

# KNOWING THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS' NAME IN GOD'S ECCLESIA

*By C. H. Mackintosh*

In a day like the present, almost every new idea becomes the center or gathering-point of some new association. Hence, it is important to have divinely formed convictions as to what God's assembly really is. We live in a time of unusual mental activity. It hence calls for the more urgent need of calm, prayerful study of the Word of God.

That Word, characterized by its Author, is like a rock amid the ocean of human thought. There it stands unmoved, prevailing over the raging storm and the ceaseless lashing waves. And not only does it thus stand unmoved itself, but it also imparts its own stability to all who simply take their stand upon it. What a mercy to make one's escape from the restless heaving and tossing of the stormy ocean and find a calm resting place on the eternal Rock!

This, truly, is a mercy. Were it not for having "the law and the testimony" of the Scriptures, what should we be? Where should we go? What should we do? Ten thousand jarring voices fall at times upon the ear, and each voice seems to speak with such authority. What darkness! What confusion! What perplexity! If one is not well taught and grounded in the Word, the danger of being drawn away or sadly unhinged is eminent. One man tells you, "**This** is right!" Another tells you, "**That** is right!" A third will tell you, **Everything** is right! " And a fourth will tell you "**Nothing** is right!" About the question of church position, some go **here!** Some go **there!** Some go **everywhere!** And some go **nowhere!**

Now, under such circumstances, what shall we do? All cannot possibly be right. And yet surely there is something right. It cannot be that we are compelled to live in error, in darkness, or in uncertainty. Where is this safe and blessed path? Hear the Divine reply: "*There is a path,* " authenticated by God, though "*no fowl knoweth it, and the vulture's eye hath not seen it; the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it... Behold **the fear of the Lord**, that is wisdom, and **to depart from evil** is understanding*" (Job 28:7-8, 28).

Let us, therefore, in the fear of the Lord, in the light of His infallible truth, and in humble dependence upon the teaching of the Holy Spirit, proceed to examine the matter before us. May we have grace to abandon all confidence in our own thoughts and the thoughts of others. May we wholeheartedly and honestly yield ourselves up to be taught only of God's Word.

## STATEMENT OF FACT

Now, to get into this grand and all-important subject, we must first make a statement of **fact**, and second ask a question of **inquiry**. The fact is: **God's assembly does exist on the earth today!** The inquiry is: What is that assembly?

First then, the fact. The existence of God's assembly on earth is a fact. This is surely a most important fact. God has in fact His assembly on the earth. I do not refer merely to any human organization, such as the Greek Church, the Church of Rome, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, or to any of the various systems which have emerged from these. These are framed and fashioned by man's hand and carried on by man's resources. I refer simply to His assembly, that which is gathered by God the Holy Spirit, centered around the Person of God the Son, and has worshipful fellowship with God the Father.

### **Authority in Scripture**

Our capacity to recognize and appreciate this assembly is a totally different matter. It will depend on our spirituality, our self-emptiness, the brokenness of our will, and our childlike subjection to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. If we begin our search for the truth of God's assembly, or for any expression of it, with minds full of prejudice, preconceived thoughts, and personal partialities, we will fail to reach the goal.

If, in our searchings, we seek the aid of the flickering light of the dogmas, opinions, and the traditions of men, nothing is more certain of failure for the determination of the truth. **To recognize God's assembly, we must be exclusively taught by God's Word and led by God's Spirit.** For it may be said of God's assembly as well as of the sons of God that *"the world knoweth it not."*

Hence, if we are governed by the spirit of *"the world,"* we will desire to exalt man, seek to commend ourselves to the thoughts of man, and aim to gain self-serving goals and soul-ensnaring expediencies. Consequently, we might as well abandon our search for any true expression of God's assembly. We should merely take refuge in that form of human organization which most fully commends itself to our considerations or convictions.

Perhaps, our object is to find a religious community where the Word of God is read or where the people of God are found. If so, we may quickly be satisfied. It would be hard indeed not to find one or both of these objects in any section of the professing Christian body.

Moreover, we might merely aim at doing all the good we can without any question about how we do it. In our ambitious undertaking, our motto might *be per fas aut nefas*—"right or wrong," we will do anything to advance our goals. Consequently, we will say that, *"Sacrifice is better than to obey, and the fat of rams better than to hearken."*

Surely, from this perspective it is worse than vain for us to pursue a search for God's assembly. Why? **Because the assembly can only be discovered and approved by one who has been taught to flee from ten thousand flowery pathways of human expediency.** Such a one will submit his conscience, his heart, his understanding, and his whole moral being to the supreme authority of the Scripture's *"Thus saith the Lord."*

In other words, the obedient disciple knows such a fact as God's assembly. He will also be enabled through grace to find it and to know his place in it. The candid student of Scripture knows full well the difference between what is founded, formed, and governed by the wisdom and the will of man, and what is gathered, focused, and governed by Christ the Lord. How vast is the difference! It is just the difference between God and man.

But can Scriptural proofs be given to show the fact of God's assembly on earth? Without the authority of the Word, all statements are utterly valueless. Therefore, what says the Scripture?

### **Prophecy in Matthew**

The first quotation is from that famous passage in Matthew 16: *"When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?'"*

*"And they said, 'Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.'"*

*"He saith unto them, 'But who say ye that I am?'"*

*"And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"*

*"And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My assembly; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'" (vv.13-18). [The words "church" and "assembly" are both English translations from the same Greek word *ecclesia*].*

Here our blessed Lord intimates that His purpose is to build an assembly. He sets forth the true foundation of that assembly, namely, *"Christ, the Son of the living God."* This is the all-important point in our subject. The building is founded on the Rock, and that Rock is not the poor failing, stumbling, erring Peter, but *CHRIST*, the eternal Son of the living God. Every stone in that building partakes of the Rock-life which, as victorious over all the power of the enemy, is indestructible.

This passage indicates the utmost importance of distinguishing between what Christ builds and what man builds. *"The gates of hades"* will certainly prevail against all that is merely of man. Hence, it would be a fatal mistake to apply to man's building these words which only apply to Christ's building. Man may build with *"wood, hay, and stubble,"* and regrettably he does. But all that our Lord Christ builds will stand forever. The stamp of eternity is upon every work of His hand. All praise to His glorious name!

Again, passing over a section of Matthew's Gospel, we come to an equally familiar passage:

*Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy*

*brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the assembly, but if he neglect to hear the assembly, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:15-20).*

We will have occasion to refer to this passage again, under the section "Question of Inquiry." It is here introduced merely as a link in the chain of scriptural evidence of the fact that there is such a thing as the assembly of God on the earth. This assembly is not a name, a form, a pretense, an assumption. It is a Divine reality, an institution of God, possessing His seal and sanction. It is something to be appealed to in all cases of personal trespass and dispute which cannot be settled by the parties involved.

This assembly may consist of only "*two or three*" in any particular place. It is the smallest plurality, if you please, but there it is, owned of God. And its decisions are ratified in Heaven.

Now, we are not to be scared away from the truth on this subject just because the church of Rome has attempted to base her monstrous pretensions on the two passages which we have just quoted. **That** church is not God's assembly built on the Rock Christ and gathered in the name of Jesus. But it is a human apostasy, founded on a failing mortal, and governed by the traditions and doctrines of men. We must not therefore suffer ourselves to be deprived of God's reality by reason of Satan's counterfeit.

God has His assembly on the earth, and we are responsible for recognizing it and finding our place in it. This may be difficult in a day of confusion like the present. It will demand a single eye, a submissive will, and a mortified mind. But let the readers be assured that it is his privilege to possess with Divine certainty his place in the assembly of God. Its truth is as certain as his own salvation through the blood of the Lamb, and he should not be satisfied without knowing it.

