

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

Volume 01-52

Dear Younger Reader

Without any fanfare we continue with a brief explanation of 1 Corinthians 14. We begin at verse 29.

There is a change of pace at verse 29. Now two or three brethren *are* to speak, bringing a prophetic word for *edification* (building up spiritually), exhortation or comfort (14:3) to those gathered together. Remember, in the New Testament particularly, prophecy isn't *foretelling* the future, but *telling forth* God's Word so it meets the particular needs of that audience at that particular time, as led by the Holy Spirit. Verse 29 defines the only *formal* meeting of the assembly found in Scripture, for ministering the Word! But in all ministry, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for *God* is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches (assemblies) of the saints" (vv.32-33). Those who minister are always to be in control of themselves, mentally and emotionally. Many of you know of wildly popular groups with thousands of members where there is swooning and uncontrolled laughter, with both the speaker and the audience whipped into a frenzy. *Someone* is the author of that confusion, *but it isn't God!* So be very careful!

We've spoken of the woman's role in God's order in the functioning assembly (vv.34-35) and have connected it with 1 Corinthians 11 as to headship, so we won't repeat ourselves. But are we prepared to accept and put these things into practice? Many are not, and do everything possible to discredit Paul's instructions, claiming Paul hated women (being a bachelor), or that Paul only expressed what was the culture of that day long ago. The Holy Spirit foresaw this attack on Scripture and wrote, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you *are the commandments of the Lord*" (v.37). Paul's writings are the Lord's inspired commandments for every Christian to follow, for all cultures, for all times, and were given to complete the Word of God (Col.1:24-26)! Paul was only relaying God's will.

We should *desire* to be used to speak for God (v.39). Foreign languages are OK if the requirements are met. But "all things [are to] be done decently and in order" (vv.39-40). We trust this short explanation will be helpful.

The unsaved are in a terrible darkness of sin (vv.17-19), but we have put off the *old man* — positionally, all we

## QUESTION 22: STUDY OF EPHESIANS 4

Since we just explained one whole chapter, let's pick up the other question dealing with a chapter — Ephesians 4. The first chapters in Ephesians tell us of our wonderful position in Christ, the spiritual blessings that are ours even now. Read them! As a result we are to have our daily Christian life match up to that high position (4:1). That first involves the practical love of those we walk with in our assembly life (v.2). We are to work hard to keep the *unity of the Spirit* (v.3). Only *God* can keep the unity of the *body* of Christ, the Church. But when we search the scriptures and find how God wants us to walk, *we should walk that way* — walk as the Holy Spirit would lead! The Holy Spirit only maintains a unity that is according to the Word. He won't support what is unscriptural.

Verses 4-6 show three concentric circles of God's realities. The inner circle is *Christian reality* — one body (the body of Christ, the Church), one Holy Spirit, and one hope (seeing and being with Christ at His coming — 1 Tim.1:1; Tit.2:13). These are things that only real Christians enjoy. The second and larger reality is that of *Christian profession*, the Kingdom (v.5) where some are truly saved and some are not. In that circle there is one Lord (all call Him Lord, although He may not truly be Lord to some — Mt.7:21-23). There is one faith, the faith of Christianity. There is one baptism — water baptism. Baptism is a kingdom-ordinance, not an Assembly ordinance. People are baptized (buried) as a dead sinner on their profession (Mt.28:19-20 JND, NKJV, NIV, NASB) without regard to the reality of that profession, which only God knows. Finally (v.6) there is the all-inclusive circle of *God's creation* where in that sense God is the father of all.

We've talked of gifts or gifted people (vv.7-16) and won't repeat ourselves except to remind you that all gift is for the edifying or building up of the Church so we will *not* remain children unable to discern right from wrong when we hear the huge spectrum of false doctrine all around us. The body is to grow, and that, in love.

were in Adam — and have put on the *new man* — all we are in Christ (vv.20-24). We are *a new creation*

(Eph.2:10; 2 Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15). But, although a new creation and having put on the new man, we still carry the heavy baggage of our old, fallen, sinful nature. So we need to *actively* stop doing what is wrong and natural to the unsaved and to our old nature, and *act as a Christian* and as members one of another — as harmoniously-working parts of the body of Christ (vv.25-29). When we sin we *grieve* or sadden the Holy Spirit who indwells us to guide us into all truth and to put God's seal of ownership on us (v.30). So we are to be kind, careful of our speech and attitudes, and be a forgiving people (vv.31-32). Hope this helps.

## **GENERAL QUESTION: THE MEETINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY**

Your questions ask about a number of the meetings of an assembly in a general sense and it may be helpful to briefly outline the meetings found in Scripture before giving specific answers to the rest of the questions. We looked at Acts 2 as describing the beginning of the Church, and now we want to use Acts 2:42 as a definition of the *functions* of a local assembly. The early believers, when the Church had begun at Pentecost, *persevered* or continued steadfastly in (1) the apostles' doctrine, (2) fellowship, (3) the breaking of bread, and (4) prayers. These define the primary meetings of the assembly. Let's look at them from this viewpoint.

**(1) *The Apostles' Doctrine.*** The object of such meetings is to learn what the apostles taught in the Word, and of course, to learn of all the Word. We see occasional lectures in Scripture (Acts 20:7; etc.) where gifted men lectured the local assembly on points the Lord had put on their heart. We also see *informal* Bible studies such as in Acts 17:11 where some brethren got together even daily to search the Scriptures as to whether what someone had preached to them was true. But as we saw above, only in 1 Corinthians 14:29-32 where two or three prophets speak for God, do we have the ordinary (weekly) meeting for learning God's mind. It is sadly neglected today in many assemblies.

