

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

Volume 01-45

Dear Reader

This 45th issue the Assembly Messenger will end our four-part study of 1 Corinthians. Bob Costen and I trust this study has been and will continue to prove profitable as we seek to be of help to further your understanding of so-called *assembly truth*. We recommend that you put each issue of the Messenger in a folder or a two- or three-ring binder for future reference. Now on to our subject. We will continue our detailed study of particularly *Assembly truth* in 1 Corinthians, beginning with verse 11 of chapter 12.

ASSEMBLY TRUTH IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12:11 through CHAPTER 16

12:11: No believer is free to use his or her gift in just any manner. “But one and the same Spirit *works* all these things, *distributing* to each one individually *as He wills*.” Like a master pianist, the Holy Spirit manipulates the keys to bring a beautiful melody of spiritual growth and harmony. Further, He *distributes* His gifts to each of us as He wills. Instead of stewing over what we *don’t* have, we should rejoice and be content with how we have been divinely gifted and earnestly use what we have, great or small, for God, under the Holy Spirit’s direction. Remember, the *Holy Spirit never* leads anyone, for any reason, contrary to the Word of God! But He may use us in spite of our disobedience, for “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom.11:29). Note that *apparent* success is not necessarily a proof of God’s approval. Think of Noah, *a preacher of righteousness* (2 Pet.2:5) who in 120 years was responsible for saving none but his family. People would rate him a failure, but God’s estimate is much different (Heb.11:7).

vv.12-27: Here we have clearly stated the truth that the body of Christ, the Church, is *one*, but has *many* members. God uses the example of the one human body that has many members. *We* are members. So is every other Christian. This is a divine work, the Holy Spirit baptizing us into one body (v.13). Most agree that this baptism was a one-time occurrence at Pentecost (Acts 2) and we all come under the effect of it. However, it may be difficult to argue convincingly if one believes it happens to every Christian upon salvation. At any rate, the effect is exactly the same. We have been divinely *entered, immersed into* (two thoughts in *baptism*) one body.

And each one of those members is necessary, although not all equal. “*God* has set the members of the human body, *each of them*, in the body *just as He pleased*” (v.18). The same with the body of Christ. Can’t we be content with that and simply *use* what He has given us for Him, without being envious of the other person? Isn’t our failure that we don’t *use* what He has given us, being too involved in worldly pursuits, having “fun,” as we might call it? Just as many of the human body’s essential parts are hidden from public view, likewise in the body of Christ, but all are necessary, whether stronger or weaker! Some members need special care and attention, both humanly and in the body of Christ. “*God* composed the body” (v.24) like a beautiful piece of music. We all have need of each other. And God has ordained diversity. But He has *never* ordained disobedience! There is to be no schism — internal division. Yet, how, *externally*, man has ruined that unity by being disobedient and substituting human ideas for divine truth! We all need to care for each other, for the suffering of one or the rejoicing of one, affects us all, even if we don’t always realize it.

Verse 27 is best translated in the JND, “Now you are *Christ’s body* and members in particular.” The Corinthian assembly was not *the* body of Christ, but *represented* in that community, characteristically, the whole body of Christ everywhere. Someone in the armed services might say he was “101st Airborne.” He wouldn’t be *the* 101st Airborne, but he *represented* it, he was *of it*. Today, when Christians are scattered in many groups, no assembly can even say it is *the* body in a city.

vv.28-31: “God has appointed these in the Church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” (v.28). The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and New Testament prophets (Eph.2:20; also Acts 13:1-2; 15:32) who brought the Word of God while the Bible was still incomplete. But now that the Bible is complete we constantly need gifted teachers/pastors (in the

scriptural sense of the word — *shepherds*) to make the Word understandable and living in our hearts and consciences. The so-called “sign gifts” authenticated the ministry of the early apostles and disciples. *Helps!* Everyone needs help. So often there is no one to do the thousand and one practical things that need to be done. Yet here comes one who is always ready to pitch in and help in whatever is needed, often unheralded by others. *God* has gifted and led that one! *Administrations* are people who have a unique ability to administer, to make a complicated set of circumstances work for the blessing of all.