I should not be content to go on for an hour without the assurance that I am, in spirit and principle, associated with an assembly of God on earth. I say "in spirit and principle," because I may happen to be in a place where there is no such local expression of the assembly. In which case, I must be satisfied to hold fellowship "in spirit" with all those who are on the ground of the assembly of God elsewhere. I must wait on Him to order my way. Then I may enjoy the real privilege of being present in person with His people who are tasting the blessings and sharing the responsibility of His assembly on earth.

This simplifies the matter amazingly. If I cannot have a true expression of God's assembly, I will have nothing. It will not suffice to point me to a religious community of Christians where the gospel is preached and some ordinances are administered. I must be convinced by the authority of God's Word and His Spirit that a group of Christians is in very truth

gathered on the ground and marked by characteristics of God's assembly. Otherwise, I cannot own it.

Yes, I can own the children of God individually anywhere, if they will permit me to do so outside the bounds of their religious system. But their sectarian system I cannot own or sanction in any way whatsoever. If I were to do so, it would just be tantamount to these assertions: It makes no difference whether I take my place in the assembly of God or in the systems of man, whether I acknowledge the Lordship of Christ or the authority of man, whether I bow to the Word of God or the opinions of man.

Without doubt, this will give offense to many. It will be pronounced bigotry, prejudice, narrow-mindedness, intolerance, and the like. But this should not trouble us. All we have to do is to ascertain the truth as to God's assembly and cleave to it whole-heartedly and energetically at all cost.

If God has an assembly, and Scripture says He has, let me be in it and nowhere else. It must be obvious that there are several conflicting systems. They cannot all be Divine. What am I to do? Am I to be satisfied to take the lesser of two evils? Surely not! What then? The answer is plain, pointed, and direct - it is either God's assembly or nothing. If there is a local expression of that assembly, well, let's be there in person. If not, let's be content to hold spiritual communion with all in other localities who humbly and faithfully own and occupy that holy ground.

It may sound like charitable liberality when someone is ready to sanction and go with everything and everybody. It may appear very easy and very pleasant to be in a place "where everybody's will is indulged, and nobody's conscience is exercised." In other words, we may hold what we like, say what we like, do what we like, and go where we like. All of this may seem very delightful, very plausible, very popular, very attractive. But, oh! It will end in barrenness and bitterness. And, in the day of the Lord's return, it will definitely be burned up as so much "*wood, hay, and stubble.*" It will not stand the scrutiny of His Judgment Seat.

## History in Acts

But let us proceed with scriptural proofs. In the Acts of the Apostles, or rather, the Acts of the Holy Spirit, we find the assembly formally set up. For example, look at Acts 2:46-47. *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to **the assembly** daily, such as should be saved."*

Such was the original, simple apostolic order. When a person was converted, he took his place spontaneously in the assembly. There was no difficulty in the matter. There were no sects or parties, each claiming to be considered a church, a cause, or an interest. There was just one thing - the assembly of God where He dwelt, acted, and ruled.

It was not a system formed according to the will, judgment, or even conscience of man. Man had not yet entered upon the business of "church-making." This was **God's work.** It

was just as exclusively God's province and prerogative to baptize the saved into one Body by one Spirit as to save the scattered from every nation.

There is no such thing in Scripture as a member of a church. Every true believer is a member of the church of God, the one Body of Christ. He can therefore be no more properly a member of anything else than my arm can be a member of any other body.

The only true ground on which believers can gather is set forth in that grand statement: "*There is one body, and one Spirit*" (Eph.4:4). And again: "*We being many are one loaf and one body*" (1 Cor.10:17). If God declares that there is but "*one body*," it must be contrary to His mind to have many bodies, sects, or denominations.

Now, it is quite true that no given number of believers in any given place can be called "the body of Christ," or "the assembly of God." Yet, they should be gathered on the ground of that body and that assembly, and on no other ground. This principle is important. It holds well at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. The sad fact of the ruin of the professing church does not touch it. It has been true since the day of Pentecost. It is true at this moment. And it will be true until the church is taken to meet her Head and Lord in the clouds - that "*THERE IS ONE BODY.*" All believers belong to that body, and they should meet on that ground, and on no other.

Why, we may justly inquire, should it be different today than in the first century? Why should the regenerated seek anything beyond or anything different from the assembly of God? Is not this sufficient? Is not the place where He dwells, and acts, and rules just the place where all His people ought to be? Definitely! Should they rest satisfied with anything else? Definitely not! I repeat, with emphasis: "**Either that or nothing.**"

Regrettably, it is true that failure, ruin, and apostasy have come in. The mighty tide of error has risen and swept away many original landmarks of the assembly. Man's wisdom and his will - or, if you please, his reason, his judgment, and his misguided conscience - have wrought confusion in most ecclesiastical matters.

Now the results have appeared before us in the almost innumerable sects and parties of the present moment. Still, the assembly is the assembly still, in spite of all the failure, error, and confusion that have come in. The difficulty in reaching it may be great, but its reality when reached is unaltered and unalterable.

In the apostolic times of Acts the assembly stood out, in bold relief, from the dark background of Judaism on the one hand, and paganism on the other. It was impossible to mistake it. There it stood as a grand reality! It was a company of living men, gathered, indwelt, ruled, and regulated by God the Holy Spirit. When the unlearned or unbelieving came in, he was convinced of all and constrained to acknowledge that God was there. (See 1 Cor. 12 and 14.)

### **Addressees in the Epistles and Revelation**

Thus, in the Gospel of Matthew, our blessed Lord intimates His purpose of building an assembly. This assembly is historically presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles. Then,

in the Epistles of Paul, he is addressing the assembly, in seven distinct places - Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica. Finally, in the opening of the book of Revelation, seven distinct assemblies are addressed. Now in all these places, the assembly of God was a plain, palpable, real thing, established and maintained by God Himself. It was not a human organization, but in each place a divine institution. A testimony. A light bearer for God.

Thus far, our scriptural proofs establish the fact that God has an assembly on the earth, gathered, indwelt and governed by the Holy Spirit, Who is the true and only Vicar of Christ upon earth. **The Gospels prophetically** intimate the assembly. **The Acts historically** presents the assembly. And **the Epistles formally** address the assembly. All this is plain.

And let it be carefully noted that everyone should listen to nothing on this subject but the voice of the Holy Scripture. Let not reason speak. Let not tradition lift her voice. Let not expediency dictate. The Holy Scripture is all-sufficient. It is sufficient to furnish the man of God thoroughly and to equip him perfectly for all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Word of God is either sufficient or it is not. It is amply sufficient for every urgency of God's assembly. It could not be otherwise if God is its Author. We must either deny the Divinity of the Bible or admit its sufficiency. There is not one hair's breadth of middle ground. It is impossible that God could have written an imperfect and insufficient Book.

This is a very serious principle about this subject. Many Protestant writers have, in assailing popery, maintained the sufficiency and authority of the Bible. But it does seem plain that they also are always at fault, especially when their opponents turn sharp around upon them and demand proof from Scripture for the many things sanctioned and adopted by Protestant communities. There are many things adopted and practiced in the denominational establishment and other Protestant communities which have no sanction in the Word. When the shrewd and intelligent defenders of popery have called attention to some of these things and demanded authority for them, the weakness of mere Protestantism has been made strikingly apparent.

