

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 99-25

Dear Reader

Sometimes we need an advanced college course in Assembly doctrine, as it were, although we might like to have just a regular high school course which doesn't require as much study. This Newsletter gets into one of those more advanced courses, needed so we won't so likely be tossed about by every wind of wrong doctrine.

Although it may be seldom used in our normal assembly lives, the truth of *defilement* needs to be firmly tucked away in our minds like the strong inner structures of an airplane wing: seldom seen, but there to keep the plane safely in the air in spite of the storms it passes through.

Of late there has been an increased activity on the part of some to openly deny collective spiritual defilement or even defilement from outside of one's own self. If defilement is individual and internal, then the *associations* of those with whom we break bread, is unimportant as long as those believers are not *personally* defiled, either morally or doctrinally. For example, according to Scripture, a practicing homosexual is defiled.

Probably very little argument there from most Christians! But one coming from a religious group led by a homosexual or where there was teaching that homosexuality was an acceptable alternate lifestyle, but who personally believes homosexuality to be a serious sin, is not defiled if defilement is strictly internal. Neither would he be defiled as a member of that group if there was no collective defilement. Only those individuals actually practicing and/or teaching the sin would be defiled. Under the condition of no collective defilement, such a person would have to *personally and publicly* press the false doctrine or be known to be involved in immorality of a serious nature to be kept from breaking bread. This would be no barrier to breaking bread for most professed Christians, regardless of their religious association. *The implications are awesome!*

## DENIAL OF COLLECTIVE DEFILEMENT

At least two key sets of verses used to deny collective defilement are Matthew 15:16-20 and Mark 7:15-23.

These verses allegedly prove that a person must *personally* imbibe evil in his heart or he is not defiled by his religious associations with teachers of, or practitioners of sinful things, for nothing from the outside makes us unclean, it is said. This is true in an *individual* and *personal* sense in our everyday lives. We are surrounded at school, work, in neighborhoods, with growing moral and doctrinal evils. We work for companies owned and led by sinful people. Yet we are not told to hide from people (1 Cor.5:10), but to be a testimony for Christ to the world while personally being free from their sin. But we are not ecclesiastically tied to them!

But it is a big step to make these verses the truth of *Assembly* practice. To do that, one has to get by key verses that teach otherwise, such as Achan's sin in Joshua 7. Therefore, this foundation example of Old Testament teaching on collective defilement by association, is re-interpreted. "*Israel* has sinned" (Josh.7:11) is claimed to mean simply that there is sin in Israel or someone in Israel has sinned. But the warning of Joshua 6:18 shows *collective* defilement: the whole camp of Israel would be accursed if anyone took of the accursed thing! Likewise, the whole camp of Israel was defiled from immorality and idolatry, and 24,000 died (Nu.25:1-9).

As we saw in our study on *associations* in issue 98-21, Achan *did* sin and Israel *as a company* was defeated in battle (7:4-5). The context of verses 11-12 makes it plain the defilement was corporate! Truly, "*Israel* has sinned"! When Achan was caught, Joshua's charge was that he has troubled *us*. So the argument completely fails. One man's sin brought corporate defilement until the sin was judged.

When using this example, and the other Old Testament examples we studied back in issue 98-21 under *associations*, some will stand up and argue that we can't use Old Testament examples for Assembly truth. Do God's *principles* change? His *ways* — although always perfect — may change, but not His principles! But what

does Scripture says? “Whatever things were written *before* were written for *our* learning” (Rom.15:4); “All these things happened to them as *examples*, and they were written for *our* admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor.10:11). Seems as if God doesn’t agree with these detractors!

## The New Testament

We next will turn to the New Testament to determine what it teaches as to corporate defilement and defilement from without (vs. from within). We get our primary truth of the *functioning* of a local assembly from 1 Corinthians, and that is where the attack begins. These who would spread new doctrines claim that corporate defilement can only be found in 1 Corinthians 5 (where, as we have seen, an immoral man was put out of fellowship as a wicked person (v.13)) if there is a *predisposition* to look for it: to read it into the portion, and that’s not the proper way to interpret scripture. We shall see.

We ask, “Was the only reason the sexually-sinning man was excommunicated, was to get him to *personally* stop sinning (5:4-5), or was there also another reason? Was it also to clear the *assembly* of defilement? Personal defilement certainly is one reason for discipline ... and it was effective with this unnamed man! We have seen from 2 Corinthians 2 that the sinning was stopped and the man restored. But is that all?

