christ's body—many of whom are divided into factions, camps and divisions? While most Christians are building vigorously on other foundations which have been laid by men and participating in many foreign things which have been added to the church, how shall we then live? How can we as believers live rightly before God and have a proper relationship with all other Christians also? These questions are of utmost importance. Unfortunately, the answers to them are easy to miss because of their childlike simplicity. Too often we seek a formula or a method rather than the person of Jesus Christ.

Though there is no step-by-step process which will guarantee us a living church experience, there are several principles by which we can be guided. Perhaps the most important one is that our hearts be right with God and our fellow man. If we have not determined in our hearts to love Him and to love and receive all the brethren also, our goal is unachievable. Furthermore, unless we also recognize all meetings of the church as being genuine, we are going to have difficulty and will never succeed in living in true unity.

Let us remember that by accepting Christian meetings as being genuine, we are not accepting what man has added to the church or that which Christians are doing which is not genuine. We are only accepting that portion, however small or large it may be, of Christians' meetings which is real. We must not throw out the baby with the bath water, so to speak. To insist that just because Christians are doing some things wrong or differently from the way we think they should be, they are not of God, is shortsighted. We cannot exclude them from the body of Christ for these reasons. Once our hearts are right with God on this matter, we can then begin to pursue unity.

A second indispensable principle which we have previously discussed is that everything in the church of Christ must be led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's leading is absolutely indispensable. All the functions and activities of the church—such as the appointment of elders, the time and location of meetings, any works of the church, and even the daily life of the believers—need this leading. This important principle cannot be overlooked. As we follow Him in all these things day by day, we will begin to experience the church's reality. No doubt, as we walk with Him, God will bring us into contact with other believers who are also seeking this kind of experience. Together

we can pray, fellowship, meet, and serve the Lord.

The third principle is that we must live the church life according to the revelation which we have seen. Once God reveals something to us, we must begin to walk in this light. When God gave Moses instructions about the building of the tabernacle, He said: "See...that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Heb 8:5)." This principle still applies to us today. After God shows what He wants, we should be careful to do it. Divine revelation should lead to human obedience. We must not shrug it off as unimportant and continue on in the same old way. Nothing which God reveals to us is inconsequential. The writer, James, exhorts us to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," for "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas 1:22,25)."

Although there is no need to start a new denomination, there is much room in this world for more Christian meetings. In fact, the scriptures exhort us to meet more and more as the day of the Lord approaches (Heb 10:25). It is possible that our Lord may lead us to attend some Christian meeting which is already established. Perhaps there are some in our area which are open to the Holy Spirit's leading. All around the country many Christians are enjoying this type of meeting. The scriptural concept of spiritual worshipping is not a new idea. Since the first century many believers have been meeting in this way.

Unfortunately, in some places it can be very difficult to find such meetings. Whether or not this is the case, Jesus Christ may lead us to start new meetings which are living and open to His leading. Christians should be open to God for this. We should not be afraid to follow the Lamb "whithersoever He goeth (Rev 14:4)." Beginning new meetings may in fact be necessary if we are to experience the church in a living way, since it can often be extremely difficult to put new wine into the old wineskins. The practices and traditions of the Christians meeting in our area may be extremely difficult to change. If they are not open to the Holy Spirit, it is very possible that God may want us to begin new meetings which are open to Him. Such meetings are of vital importance both to us and to Him. Therefore this possibility should not be overlooked. Many Christians in every place are more than willing to practice this type of meeting. Surely, other Christians are hungry for a deeper church experience also. By living out what we have seen and sharing it with others, together we can begin to live and meet in a way which is spiritually satisfying.

For this purpose, a home living room would be just fine. If on occasion more room is needed, there are many buildings available to rent which would not involve great financial strain on those attending. The idea behind this is not to meet separately from other believers who do not see things the same way that we do. It is only to have meetings in which the Holy Spirit can be in authority and the church can be manifested in a more full way.

Many Christians wonder with which others they should be meeting. A most practical answer would be to meet with those they know. Our Christian friends, the believers with whom we have some association, are probably those with whom we should be meeting. As we have daily association one with another, a godly relationship in His love will begin to grow. The automatic result of this spiritual relationship should be a desire to worship and pray with one another. And the natural outgrowth of a proper daily church life is the church meetings. So it is that the Christians nearest us are probably those with whom we should meet.