**If we admit, for a moment, that in some things we must have recourse to tradition and expediency, then who will undertake to fix the boundary line? If it is permissive to depart from Scripture at all, how far are we to go?** If the authority of tradition is admissible at all, who is to fix its domain? If we leave the narrow and well-defined pathway of Divine revelation, and enter upon the wide and bewildering field of human tradition, has not one man as much right as another to make a choice?

In summary, it is obviously impossible to meet the adherents of Roman Catholicism on any other ground than that on which the assembly of God takes its stand - namely, **the all-sufficiency** of the Word of God, the Name of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Such is the impregnable position occupied by His assembly. However weak and contemptible that assembly may be in the eyes of the world, we know, for Christ has told us, that *"the gates of hades shall not prevail against it."*

Those gates will certainly prevail against every human system - against all those corporations and associations which men have set up. And never has hell's gates triumph been made more horribly manifest than in the Church of Rome itself, though it has arrogantly laid claim to this very declaration of our Lord as the bulwark of its strength.

Nothing can withstand the power of the gates of hades except the assembly built upon "*the Living Stone*." And the local expression of that assembly may be "*two or three gathered in the name of Jesus*," a poor, feeble, contemptible handful - the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things.

It is well to be clear and decided about this. Christ's promise can never fail. He has come down to the lowest possible point to which His assembly can be reduced, even "two." How gracious! How tender! How considerate! How like Himself! He attaches all the dignity, all the value, all the efficacy of His own Divine and deathless Name to an obscure handful gathered around Himself.

It must be very evident to the spiritual mind that the Lord Jesus, in speaking of the "*two or three*," thought not of those vast systems which have sprung up in ancient, mediaeval, and modern times, throughout the eastern and western worlds. They numbered their adherents and devotees, not by "twos or threes," but by kingdoms, provinces, and parishes.

It is very plain that a baptized kingdom and "*two or three*" living souls gathered in the Name of Jesus do not and cannot mean the same thing. Baptized Christendom is one thing, and the assembly of God is another. What this latter is, we have yet to unfold. We are here asserting that they are not and cannot be the same thing. But they are constantly confounded, though no two things can be more distinct.

If we would know under what figure Christ presents the baptized world of Christendom, we have only to look at *the "leaven"* and the "*mustard tree*" of Matthew 13. The former gives the internal, and the latter the external character of "*the kingdom of heaven*." However, "*a mustard seed*" by contrast is that which was originally set up in truth and simplicity, a real, genuine thing, though small. But later through Satan's crafty working, it has become inwardly a corrupt mass, like "*leaven*."

And outwardly it is a far-spreading, showy, popular thing in the earth, gathering all kinds beneath the shadow of its patronage, like a big "*tree*." Such is the lesson, a simple yet a deeply solemn lesson. The spiritual mind will learn something about organized Christianity from the "*leaven*" and the "*mustard tree*" of Matthew 13.

And we may add: One result of learning this lesson would be an ability to distinguish between the appearance of "*the kingdom of heaven*" and a gathering of "*the assembly of God*." The former may be compared to a wide swamp; the latter, to a running stream passing through it. The clear stream is in constant danger of losing its distinctive character, as well as its proper direction, by its mingling with the surrounding waters. To confound the two things is to deal a deathblow to all godly discipline and consequent purity in the assembly of God.

If the kingdom and the assembly mean the same thing, then how should we act for "*that wicked person*" in 1 Corinthians 5. The Apostle tells us to "*put him away*." Where are we to put him? Our Lord Himself tells us distinctly in Matthew 13 that "*the field is the world*," and again in John 17, He says that My disciples are not of the world. This makes it all plain enough.



But men tell us, in the very face of our Lord's statement that the field is the church, that the tares and the wheat - the ungodly and the godly - are to grow together and never to be separated. Consequently, the plain and positive teaching of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 5 is made to be set in open opposition to the plain and positive teaching of our Lord in Matthew 13. And all this flows from the effort of confounding two distinct things: the wider, worldly scope of "*the kingdom of heaven*" and the more narrow, godly sphere of "*the assembly of God*."

It would not by any means be suitable or harmonious with the object of this paper to enter further upon the interesting subject of "*the kingdom*."

Enough has been said if the reader has thereby been convinced of the immense importance of duly distinguishing the kingdom from the assembly. What this latter truth is we will now proceed to inquire. May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher!

## QUESTION OF INQUIRY

In handling the question "what is God's assembly," our thoughts will be clear and precise by considering the following four points:

- What is the **ground** on which God's assembly is gathered?
- What is the **center** around which the assembly is gathered?
- What is the **power** by which the assembly is gathered?
- What is the **authority** on which the assembly is gathered?

### Ground of Gathering

**First**, the **ground** on which the assembly is gathered is, in one word, **salvation or eternal life**. We do not enter the assembly to be saved, but as those who are already saved. The Word is: "*On this rock I will build my church*." He does not say, "On my church I will build the salvation of souls." One of Rome's boasted dogmas is this: "There is no salvation outside of the true church." Yes, but we can go deeper still and say, "Off the true Rock there is no church!" Take away the Rock, and you have nothing but a baseless fabric of error and corruption. What a miserable delusion to think of being saved by that!

Thank God, for it is not so. We do not get to Christ through the church, but to the church through Christ. To reverse this order is to displace Christ entirely. Thus, we have neither the Rock, nor church, nor salvation! We meet Christ as a life-giving Savior before we have anything to say about the assembly at all. Hence, we could possess eternal life and enjoy full salvation as though there were no such thing as an assembly of God on the earth.

The reader will do well to note the fact that in Matthew 16 we have the first allusion to the church, and there our Lord speaks of it as a future thing. He says, "*On this Rock I will build*

*my church.*” He does not say, “I **have** been, or I **am** building.” Briefly, the church had no existence until our Lord Christ was raised from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God. Then, but not until then, the Holy Spirit was sent down to baptize believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, into one Body and unite them to the risen and glorified Head in heaven. This Body has been on the earth since the descent of the Holy Spirit, it is still here, and it will be here until Christ comes to fetch it to Himself. It is a perfectly unique thing. It is not found in the Old Testament Scripture.

Paul expressly tells us, it was not revealed in other ages. It was hid in God and never made known until its revelation was committed to him. (See Rom. 16:25-26; Eph.3:3-11; Col. 1:24-27.) The church is never spoken of until Matthew 16, and there only as a future thing. The **termini** of the church's earthly history are Pentecost at the beginning (Acts 2) and the Rapture at the end (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

We cannot be too simple in grasping this truth, the truth of getting into the church through Christ alone. At a time like the present, ecclesiastical pretension is rising to such heights. The church, falsely so called, is opening her bosom, with delusive tenderness, and inviting poor, sin-burdened, world-sick, and heavy laden souls to take refuge therein. She, with crafty liberalism, throws open her treasury door, and places her resources at the disposal of needy, craving, hungry souls. And truly those resources have powerful attractions for those who are not on *"the Rock."*

There is an ordained priesthood, professing to stand in an unbroken line with the Apostles. Pathetically, how different are the two ends of the line - the New Testament Apostles and today's organized priesthood. There is still a continual sacrifice, but lamentably, a bloodless one and therefore worthless (Heb. 9:22). Also, there is a splendid ritual, but regrettably, it seeks its origin among the shadows of a bygone age, shadows which have been forever displaced by the Person, work, and offices of the eternal Son of God. Him, we will forever adore in His peerless Name!