Verses 29-30 show that these gifts are given only to some individuals. Only 12-14 people were apostles. Comparatively few believers had the gift of healing or of tongues. Paul had the gift of tongues because he traveled extensively where there were many strange languages and dialects. But we are told it is proper to *desire* earnestly (not covet) the greater, most useful gifts, which chapter 14:1 says is *prophecy* because it edifies (strengthens, builds up) the assembly. But something even more important than just having a gift is seen in the parenthetical Chapter 13.

Chapter 13 (a parenthesis)

Love. Without genuine love, *in proper relationship with truth*, we either become careless and indulgent, or cold and legal, both individually and as *assemblies*, for chapter 13 was written to an assembly. The Lord *commanded* love of one another (Jn.13:34-35; 15:12), but He also enclosed it within the bounds of *obedience* to Himself (1 Jn.5:1-3). Many try to throw off those bounds of obedience and thus are shown to be in error. Yet our chapter shows the importance of genuine Christian love for *all* our brothers and sisters in Christ. Great gift, understanding, knowledge, faith, giving, and self-sacrifice without love makes me *nothing*, useless for God (vv.1-3). *Love is serious business with God* (v.13). Often by hearing people talk in harsh, unkind words shows how far we miss the mark in this regard.

Verses 4-7 give a number of practical attributes of love. It’s interesting to compare the words of various translations, which we leave for you to do. Verse 8 says that love will never *fail* (Gk: *pipto*: cease to have force). It goes on forever, for “God is love” (1 Jn.4:8,16). But prophecies will “be *done away*” (Gk: *katargeo*: to reduce to inactivity, rendered of no effect after their temporary use was fulfilled — Vine). Tongues “shall cease” (Gk: *pauo*: to come to an end, take one’s rest — like a car running out of gas and coasting to a stop) and knowledge “shall be done away” (Gk: *katargeo*, as above)(v.8, JND). I would suggest that prophecies and knowledge, the constant seeking of it, will end when we are with the Lord. It’s when that which is perfect has come (v.10). But *tongues*, the gift of foreign languages, ran down, ran its course early in the history of the Church, after the apostolic age. Be very wary of today’s “tongues movement.”

Chapter 14

Taking out the parenthesis, this chapter immediately follows chapter 12. “Desire the greater gifts ... but especially that you may prophesy” (12:31; 14:1). The first part of chapter 14 contrasts speaking in a tongue (foreign language) to speaking plainly in the meetings of the assembly to *edify* (build up, strengthen) the believers. One who *prophesies* — tells forth God’s Word as the Holy Spirit leads — “speaks *edification* and *exhortation* and *comfort* to men” (v.3). These are the three great essentials in prophetic ministry. Bob Costen also points out that the three great principles that regulate the use of gifts are *love* (v.1); *edification* (vv.2-26); and *divine order* (vv.26-40).

It would have been wonderful for all the brethren to have been able to *go out* and preach the gospel to the unsaved of many nations in their own language (v.5), but *in the assembly* (where most would have a common language), it would be far better to say that which edifies (v.6). Speaking in a language not known by most would be like a trumpet used for Israel’s march, that produced an uncertain sound: it would not be understood what was desired. It would only cause confusion (vv.8-9). Again, Paul emphasizes that the object of speaking *in the assembly* is to edify it, *build it up*, and speakers should desire to *excel* in that (v.12)! Whether preaching, praying, singing or giving thanks, it is to be understandable and done with understanding — knowing the words and understanding their significance (vv.13-17).

Paul, as a missionary, used the gift of being able to speak in languages he did not naturally know, more than any at Corinth. But *in assembly* (when the church was meeting in the character of *in assembly*), five understandable words that would build up the brethren are better than 10,000 words not understood because said in a foreign language (v.18).