Christians should not feel that they must be a part of some long established

religious organization to be approved by God or to be genuine. This concept is not found in the Bible. The approval of God is much more important than the favor of men. May we seek to please Him and realize that it is He who has founded the church and He that is building it (Mt 16:18). We should never be afraid to follow Him in this work.

If we do begin to have Christian meetings in our home, for example, let us remember that we should never separate ourselves or set ourselves apart from the other Christian meetings in our city. We should not attempt to keep those Christians with whom we meet from fellowshiping with other Christians or attending other meetings. Also, we should receive all the members of the body of Christ in the same way that Christ has received them.

As we study the Word of God and as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will lead us daily into a deeper, richer experience of His church. Our goal should not be to tear down or destroy what other Christians are doing, even if we perceive that it is not godly. Our goal is to build up the Church. However, this may include speaking the truth in love about some of these things to our brethren. We must not shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God merely because others may not agree with us. Yet it is essential to make sure that our hearts are right with God when we do these things lest we use truth which we see as a club to batter other Christians. Revelation should never give rise to feelings of superiority or become another tool for hacking in pieces the body of Christ.

Another essential principle which we must follow is that our experience of Christ in the church must be in accordance with the Bible. Everyone should realize that while we are following the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will always lead us in complete accordance with the Word of God. If we think we are being led in some way by Him which is not in harmony with the Bible, then we must realize that it is not the Holy Spirit who is leading us.

Before we interpret God's Word, however, we should be in the Spirit. We cannot approach the Bible simply with our human minds, try to figure out how the church was practiced in the days of the early apostles, and attempt to implement the same things today. This method does not work. It will only cause confusion and trouble.

In order to further clarify this, let me use the illustration of a package of seeds. When you buy a package of flower seeds, on the front you usually see a beautiful picture of how the flower is going to look. Yet when you open the package, all you find are some small brown seeds. They don't look at all like the picture on the package. But, if you simply plant the seeds in the ground, water them, and wait patiently, something will begin to grow. Very often this sprout doesn't look like the finished product either. Yet it is the same thing. And if properly cared for, it will produce the flowers. To aid in this care, sometimes on the back of the package there are smaller pictures to show us what the sprouts will look like so we can distinguish them from the weeds.

So it should be with the church today. We cannot read the Bible, decide how we think the church should look, and begin to manufacture it. Christ's body simply does not work this way. Some having read the Bible think that they see certain truths about elders, apostles, church meetings and so on. They then attempt to fabricate what they see in a natural way.

This would be the same as someone trying to make a flower. Perhaps first they would buy some pink paper and cut out objects that look like petals. Then they would glue them together. In the end, they might achieve something which looks remotely like a flower. Yet it would be lacking any reality.

God's way is a different way. His church is produced by His life growing up in

and flowing out of the members of His body. It can never be produced artificially. No matter how many elders we appoint, how many meetings we have, or how one with Christians we say we are going to be; unless we have the living reality of Jesus Christ in our daily lives, it is to no avail. It cannot be pleasing to God. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it (Ps 127:1)." We must learn to cultivate the life of Christ which is in us. This goal can be aided by feeding on His word, praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and allowing Him to lead us day by day. As He leads us individually and together with the other members of His body, we will begin to see the church unfold in all her beauty.

The one and only way to experience the church is Jesus Christ. He is the answer to all of our needs. We must cleave to Him and not to any other method or way. We must meet with other Christians according to His direction. We must walk daily in the Spirit and have contact with other Christians by His bidding. This seems very simple. Thank God, it is! The Bible tells us that we should let no man beguile us from the simplicity that is in Christ (II Cor 11:3). Perhaps we have become too complex in our understanding and teaching. Christ is so simple that even the most ignorant brother can follow Him and properly live in the church today. The solution to our multitudinous problems is so uncomplicated that it is easy for us to miss. To follow Christ today is to express Him. And to express Him is to be the church which He desires. All the members of His body, as they follow Him every day, produce the church, His bride. This is what the world needs to see and this is what God desires.

What a great need there is today for such an expression of Jesus Christ. We are living in a time which appears to be the close of the age. The power of the Devil is being unleashed to corrupt mankind and destroy him with many devices. What a tremendous need there is for the church to be a shining testimony of Jesus Christ. How the lampstands need to shine and to lead men to the Saviour. May God have mercy upon us that we could give our lives for His testimony.