The believer has a very conclusive answer to all the pretensions and promises of the Romish system. He can say he has found his **all** in a crucified and risen Savior. Why does he want the sacrifice of the Mass? He is washed in the blood of Christ. Why does he want a poor, sinful, dying priest who cannot save himself? He has the Son of God as his Priest. Why does he want a pompous ritual with all of its imposing adjuncts? He worships, in spirit and in truth, within the Holiest of all, where he enters with boldness, through the blood of Jesus.

Nor is it merely with Roman Catholicism. There are thousands, besides Roman Catholics, who, in heart, look to the church, if not for salvation, at least as a stepping stone to salvation. Hence, the importance of seeing clearly that the ground on which God's assembly is gathered is the Lord's salvation and eternal life. Whatever be the object of that assembly, it is most certainly not to provide salvation for its members, since all of its members are saved before they enter it at all.

God's assembly is a house full of salvation from one end to the other. It's a blessed fact! It is not an institution set up for the purpose of providing salvation to sinners, neither is it for supplying their religious wants. The assembly is a saved, living body, formed and gathered by the Holy Spirit. It makes known to *"principalities and powers in the heavenlies, the*

*manifold wisdom of God.*" It declares to the whole universe nothing but the **all-sufficiency** of the Name of Jesus.

Now, the great enemy of Christ and the church is well aware of what a powerful testimony the assembly of God is called and designed to produce on the earth. Therefore, he has put forth all of his dark energy to quash that testimony in every possible way. He hates the Name of Jesus and every tendency to glorify that Name. Hence, his intense opposition is unleashed on the assembly as a whole, and on each local expression wherever it may happen to exist.

Satan has no objection to a mere religious establishment. He sets it in motion to provide for man's religious wants, whether maintained by organizations or by voluntary effort. You may set up whatever you please. You may join whatever you please. You may be whatever you please - as long as anything and everything is not for God's assembly. **That** Satan hates most fervently and will seek to blacken and blast by every means in his power. But those consolatory accents of the Lord Christ fall with Divine power on the ear of faith: *"On this Rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it."*

### **Center of Gathering**

**Second**, this spontaneously brings us to the next point: What is the **center** around which God's assembly is gathered? The center is **CHRIST**, the Living Stone, as we read in the Epistle of 1 Peter: *"To whom coming as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"* (2:4-5).

It is around the Person of the living Christ, then, that God's assembly is gathered. It is not around a doctrine, however true. Nor around an ordinance, however important. But around a living, Divine Person! This is a great cardinal and vital point, which must be distinctly seized, tenaciously held, faithfully avowed, and constantly carried out. It is *"to Whom coming!"* It is not "to which coming." We do not come to a thing, but to a Person. *"Let us go forth therefore unto HIM . . ."* (Heb. 13:13). The Holy Spirit leads us **only** to Jesus. Nothing short of this will avail.

We may speak of joining a church, becoming a member of a congregation, attaching ourselves to a party, a cause, or an interest. All of these expressions darken and confuse the mind, and hide from our view the Divine idea of the assembly of God. It is not our business to join anything. When God converted us, He joined us by His Spirit directly to Christ. And that should be enough for us! Christ is the only and unique Center of God's assembly.

And, we may ask, is not He sufficient? Is it not quite enough for us to be *"joined to the Lord"* (1 Cor.6:17)? Why add anything thereto? *"Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matt.18:20). What more can we possibly need? If Jesus is the Center in our midst, why should we think of setting up a human president? Why not unanimously and wholeheartedly allow **Him** to take the president's seat, and bow

to **Him** in all things? Why set up human authority, in any shape or form, within the house of God?

But this is done. And it is well to speak plainly about it. Man is set up in what he professes to be an assembly. We see human authority exercised in a sphere where Divine authority alone should be acknowledged. It matters not whether it is pope, parson, priest, or some presiding leader. Basically, the principle is that man is set up in Christ's place.

It may be the pope appointing a cardinal, a legate, or a bishop to his sphere of work. Or it may be a presiding leader appointing a man to exhort or to pray for ten minutes. The principle is the same. It is human authority acting in the place where only God's authority should be owned. If Christ is central in our midst, we can count on Him for everything.

Now in saying this we anticipate a very probable objection. It may be said, by the advocates of human authority, "How could an assembly ever get on without some human presiding leader? Would it not lead to all kinds of confusion? Would it not open the door for everyone to intrude himself upon the assembly irrespective of his gift or qualification? Should we not have men popping up often, worrying us with their empty nonsense and dull rhetoric?"

Our answer is a very simple one. Jesus is all-sufficient! We can trust Him to keep His house in order. We feel ourselves far safer in His gracious and powerful hand, than in the hands of the most attractive human president.

We have all of the spiritual gifts treasured up in Jesus. He is the Fountainhead of all ministerial authority. He is *"the One who hath the seven stars in His right hand"* (Rev. 2: 1). Let us only confide in Him, and the order of our assembly will be as perfectly provided for as the salvation of our souls. This is just the reason for the way we connected the title of this article using the "The All-sufficiency of Jesus' Name" with "God's Ecclesia." We believe that the Name of Jesus is, in truth, all-sufficient, not only for personal salvation, but also for all the urgencies of the assembly. Christ is our all-sufficient Center for worship, communion, ministries, discipline, government - yes, everything! Having Him, we have all and abound.

### Contrast to Religion

Christ as our Center is the real marrow and substance of our principle. Our one aim and object is to exalt the Name of Jesus. We believe He has been dishonored in what calls itself His house. He has been dethroned, and man's authority has been set up. In vain does He bestow a ministerial gift, for the possessor of that gift dare not exercise it without the seal, the sanction, and the authority of man. Not only is this so, but man also thinks it proper to give his seal, his sanction and authority to one who possesses not a particle of spiritual gift. Yea, perhaps he may not have a particle of spiritual life. Nevertheless, he is a recognized minister. **It is paradoxical that man's authority without Christ's gift makes a man a minister, and Christ's gift without man's authority does not!** If this does not dishonor the Lord Christ, what does?

Christian readers, pause here and deeply ponder this principle of human authority. Get to the root of it, and judge it thoroughly, in the light of Holy Scripture and the Presence of

God. It is, be certain of it, the grand point of distinction between the assembly of God and every human system of religion under the sun. If you look at all those systems, from Romanism down to the most refined form of religious association, you will find man's authority recognized and demanded. With it, you may minister; without it, you may not.

On the contrary, in God's assembly, Christ's gift *alone* makes a man a minister, apart from all human authority. "*Not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead*" (Gal. 1: 1). This is the grand principle of ministry in the assembly of God.

Now, in classing Romanism together with all of the other religious systems of the day, let it once for all be distinctly understood - it is *only* related to the principle of ministerial authority. God forbid that parity is shown to a system which shuts out the Word of God, teaches idolatry, worships saints and angels, and promotes a whole mass of gross and abominable error and superstition. It most definitely does not compare with those more improved systems where the Word of God is upheld and scriptural truth is somewhat proclaimed. Nothing can be further from our thoughts. We believe popery to be Satan's masterpiece of a religious system, though many people of God have been, and may yet be, involved within it.

Further, let us at this stage most clearly declare to be true that the saints of God are to be found in every Protestant community, including both ministers and members. The Lord uses them in many ways by blessing their work, service, and personal testimony.

Finally, we feel it is nigh to declare that we refuse to move a finger and touch any one of those systems. It is not with the systems that we have to do. The Lord will deal with them. Our burden is only with the saints in those systems - to seek by every spiritual and scriptural agency to get them into their true position regarding God's assembly.

Having said this much to prevent misunderstanding, we return with increased power to our principle: That the thread of human authority runs through every religious system in Christendom. And in truth there is not a hair's breadth of consistent standing ground between the church of Rome and the assembly of God.