Quoting Isaiah 28:11-12, Paul shows that the gift of *tongues* are a sign for the *unsaved*, but *prophesying* is for *believers* (vv.21-22). So if the church gathers somewhere and unsaved come in to hear what is happening, and all they hear is foreign languages, they will leave thinking the people are out of their minds. But if they hear God's Word preached in power, and one hears the secrets of his heart exposed, he will worship God and "report that God is truly among you" (vv.23-25).

Directions for the Meeting of the Assembly for Ministry

vv.26-28: Here begins the general instructions for the gathered assembly. "There is "room for everyone to find his place and to contribute his share to the general edification [building up of the believers] and under the guidance and rule of the Spirit of God alone" (FWG). Every brother should be *exercised* to have something to bring, but that exercise doesn't give *license* to use that hymn or teaching at that time unless led of the Holy Spirit to do so. Nothing is to go on in such a meeting that is not for the spiritual strengthening of the believers gathered together.

What if fellow-believers come from afar and are led to minister to the gathered saints in their native (but foreign) languages? Two may do so in any particular meeting, and in an extreme case, three, but only under two conditions. One must speak only after another has sat down, and someone must be able to interpret, either because he knows both languages or because he had the spiritual gift of being able to interpret foreign languages (v.27). If there was no one to interpret, then the brother was to remain silent in the assembly, for speaking would cause confusion and would not build up the saints (v.28). We believe both the gifts of speaking in tongues (foreign languages) and interpreting of tongues are gifts that authenticated the early believers and allowed the gospel to spread rapidly, but have long since died out. Such gifts were for that *first generation* of believers who heard the Lord (Heb.2:3-4).

vv.29-33: In few words these verses direct us to the *only definite meeting of the assembly (assembly meeting) for ministry*, to build up the brethren. These verses don't negate other forms such as lectures, Sunday School classes, and conversational Bible Studies, but these verses define the only meeting where gift is not prominent and the Holy Spirit is entirely in charge in the gathered assembly. Two or three *prophets* are to speak each time the assembly gathers in this way for ministry. The third speaker in this case (unlike above) is not the unusual case. The speakers are *prophets*, not necessarily *teachers*. The context shows they aren't the *few* with the *gift* of prophecy, but potentially *every brother* of the assembly (v.31) whom the Holy Spirit decides to use at that moment to bring forth what *He* wants brought forth. I might think what was on my heart was *so* important, but the Holy Spirit might well use two or three others to bring out entirely other matters which *He* knew were more important for that gathered audience. If a fourth speaker speaks, he is out of order!

The gathered assembly is to judge or discern what is said (v.29). The assembly is always responsible for what goes on in its midst. If something was said wrong it would need correcting, possibly on the spot! But what if, while someone is speaking, something comes very strongly to me that I'm sure the Holy Spirit wants spoken. Am I to jump up? No. I'm to wait until the speaker is silent, has completed his message (v.30). There is no urgency. As the Spirit leads, all the brothers may prophesy — not at one meeting, but over time — so all may learn and be encouraged (v.31). But in all this, there must *never* be confusion. The speakers are to be in control of themselves, for *God* is not the author of confusion or disorder, but of peace (vv.32-33). So if there is disorder, one must look elsewhere than to God. Many professed Christian groups today need to take this verse very much to heart as they lead millions astray with disorder (shouting, fainting, speaking in gibberish, laughing, etc.) in the name of the Holy Spirit. It really is blasphemy!

We believe it ought to exercise every assembly that the only God-ordained meeting for the spiritual growth of the brethren is often relegated to several times a year, if that often, and other things substituted. Is it that we brothers have become so unexercised as to be happy to let a few *teachers* teach in classes and Bible Studies, instead of being constantly under exercise that the Holy Spirit may use *me* to bring something before the saints next week? And that might necessitate that I spend more time in the Word and in prayer, and be prepared mentally and spiritually to be used. Or do I prefer my worldly toys? How about you wives? Are you *encouraging* your husbands in these matters?