The first proof of *assembly* defilement is in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7 (with Galatians 5:9 and Matthew 16:12, helping us define the spiritual meaning of leaven or yeast as *sin*). Leaven, with its spreading, pervasive character of moral or doctrinal evil, must be purged out, or the assembly is seen as defiled, diffused throughout every part with the leaven (sin). Unjudged sin defiles an assembly, first spiritually, soon in practice.

Many agree we can’t break bread with one known to be *spreading* the leaven, the sinning person himself. But let’s look at these verses in 1 Corinthians 5 from the viewpoint of the others who personally were neither sinning (as yet) in doctrine or in moral matters. Were they defiled? In paraphrase, God said, “You’re defiled because of the spreading power of leaven: the only way to get *corporately undefiled* is to purge out the leaven (5:7), *to no longer be ecclesiastically associated with it*!” Read carefully. Isn’t that what these verses are saying? Are we only “reading into these verses” this great truth of God’s holiness?

Some imply that *leaven* as used in 1 Corinthians 5, doesn’t mean sin. But it does. All New Testament teaching on *leaven* makes us hard pressed to come to any other conclusion. Check it out yourself.

Is there any other proof as to the defilement of the Corinthian assembly? Yes! Turn to 2 Corinthians 7. The Holy Spirit knew this would be an issue. In this interesting chapter, Paul reminded the Corinthian assembly of his letter (1 Corinthians) which made them sorrowful (v.8), but which brought *repentance*. What did they need *as an assembly* to repent of if not defiled corporately?

Verse 11 says, “What clearing of yourselves .... In all things you (collectively) have proved yourselves (plural) to be clear [or, *pure*, JND] in this matter.” At one time they were *not* pure (Gk: *hagnos*), but by following the apostolic directions and excommunicating the sinner, they had cleared or purified themselves, *as an assembly*, from defilement: they were no longer contaminated. For the first “clearing” above, J.N. Darby uses the word “excusing.” The Greek is *apologia* (apology) and is usually translated by “answer” or “defense.” Vine says the Greek thought is *a successful defense against an accusation*, hence a clearing of oneself.

A year earlier, the Corinthian assembly could have been rightfully accused of being defiled, but by their excommunication of the immoral man, they had cleared themselves. They, by their action, had a successful defense against any charge of immorality in their midst, or of indifference to it.

These verses clearly show that there is collective or corporate defilement, which is cleared by assembly action to purge out the sin. We have previously seen that the exact wording in Galatians 5:9 as to doctrinal sin, as to moral sin in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7 (a little leaven leavens the whole lump), shows that the defilement in doctrinal matters and the process for correction, are the same. The process only needed to be spelled out in detail once.

## **Personal Defilement from Without in 2 John**

Since 2 John 9-11 is such a powerful set of verses as to defilement and associations, it has likewise undergone considerable attack. Some try to make its application very narrow because of the seriousness of the sin, but that can't be supported. Whether corporately (as with Achan in Joshua 7 or the Corinthian assembly), or with the individual as in 2 John, the *principle* remains the same — association with that which is sinful defiles.

Remember the account in 2 John? It tells of an unsaved person teaching false things about Christ. Today, it could speak of a Jehovah's Witness who comes to your house with a Watchtower Magazine in his hand. God's instructions are not to let him into your house. Furthermore, you are not even to greet him. No handshake. No "Hi; How are you?" Now, listen to the punchline. "He who greets him partakes in his wicked works" (v.11, JND).

Think of it! An otherwise most godly believer. One in communion with God. But defiled, and not by anything within. Yet seen by God as partaking in false teaching! "But I don't believe a word of what that evil person teaches," you protest. You don't have to imbibe it — personally believe and teach it. You are guilty by association in even greeting him. As we said in earlier Newsletters, one needs to get past the example to see the very powerful principle involved — a principle of *associations defiling*, found throughout Scripture.

## **The Same Story in 1 Corinthians 10**

It's the same story we saw previously in 1 Corinthians 10:18-22 concerning idols and eating things offered to idols. Chapter 8 shows that food offered to idols is just food and has no direct power over the Christian. But chapter 10 shows the spiritual meaning. One doesn't have to agree in the slightest way with the idol, but those who eat of the sacrifices still are partakers of the altar — what the sacrifice stands for. So if a Christian partook, he would be having fellowship with demons who are behind the idol. The sin, the wrong belief, *is not from within*: the Christian utterly rejects what the idol stands for or any worship of demons. Yet again, the person is fully guilty by association, and the Lord is provoked to jealousy (1 Cor.10:22). How sad!