An honest seeker after truth, departing from among the dark shadows of popery, cannot possibly stop until he finds himself in the clear light of God's assembly. He may take years to travel over the intervening space. His steps may be slow and measured. But if only he follows the light in simplicity and godly sincerity, he will find no rest between those two extremes. The assembly of God is the true place for all of the children of God. Regrettably, they are not all there. But this is only their loss and their Lord's dishonor. They should be there, because God is not only present there, but He also is allowed freedom to act and **rule** there.

This latter statement is all-important. Because it is said, Is not God everywhere? Does He not act in various places? It is true, for He is everywhere, and He also works in the midst of palpable error and evil. Nevertheless, He is not allowed to **rule** in the systems of men, because man's authority is actually supreme. This we have already shown.

And besides this, the fact of God's mercy in converting and blessing souls in any system is still no reason for us to be there. Otherwise, in this sense we ought to be in the Church of Rome. Remember how many have been converted and blessed in that awful system. Even in a certain revival, we have heard of persons being stricken with conviction in many of the Roman Catholic chapels. What proves too much proves nothing at all.

Hence, no arguments can be based on the fact of God's working in a place. God is Sovereign and may in mercy work where He pleases. Yet we are subject to His authority and work where we are commanded according to His Word. My Master may go where He pleases, but I must go where I am told.

### Dangers and Difficulties

But some may ask, "Is there no danger of incompetent or unfaithful men intruding their ministry upon the assembly of God? And if this is so, where is the difference between that assembly and systems of men?" In reply, "Certainly, there is a very great danger. But such a thing would be in spite of the principle, not by virtue of it." This makes a great difference. It is pathetic that we often see intrusive men on their feet in the midst of an assembly. Common sense and spirituality dictate that they should keep their seats.

Let no one imagine, while we contend for the truth of God's assembly, that we are ignorant and forgetful of the dangers and trials to which the assembly is exposed. Far from it. No could be on that ground for 28 years, like the author of this message has, without being painfully conscious of the difficulty of maintaining it. But then the very trials, dangers, and difficulties became many convincing evidences. Painful? Yes, but they proved the truth of the position seen in the Scriptures. Was there no remedy but an appeal to human authority, a setting up of man in Christ's place, and a return to worldly systems? Then we should without hesitation pronounce the remedy to be far worse than the disease! For were we to adopt the remedy, we should have worse symptoms than the disease. Why? Because the remedy would not be mourned over as a disease, but be gloried in as the fruits of man's so-called order.

Nevertheless, there is a scriptural remedy. Blessed be God! What is it? "***There am I in their midst!***" This is enough! It does not say, "There is a pope, a priest, a parson, or a presiding leader in their midst, at their head, in the chair, or in the pulpit." No thoughts of such a thing exist from cover to cover in the New Testament. Even in the assembly at Corinth, where there were grievous confusion and disorder, the inspired Apostle never hinted at such a thing as a human presiding agent - not under any name whatsoever. "*God is the author of peace in all the assemblies of the saints*" (1 Cor. 14:33). God was there to keep order. They were to look to Him, not to man under any name. To set up a man to keep a good order in God's assembly is sheer unbelief. Moreover, it is an open insult to the Divine Presence.

Now, we have been often asked to cite Scripture showing the idea of a Divine Presidency in the assembly. Immediately, we reply: "*There am I,*" and "*God is the Author.*" On these two pillars, even were we to have no more, we can triumphantly build the glorious truth of a Divine Presidency. This is a truth which must deliver all who receive it, if they

hold it as from God, rather than from every system of man, call it by whatever name you please.

It is, in our judgment, impossible to recognize Christ as the Center and Sovereign Ruler in the assembly when anyone continues to sanction the setting up of a man over others. When once we have tasted the sweetness of being under Christ, we can never again submit to the servile bondage of being under man. This is not insubordination or impatience of control. It is only the utter refusal to bow to a false authority and to sanction a sinful usurpation. The moment we see man usurping authority in that which calls itself the church, we simply ask, "Who are you?" And then we retire to a sphere where God alone is acknowledged.

"But then there are errors, evils, and abuses even in this sphere." Undoubtedly. But if there are, we have a God Who can correct them. And what if an assembly is henceforth troubled by the intrusion of ignorant and foolish men? Men who have never yet measured themselves in the presence of God? Men who boldly overleap the wide domain over which common sense, good taste, and moral proprieties preside? Men who vainly talk of being led by the Holy Spirit? Men who are always restlessly and willfully doing some ambitious thing? Men who keep the assembly in a continual state of nervous apprehension, not knowing what's coming next?

If any assembly be thus grievously afflicted, what should they do? Abandon the ground in impatience, chagrin, and disappointment? Give it all up as a myth, a fable, and an idle illusion? Go back to that from which they once came out? It is lamentable that some have done exactly this, proving that they never understood what they were doing. Or, if they did, they had not the faith to pursue it. May the Lord have mercy upon such and open their eyes that they may see from whence they have fallen. May they get a true view of the assembly of God in contrast with the allurements of men's attractive systems.

But what is the assembly to do when abuses creep in? They should simply look to Christ as the Lord of His house. Own Him in His proper place. Bring the Name of Jesus to bear upon the abuse whatever it is.

Will anyone say, "It is not enough. It has been tried and was ineffectual"?

We do not, and cannot, believe it! Certainly, we may find that the Name of Jesus is not enough. But we will never hand ourselves over to man and his miserable order! We will never, God being our Helper, erase that peerless Name from the central standard around which the Holy Spirit has convened us! How can we place the perishable name of a mortal in its stead?

### *Subjects Under Hatred*

We are fully aware of the immense difficulties and painful trials connected with the assembly of God. Its difficulties and trials are perfectly characteristic of the assembly life and testimony. There is nothing more under the canopy of heaven that the devil hates than the assembly of God. He will leave no stone unturned to oppose that assembly. We have seen Satan manifesting his work repeatedly. An evangelist may go to a place and preach the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus for the salvation of souls. He will have thousands hanging on his lips. But let the same man return. While he preaches the same Gospel, he takes another step and proclaims the all-sufficiency of that same Jesus for the many

urgencies of an assembly of believers. He will find himself opposed on all sides. Why is this? It is because the devil hates the feeblest expression of the assembly of God.

You may see a town left for ages and generations to the dark and dull routine of a religious formalism. In other words, a dead people gather once a week to hear a dead man going through a dead service, and yet go through the rest of the week living in sin and folly. There is not a breath of life in them, not a leaf stirring around them. In this the devil delights. But let someone come and unfurl the standard of the Name of Jesus - Jesus the Center for the soul and Jesus the Center for the assembly - and you will soon see a mighty change. The rage of hell is excited, and the dark, dreadful tide of opposition rises.

This is the true secret behind many bitter attacks, which have been made on those who occupy the ground of the assembly of God. Undoubtedly, we have to mourn over our many mistakes, errors, and failures. We have given much occasion to the adversary, by our follies and inconsistencies. We have been a poor blotted epistle, a faint and feeble witness, a flickering light. For all this, we have to be deeply humbled before our God.

Nothing could be more unbecoming in us than pretension, or assumption, or the putting forth of high sounding ecclesiastical titles or claims. We must be reminded that dust is our place. Yes, beloved brethren, the place of confession and self-judgment is becoming to us when we are in the Presence of our God.