The Role of Women in Such Meetings of the Assembly

vv.34-35: These must be the most hated verses in the Bible among women's groups that refuse to bow to the differing roles God gives to the men and women in the meetings of the local assembly. "Let your women be *silent* in the assemblies, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but to be in subjection ... for it is a shame for a woman to speak *in assembly*" (JND). If they need help they can ask their husbands (or, *men*) later, such as another brother or one's father (v.35). These verses have to do with meetings of the *assembly* which have the character of being "*in assembly*" — when gathered so the Holy Spirit is completely in charge and gift is not prominent, as the breaking of bread, the prayer meeting, the above "ministry" meeting, and a meeting for discipline or restoration. We studied this in great detail in issue 98-12. The instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (properly translated) are different than here, and cover a wider application.

From Ephesians 5:22-32 we learn that the *man* represents Christ and the *woman* represents the Church. The Church is silent before Christ, our Head (Col.1:18). All direction and control comes from Him. He is the Teacher in the assembly and He uses His representative-picture, the man. It has nothing whatever to do with superiority/inferiority, with ability or intelligence, with spiritual gift, but with simple obedience to the Lord.

vv.36-38: These verses completely destroy one of the favorite arguments of that movement which would push "equal rights" (as they would call them) of women in the churches, and challenge those who disregard these directions. They argue that Paul was simply a woman-hating bachelor. Does one believe himself or herself to be spiritual or one who speaks for God? Then "let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you *are the commandments of the Lord.*" What Paul wrote had nothing to do with himself or the culture of that day. If the people wanted to be ignorant of that fact, then let them be ignorant. It doesn't change God's orders! And He will hold us accountable to obey them!

Finally, we are told we should *desire* to prophesy, not shrink from it. It is a great privilege to be used to speak for God! And the assembly is not to forbid foreigners to speak in their language if, as we saw above, one can interpret. But in *all circumstances, all things* are to be done decently and in order (v.39). Think of this to even include brothers' meetings, etc. And if there is not *divine* order, it is *disorder*!

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 gives important doctrine, but not directly related to assembly truth, but more to the gospel (vv.1-4), so it will not be gone into in detail. The tie to assembly truth is the importance of right doctrine. Some in Corinth were teaching otherwise (v.12). The rest of the chapter teaches the great truths of the *resurrection*, which is the platform on which God is working among His people, and which brings in the first man Adam who became a living soul; the *Last Adam*, a life-giving Spirit; and again, the first man out of the earth; the *Second Man*, out of heaven (vv.45-47). Finally the resurrection in connection with the *Rapture* is seen in verses 51-58, including the fact that some of us will never die physically and thus will never be resurrected, but we all will be *changed*, to have bodies of glory (Phil.3:20-21 JND). Paul warns the Corinthians as to false teaching (v.34), here regarding the resurrection, and works in this chapter to correct it. From what he writes in warning of apostolic judgment in 2 Corinthians 13:2, he may not have been successful in stopping these false teachings at Corinth. And 2 Timothy 2:16-17 show the result of such teaching, one of the things Timothy was to depart from (2:19).

Chapter 16

Having just recently studied *giving* in issues 00-35 and -36, we won't go into it again here, except to say *giving* was a part of the functioning assembly (v.1). "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside" (v.2).

Finally we have a list of gifted men who traveled in the Lord's work, such as Timothy (vv.10-11), a much younger brother. The *assembly* was to take care of him, profit from him since he did the Lord's work as did Paul, not despise him, perhaps thinking he was too young (1 Tim.4:12), and send him on his way with what he needed. They were to treat him as part of the family. Likewise, when the Lord sends godly and gifted men into our midst, they are to be taken in and loved, and evaluated on their *life* and *ministry*, not on chronological age or other external or natural circumstances. But they are expected to preach the truth!

Thus closes this interesting book. We trust the study of assembly truth found therein has been of much profit personally and in the local church where you express fellowship. We have seen the good and the bad. God has never promised us a leisurely assembly life, but has given the instructions that make it possible for every assembly to be all that God wants it to be, regardless of problems that arise. If not, the fault is all ours. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you! Amen (v.23). Remember, our mailing address is Roger P. Daniel, 22240 Morley Ave., Dearborn MI 48124-2127.

RPD and BC