## **Concluding Remarks**

So in spite of clever people with their clever but false doctrines, Scripture is clear as to both points: there *is* collective or corporate defilement in both the Old and New Testaments, and there *is* defilement by association, whether or not the person personally imbibes that which is sinful. The impact of these facts is equally awesome! People who continue with unscriptural religious systems (and they are everywhere today) are associated deeply with those systems and with all they stand for. If those systems teach false doctrine, then the people connected with those systems are seen as promoters of false doctrine even if the doctrine itself is personally rejected. And if I associate myself in the breaking of bread with such people (and we have seen that breaking bread involves a deep association), then I also am defiled. That is what *God* says! So second degree separation is just as much required as first degree separation!

Make sure what we have said is according to Scripture and not just the clever words of a couple of other brothers. Only then can you have assurance and spiritual stability! Then tuck it away in your mind and use it as a firm anchor when helping the local assembly where you express fellowship to safely navigate through the strong and contrary winds of false doctrine concerning assembly fellowship.

RPD

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

We apologize to the writer for the long delay in including his letter in the Newsletter. This was the first available space, and we did not get enough letters of a doctrinal character to make a separate page of letters. Still, it makes for interesting reading and we thank the author for writing and would encourage others to also write.

“In your article on Deacons (98-16) you refer in the final full paragraph on pg.1 to the apostles summoning the disciples, ‘the brethren in the Jerusalem assemblies,’ and say that they told them to choose ‘from within the assemblies.’ Further on in the paragraph you make reference to ‘practical matters of the assemblies,’ ‘The assemblies did the choosing,’ and ‘The assemblies had well understood.’ Nowhere in Scripture do we read of more than one assembly at Jerusalem. That numbers were great is indicated clearly in Acts 6 and also later on, but never does Scripture refer to more than one assembly in that city or, for that matter, in any other one. At Rome the saints evidently met in three or four places according to Romans 16 (and who knows how many more places may have been used for the saints at Jerusalem to meet in), but only one assembly is ever addressed or referred to in any one city. This may seem like a technicality, but I think it is an important point to take note of, especially as against the popular but wrong thought of independence of local assemblies.... Early brethren were in agreement on this, although their efforts in London, England, to carry out the principle ultimately went too far and led to central control.”

Eugene P. Vedder, Jr. St Louis MO

*Thank you very much for your letter. We certainly agree that when addressing the saints in a city, Paul speaks of one assembly: “To the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor.1:2). Same in Acts 13:1 (where Luke is the author) as to Antioch. In these instances we do not know whether or not the saints met in more than one location. But in Acts 15:4, 22 your point is well made: Luke speaks of only one church (assembly) at Jerusalem, although, as you say, they obviously didn’t meet in one location. On the other hand Paul recognizes the **individual** gatherings or assemblies at Rome, speaking of the “church” or “assembly” (JND) that met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom.16:5). In 1 Corinthians 16:19, an assembly in their home (apparently then at Ephesus) is again mentioned. But as William Kelly points out, that assembly is not called the assembly in Rome or Ephesus. Taking these two facts together, it appears it would be best to speak of the “assembly” (not “ies”) in the places you point out, while recognizing that Scripture still recognizes the individual gatherings as assemblies. We note that when speaking of a region or province of a country, Paul speaks in the plural: “To the churches of Galatia” (Gal.1:2). In practically carrying this out with today’s large metropolitan areas, we cannot, as you note elsewhere, rightly classify the metropolitan area as a city: it is comprised of many cities of various sizes. We, with you, recommended reading a series of letters on this subject by William Kelly on pages 189, 203, 220, 237, 249, 265, 282, Volume 14 of the “Bible Treasury.” In these pages Mr. Kelly also indicates how discipline, reception, etc. can/should be carried out when there is more than one gathering in a city.*

## **BOB COSTEN’S “SALIENT FEATURES REGARDING THE LORD’S SUPPER”**

Bob Costen sent in these few notes from 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 that you may find helpful in our study of reception. Please read the few verses and then review this outline. They bring Christ and our responsibility before us in a simple way.

- **PARTICIPATION**— “This do” (vv.24-25)
- **RECOLLECTION**— “in remembrance” (vv.24-26)
- **ADORATION** — “of Me” (vv.24-26)
- **CONTINUATION** — “as often” (v.26)
- **PROCLAMATION** — “show forth (proclaim) the Lord’s death” (v.26)
- **ANTICIPATION** — “till He comes” (v.26)
- **EXAMINATION** — “Let a man examine (approve) himself” (v.28)
- **OBLIGATION** — eat and drink in a “worthy manner” — to stand in holy separation (vv.27-31)
- **CONDEMNATION** — not with the world when one eats and drinks in a *worthy* manner through self-judgment (vv.28-34); otherwise the Lord judges.
- **IDENTIFICATION** — with Himself and His death (vv.23-29)