Still, we are not to let slip the glorious truth of the assembly of God when we have so shamefully failed in carrying it out. We are **not** to judge the truth by our exhibition of it, **but** rather to judge our exhibition by the truth. It is one thing to occupy Divine ground, and another to carry ourselves properly thereon. While it is perfectly right to judge our practice and our principles, yet truth is truth in spite of all that. And we may rest assured that the devil hates the truth of the assembly. A mere handful of poor people, gathering in the Name of Jesus and breaking bread, is a shame to the devil. How true it is that such an assembly evokes the wrath of men. Why? Because it throws their office and authority overboard, and they cannot bear that. Yet, the root of the whole matter will be found in Satan's hatred. His special object of attack is the testimony which the assembly bears to the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus for its every possible urgency.

This is a truly noble testimony. May it be more faithfully carried out. Intense opposition is inevitable - like the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and the returned captives. Many a Rehum and many a Sanballat will be encountered. Nehemiah might have gone and built any other wall in the whole world except the wall of Jerusalem, and Sanballat would never have molested him. But to build the wall of Jerusalem was to him an unpardonable offense. Why? Just because Jerusalem was God's earthly center, around which He will yet gather the restored tribes of Israel. This was the secret of the enemy's opposition. And mark the designed contempt: *"If foxes go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."*

And yet Sanballat and his allies were not able to break it down. They might have caused it to cease because of the Jew's lack of faith and energy. But they could not break it down when God would have it up.

How this is like the present moment! Surely, there is nothing new under the sun. There is a designed contempt, and the alarm is real. But, oh! If those who are gathered in the Name of



Jesus were only more true in their heart to the blessed Center, what testimony there would be! What power! What victory! How it would have impact all around us. “***Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there I am.***” There is nothing like this under the sun, even if it is ever so feeble and contemptible. The Lord be praised for raising up such a witness for Himself in these last days. May He greatly increase its effectiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit!

### **Power of Gathering**

**Third**, we must now very briefly glance at our next point: What is the **power** by which the assembly is gathered? Here again mm and his doings are set aside. It is not man's will choosing, not man's reason discovering, nor man's judgment dictating, nor man's conscience demanding. Rather, it is the **HOLY SPIRIT** who gathers souls to Jesus. As Jesus is the only gathering Center, so the Holy Spirit is the only gathering power. The one is as independent of man as the other.

It is “*where two or three are gathered.*” It does not say “where two or three are **met**.” People may meet together around any center, on any ground, and by any influence, but they will merely form a club, a society, an association, a community. But the Holy Spirit gathers people to Jesus on the ground of salvation. And this, wherever they convene on this ground, is the assembly of God. The gathering may not embrace all of the saints of God in a locality, but it is really on the ground of the assembly of God, and on nothing else. It may consist of only “*two or three.*” Although there may be hundreds of Christians in the various religious systems around, yet the “*two or three*” are on the ground of the assembly of God.

This is a very simple truth. A soul led by the Holy Spirit will gather only to the Name of Jesus. If we gather to anything else - whether it is to some point of truth, some ordinance, or something else - we are not led of the Holy Spirit. It is not a question of eternal life or salvation. Thousands are saved by Christ, but they do not own Him as their Center. They are gathered to some form of Church government, some favorite doctrine, some special ordinance, some gifted man. The Holy Spirit will never gather to any one of these. He gathers only to a risen Christ. This is true of the whole church of God upon earth, and each local assembly, wherever it convenes, should be the expression of the whole.

Now the **power** of the assembly will very much depend upon the heart's integrity of each member - is he truly gathered to the Name of Jesus only? For example, if I am gathered to a party holding peculiar opinions, or if I am attracted by the people or their teaching, I will only prove to be a hindrance, a weight, or a cause of weakness. In other words, if I am not led to the true Center of God's assembly, I am not in the power of the Holy Spirit. I will be to the assembly what a waster is to a candle - instead of adding to the general light and its usefulness, I will do the very reverse.

All of this is deeply practical. It should lead to a great exercise of heart. We need self-judgment about what is drawing me and what is my attitude in the assembly. The tone and testimony of the assembly have been greatly weakened by the presence of certain persons not understanding their position. Some attend the gatherings because of the teaching and blessing not found anywhere else. Some come because they like the simplicity of worship. Others come looking for love. None of these things are up to the

mark. We should be in the assembly simply because the Name of Jesus is established as our only standard and the power of the Holy Spirit has "*gathered*" us only to Him.

### Submission to the Spirit

Undoubtedly, ministry is most precious, and we will have it in more or less power where everything is in harmonious order. Worship is simple, real, and true when we realize the Divine Presence and fully submit to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. However, if we go **looking** for love or for ministry, we will certainly be disappointed. But if we are enabled to **cultivate** and **manifest** it, then we will get a great deal more than we expect or deserve.

Generally, those persons who are perpetually complaining of the lack of love in others are utterly failing of love themselves. On the other hand, those who are really walking in love will tell you of receiving ten thousand times more than they deserve. Let us remember the best way to get water out of a dry hand-pump is to pour a little water in. You may work at the handle until you are tired and then go away fretting. Impatiently, you complain of the horrible pump. However, pour in a little water and you will receive a gushing stream to satisfy every desire.

We have but little conception of what the assembly would be were each one distinctly led by the Holy Spirit and gathered **only** to Jesus. We should not then have to complain about dull, heavy, unprofitable, trying meetings. We should have no unhallowed intrusion of our natural temperament and its restless doings. For example, avoid making a prayer, refrain from talking for talking sake, and refuse seizing a hymnal to fill in a gap. Each member would know his place in the Lord's immediate Presence. Each gifted vessel would be filled, fitted and used by the Master's hand. Each eye would be directed to Jesus. Each heart would be occupied with Him.

If a chapter were read, it would be considered as the very Voice of God. If a word were spoken, it would manifest the power it has upon the heart. If a prayer were offered, it would lead the soul into the very Presence of God. If a hymn were sung, it would lift the spirit up to God and be like the sweeping of the strings on a heavenly harp. We should have no ready-made sermons. No teaching or preaching prayers should be offered as though we could explain our doctrines to God. Our prayers should not tell Him a whole host of things about ourselves. No praying should be aimed at our neighbors. No request should be made about the lofty graces that are lamentably deficient among ourselves. Neither should singing be made for music sake, nor should we be getting disturbed if the harmony is interfered with. All of these weaknesses of our natural dispositions should be avoided. We should feel ourselves in the enjoyment of the very sanctuary of God. It should be a foretaste of a time when we will worship in the courts above and "*go no more out.*"

We may be asked, "Where Will you find all of this down here?" Ah! This is the question. It is one thing to present the **ideal** on paper, and another to realize it in the midst of error, failure, and weakness. Through mercy, some of us have tasted, at times, a little of this blessedness. We have occasionally enjoyed moments of heaven upon earth. But oh, for more of it! May the Lord, in His great mercy, raise the tone of the assembly everywhere! May He greatly enlarge our capacity for more profound communion and spiritual worship! May He enable us so to walk in our private life from day to day and to judge ourselves and

our ways in His holy Presence, that we may not prove to be a lump of lead or a wasted candle to the assembly.

Although we may not be able to reach in experience the true idea of the assembly, yet never be satisfied with anything less. Honestly aim at the loftiest standard and earnestly pray to be lifted up to it. As to the **ground** of the assembly, hold it with jealous tenacity and never consent to occupy any other.

### Exercises in the Spirit

The tone and character of an assembly will vary immensely from place to place, depending upon the faith and spirituality of those gathered. Sometimes, the tone of things is felt to be low, especially when meetings seem to be unprofitable. At other times, things are said and done repeatedly when they are wholly out of place. Let all those who feel it wait on God -wait continually and believingly, and He will certainly hear and answer. In this way the trials and exercises related to God's assembly will have the happy effect of casting us more immediately upon Him. Thus, "*the eater will yield meat and the strong sweetness.*"

We count on the trials and difficulties in the assembly, because it is **the only and right** divine thing to do on this earth. The devil will put forth every effort to drive us from the true and holy Name of Christ. He will try our patience, tax our temper, hurt our feelings, and cause an offense in untold and countless ways to make us to forsake the assembly.

It is well to remember this. We can only hold His Name by faith. This marks the assembly of God and distinguishes it from every other human system. You cannot make progress there except by faith. Moreover, if you are ambitious to be somebody, seek a place for yourself, or exalt yourself, you need not consider the assembly. But you will soon find therein your level and measure of function, whatever it should be. Fleshly or worldly greatness in any shape will be of no account in God's assembly. His Presence will wither up everything of that kind and flatten all human pretensions.

### Holiness in the Spirit's Presence

Finally, you cannot make progress in the assembly if you are living in secret sin. His Presence will not be agreeable with you. Have we not often experienced in the assembly a feeling of uneasiness caused by the recollection of many things during the week which had escaped our notice? Wrong thoughts, careless words, and unspiritual ways have all crowded in upon our minds. But they have caused our conscience to be exercised especially in the assembly!

How can this be? Because the atmosphere we are breathing in the assembly is more intense than what we have been breathing during the week. We have not been in the Presence of God in our private life. We have not been judging ourselves. Hence, when we take our place in the assembly, our hearts are under His detection. Our ways are exposed in His light. And, the exercise of self-judgment, which ought to have gone on in private, goes on at the Table of the Lord. This inner working of the Spirit is poor and miserable for us, but it demonstrates the power of the Presence of God in the assembly.

Things must be in a miserable, low state if our hearts are not consciously exposed under His detection. It is a splendid evidence of spiritual power in the assembly when careless, carnal, worldly, self-exalting, money-loving, unprincipled persons are driven out by the intensity of its atmosphere. God's assembly is no place for such persons. They can breathe more freely outside of its meetings.

Now, the numbers who have departed from the ground of the assembly have done so because their practical ways were not in accord with the purity of the place. Doubtlessly, it is easy in such cases to find an excuse in the conduct of those who are left behind. But if the **roots** of those things were in every case laid bare, we should find that many left because of their inability or reluctance to bear with its searching light. *"Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever."* Evil must be judged, for God cannot sanction it. If an assembly can sanction it, then it is **not** God's assembly at all, though it is composed of Christians. To pretend to be an assembly of God and not judge false doctrine and evil ways would involve the blasphemy of saying that God and wickedness can dwell together.

The assembly of God must keep itself pure, because it is His dwelling place. Men may sanction evil and call it large-hearted liberality. But the house of God must keep itself pure. Let this great practical truth sink down into our hearts and produce its sanctifying power upon our direction and character.

### **Authority for Gathering**

**Fourth**, in the last place, a few words will suffice to set forth the **authority** on which God's assembly is gathered. It is **THE WORD OF GOD** alone. The **charter** of the assembly is the eternal Word of the living and true God. It is not the traditions, not the doctrines, nor the commandments of men. A passage of Scripture, Matthew 18:20, to which we have more than once referred in the progress of this paper, contains this summary:

- The central standard around which God's assembly is gathered - the **Name of Jesus**.
- The power through which it is gathered - the **energy of the Holy Spirit**.
- The authority by which it is gathered - the **Word of God**.

Now these are the same all over the world. Whether I go to New Zealand, Australia, or Canada; or to London, Paris, Edinburgh, or Dublin: The gathering Center, the gathering power, and the gathering authority are one and the same. We can own no other Center but Christ, no gathering Energy but the Holy Spirit, and no authority but the Word of God. These three should issue in a testimony characteristic of holiness and soundness in the truth.

Such is the assembly of God, and nothing else should be acknowledged. What about all the saints of God? These we can acknowledge, love, and honor as such wherever we find them. But human systems? Those are dishonoring to Christ and hostile to the true interest of the saints of God. All Christians on the true ground of the assembly are in the place of real blessing and effective testimony. There is a testimony characterized by the assembly

which could not be produced were that assembly broken up and each one a Whitefield in evangelistic power.

### Fellowship with Evangelists

This is said not to belittle evangelistic work. God forbid. We would that all were Whitefields. The fact is that many were influenced to despise the assembly under the plea of going out as evangelists. When their path is traced and the results of their work are examined, it is discovered that no provisions were made for the souls who were converted by their instrumentality. They seem not to know what to do with them. They quarry the stones, but do not build them together. The consequences are that souls are scattered here and there. Some pursue a haphazard course at random. Others are fragmented, living in isolation. In other words, the fault is attributed to the lack of focusing on His true church.

All of these converted souls should find their place in the assembly of God. The Word of God says they should be "*added to the assembly,*" having "*fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayer.*" They should "*come together on the first day of the week, to break bread,*" looking to the Lord Christ to edify them by the mouth of whom He will. This is the simple, true path - the normal, Divine idea. It may be they need more faith to realize it, because of the clashing and conflicting sects of the present day.

Of course, all this will be pronounced proselytizing, prejudice, and party spirit. People will regard it as a very idealistic, liberal **idea** to be able to say, "I belong to nothing." It appears to them to be a very strange, irregular position! They think it has just resolved itself to this: That **somebody** is professing **nothingism** in order to get rid of all their responsibility and to go with all and everything. This is a very easy path for these natural - thinking, amiable personalities, but what will come of it in the Day of the Lord's return? Even now, it seems to be an unfaithfulness to Christ. From this, may the good Lord deliver His people.

But let none imagine that the evangelist and the assembly are placed in opposition to each other. The evangelist should go forth, in full fellowship, from the bosom of the assembly. He should work not only to gather souls to Christ, but also gather them into the assembly. Here, divinely gifted pastors could watch over them and divinely gifted teachers instruct them. No one should clip the evangelist's wings, but only guide the results of his movements. The Lord is unwilling to see real spiritual energy expended in aimless, haphazard service.

Undoubtedly, it is a grand result to bring souls to Christ. Every soul linked to Jesus is a work done forever. But ought not the lambs and sheep be gathered and cared for? Would anyone be satisfied to purchase sheep and leave them to wander wherever they incline? Absolutely not! But where should Christ's sheep be gathered? Is it into the folds of man's fabrication, or is it into the flock of God's assembly? Into the latter unquestionably! For it is the inevitable place for all the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ, however feeble, despised, blackened, and maligned.

Here, however, is responsibility, care, anxiety, labor, and a constant demand for watchfulness and prayer. This is what flesh and blood would like to avoid if possible. The

idea of going through the world as an evangelist is attractive and agreeable, for thousands will hang on one's lips and hundreds will be the seal of one's ministry. But what will be done with these souls? By all means, show them their true place **in** the assembly of God. In spite of the ruin and apostasy of the professing body, it is the place where they can enjoy proper spiritual communion, worship, and ministry.

Yes, it will involve much trial and painful exercise. It was so in apostolic times. Those who really cared for the flock of Christ had to shed many a tear, send up many an agonizing prayer, spend many a sleepless night. But then in all these things, they tasted the sweetness of fellowship with the Chief Shepherd. And when He will appear, their tears, prayers, and sleepless nights will be remembered and rewarded, while those who are building up human systems will find their works come to an end, to be heard of no more forever. Moreover, the false shepherd who ruthlessly seize the pastoral staff only to use it as an instrument of cruelty against the sheep and as a means of filthy gain to themselves shall have their faces covered with confusion.

In conclusion, there is a need to answer three questions:

#### Submission to Scripture

**First**, we may be asked, "Where are we to find 'the assembly of God' from the days of the Apostles in the first century up to the nineteenth? And where are we to find it now?"

The answer is simple. Both then and now we find "the assembly of God" in the pages of the New Testament. It matters little if Neander, Mosheim, Milner, besides scores of other ecclesiastical historians, have failed in their interesting researches to discern a single trace of the true idea of God's assembly, from the close of the apostolic era to the opening of the current century.

It is quite possible there may have been, here and there among the thick gloom of the middle ages, *"two or three"* really *"gathered in the Name of Jesus."* At least, there must have been those who sighed after the truth for such a thing. But be this as it may, it leaves the truth wholly unscathed. It is not on the records of historians, but built on the infallible truth of God's Word. Therefore, if it could be proved for eighteen centuries that there were not even *"two or three gathered in the Name of Jesus,"* it would not in the smallest degree affect the question. The final word is not "What saith the ecclesiastical historian," but "What saith the Scriptures."

For example, if history has any forceful argument, it would equally apply to the precious institution of the Lord's Supper. How did it cope with that ordinance for over a thousand years? It was stripped of one of its grand elements, wrapped in a dead language, buried in a tomb of superstition, and engraved with this inscription, "A bloodless sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead."

Even when, at the time of the Reformation, the Bible was once more permitted to speak to man's conscience and to pour its living light upon the tomb in which the Eucharist lay buried, what was produced? Under what form does the Lord's Supper appear before us in the Lutheran Church? It is under the form of consubstantiation. Luther denied that there was any change of the bread and wine **into** the body and blood of Christ

(transubstantiation). But he maintained, in the teeth of fierce and unbending opposition from the Swiss Reformers, that a mysterious presence of Christ was **with** the bread and wine (consubstantiation).

Well, then, should not the Lord's Supper be celebrated according to the order laid down in the New Testament? Should support be given to the sacrifice of transubstantiation of the mass, or to consubstantiation, because the true idea of the Lord's Table seems to have been lost to the professing Church for so many ages? Certainly not! What should be done? Take the New Testament, see what it says on the point, bow in reverent submission to its authority, spread the Lord's Table in its Divine simplicity, and celebrate the Feast. Celebrate it according to the order laid down by the Lord and Master who said to His disciples, and therefore to us, "*This **do**, in remembrance of me.*"

### Obedience to Scripture

**Second**, "Is it not worse than useless to seek to carry out the true idea of the assembly of God, seeing that the professing church is in such complete ruin?"

Are we to be disobedient because the church is in ruin? Are we to continue in error because the dispensation of the church has failed? Definitely not!

Yes, we own the ruin, mourn over it, confess it, take our share in it and in its sad consequences, and seek to walk softly and humbly in the midst of it, confessing ourselves to be most unfaithful and unworthy. But though we have failed, **Christ has not failed!** He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself. He has promised to be with His people to the end of the age. Matthew 18:20 holds as good today as it did eighteen hundred years ago. "*Let God be true, and every man a liar.*"

The idea of men going around to do church-making or pretending to be ordained ministers ought to be repudiated. It is pure assumption, without a single shred of scriptural authority. It is God's work to gather a church and raise up ministers. We have no business to form ourselves into a church or to ordain office bearers. Doubtlessly, the Lord is very gracious, tender, and sympathetic. He bears with our weakness and overrules our mistakes. And where the heart is true to Him, even though in ignorance, He will confidently lead on into higher light.

However, we must not use God's grace as a plea for unscriptural acting, no more than we should use the church's ruin as a plea for sanctioning error. We have to confess the ruin, count on the grace, and act in simple obedience to the Word of the Lord. Such is the path of blessing at all times. The remnant in the days of Ezra did not pretend to have the power and splendor of Solomon's days. But they obeyed the Word of Solomon's Lord. And they were abundantly blessed in their deed. They did not say, "Things are in ruin; therefore, we had better remain in Babylon, and do nothing." No! They simply confessed their own and their people's sin, and counted upon God. This is precisely what we are to do. We are to own the ruin and count on God.

### Today's Direction from Scripture

Finally, **third**, “Where **is** this assembly of God **now**?”

*“Where two or three are gathered in My Name”*; the Ecclesia is in the Name of Jesus. This is the assembly of God according to a statement from the Scripture.

And carefully note this: That in order to reach Divine results, there must be Divine conditions! To lay claim to the results without the conditions is only empty conceit. If we are not really gathered in the Name of Jesus, we have no right to expect that He Will be in our midst. If He is not in our midst, our assembly will be a poor occasion. But it is our happy privilege to be assembled in such a manner so as to enjoy His blessed Presence among us. By having Him, we do not need to set up a poor mortal to preside over us. When the assembly is convened for worship, God presides in our midst. If He be fully owned, the current of communion, worship, and edification will flow on without a ripple and without a curve. All will be in lovely harmony.

Remember there is a very essential difference between those occasions on which the assembly is gathered for worship and those for the special services of the gifted brothers. In the latter, the evangelist or the teacher serves in his individual capacity with responsibility to his Lord. It does not make any difference whether such meetings are conducted in the rooms usually occupied by the assembly or elsewhere. The members of the assembly may attend as they feel disposed. But when the assembly is gathered for worship, if one man, however gifted, assumes a place, it would quench the Spirit.

If the flesh is allowed to act, it will grieve and quench the Spirit, which will spoil everything. Flesh must be judged in the assembly of God, just as it should be judged in our individual walk from day to day. But remember that errors and failures in the assembly are no more to be used as arguments against the truth of the Divine Presence in the assembly, than individual failures and errors are used against the admitted truth of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

“Are you the people, then?” A question someone might ask. Well, the question is not are we the people, but are we on Divine ground? If not, the sooner we abandon our position the better. That there is a Divine ground, in spite of all the darkness and confusion, will hardly be denied. God has not left His people under the necessity of abiding and compromising with something connected with error and evil.

Moreover, how are we to know whether we are on Divine ground or not? Simply by the Divine Word. Let us honestly and seriously test everything connected with our stand by the standard of the Scripture. If it cannot stand the test, let us abandon it immediately. Yes, immediately! If we pause to reason or weigh the consequences, we will unquestionably lose our way. Pause? Certainly, to make yourself sure of the mind of the Lord. But never pause to reason about it once you have ascertained it.

The Lord never gives light for two steps at a time. He gives us light, and when we act on that light, He gives us more. *“The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth **more and more** unto the perfect day.”* This is a precious, soul-stirring motto! **“More and more!”** There is no halting, no standing still, no resting in attainment. It is *“more and more”* until we are ushered into the full-orbed light of the perfect day of glory.



Reader, are you on this Divine ground? If so, cling to it with your whole soul. Are you in this path? If so, press on with all the energies of your moral being. Never be content with anything short of His dwelling in you, and your conscious nearness to Him. Let not Satan rob you of your proper portion by leading you to rest in any other name. Let him not tempt you to mistake your ostensible **position** for your real **condition**. Cultivate secret communion, secret prayer, and constant self-judgment. Be especially on your guard against every form of spiritual pride. Cultivate lowliness and meekness, brokenness of spirit and tenderness of conscience in your own private walk. Seek to combine the sweetest grace toward others with the boldness of a lion where truth is concerned. Then will you be a blessing in the assembly of God and an effective witness of the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus.

*Authored by C. H. Mackintosh*

*Edited by W. E. Mallon*