**(2) *Fellowship.*** This "having in common" was the general condition of the early assembly at Jerusalem and gave them the needed unity to do the many things that needed to be done for an effective functioning local assembly. Think of the assembly working together informally for Sunday School, vacation Bible school, home meetings, children's meetings, young peoples' meetings, gospel meetings, etc. Think of the assembly encouraging and supporting home visitation, jail work, tract and other publication work, conferences, camps, mission work, traveling brethren, etc.

**(4) *Prayers.*** The prayer meeting is the *power-meeting* of the assembly, for without the Lord we can do nothing (Jn.15:5). We are told in Matthew 18:19-20 "that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven, for where two or three are gathered together to My name, I am there in the midst of them." So the *example* to bring out the principles of gathering to Him or to His name, and He in our midst, *is the prayer meeting!* Yet so often we make a good effort to be at the breaking of bread, but neglect the prayer meeting. *Can you imagine that being God's mind?* We soon see the prayer meeting in action after the beginning of the Church. In Acts 4:24-31 the believers that Peter and John met with held a prayer meeting thanking and praising the Lord for preserving Peter and John from the authorities who sought to stop their preaching. God acknowledged His pleasure in that prayer by shaking the building, and He gave them increased power to speak the Word in boldness. We aren't to expect outward signs today, but we all can be *filled* with the Holy Spirit (whom we all have as an indwelling possession — Rom.8:9-15; Gal.4:6; 1 Jn.3:24; etc.) by being close to God, giving Him first place (Eph.1:13-14; 5:18). C.H.Mackintosh said as to the prayers, "The prayers will not be long. All the prayers of Scripture are short. Long prayers kill a prayer meeting quicker than almost anything. We may pray all night in our closets [privately at home] if we wish, but in a meeting, prayers edify most when brief." Many of the older brethren hardly give opportunity for the younger to pray. That is very sad!

## **QUESTIONS 3,7,14: BREAKING BREAD; THE COMMUNION SERVICE**

The third formal meeting of the assembly in the list at the beginning of the previous answer is the *breaking of bread* or the *communion service*, so-called. We broke it off from the above answer because there were questions directly relating to it, and it is a more complicated subject. The meeting to break bread is the gathering together to partake of the Lord's Supper. It is the time we give back to the Lord Jesus our praise for what He has done, our worship of Him for who He is, and our thankfulness to Him for everything pertaining to Him in relation to the cross. It is the time to partake of the bread and wine, speaking of His body given, and His blood shed to pay for our sins. It is primarily taught in 1 Corinthians 10-11. *He* is the One prominent in that meeting!

The Lord's supper was first introduced by the Lord to His disciples shortly before the cross, as seen in Luke 22:19-

20. We won't dwell on that portion because the essential ingredients are also given in 1 Corinthians 11, with added detail, except to say that when the Lord introduced it in Luke, there was nothing to connect it to the Church. We must await the formation of the Church in Acts 2 before we see that the breaking of bread is a Church-ordinance, a definite part of the functioning of every local assembly gathering (Acts 2:42) as part of "My Church" (Mt.18:20). "They persevered in ... *breaking of bread* and prayers" (JND). We've seen that Acts 2:42 defined the functioning of the first local assembly about 1970 years ago in Jerusalem, *and nothing from God has ever changed this divine pattern!* As always in Scripture, the order of things is important. The number one thing that defined their meeting together was agreement in the teaching of the apostles — the "apostles' doctrine." Being in agreement as to the doctrine, they could have *fellowship* together with the apostles. *Fellowship* means *having in common*. Those who could have that fellowship together broke bread together — partook of the Lord's supper — and could pray together. Today, most religious groups relegate the breaking of bread to an act *independent* of doctrinal belief and practice, and separate it from "church" fellowship. With many groups, virtually any professed Christian is allowed to break bread, but with some, much enquiry is made of one desiring to "join their church." That *separation* of the two is wrong!

It would seem from Acts 2:46 that at first, the brethren of the early Church broke bread daily. They felt a wonderful oneness, and wanted to be together. Note Acts 4:31-36. But when we pick up the account in Acts 20:7 some 25 years later, we see that the established time to break bread was *the first day of the week*, our Sunday. "And the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread ..." The "first day of the week" is also seen in 1 Corinthians 16:2 in connection with the gathering of the believers. We thus take by apostolic example that the breaking of bread should take place every Lord's day (Sunday) at any convenient time. In Acts 20 it evidently was in the evening when most would be free of other duties, Sunday then being a regular work day. Sunday should *not* be thought of as "*our Sabbath*," a day of rest, but as an active day for the Lord.

### 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

The apostle Paul did not experience the original breaking of bread or the Lord's death and resurrection, or the Lord's 40-day resurrection-ministry to His apostles and possibly others just before He ascended back to heaven. So as the one chosen to bring out the truth of the Assembly in writing, Paul received a detailed *revelation*

although it was something the disciples were told to "do" (Lk.22:19).

(v.23), which he wrote to the Corinthian assembly. On the night the Lord was betrayed He took bread, gave thanks and broke it — hence the expression *the breaking of bread*. He then said, "This is My body which is for you" — for the Corinthian assembly, for the entire Christian company which the Corinthian assembly represented locally (v.24 JND). Note that the best manuscripts don't have the words "Take, eat ... broken" as used in the KJV/NKJV. His body was *given*, not broken, for us. It was in that body that He "bore our sins ... on the tree" (1 Pet.2:24). "Do this in remembrance of *Me*" — an active "recalling of *Me* to mind" (JND note). Many argue that "do this" is simply a *request*, but if so, it is our *Lord's* request. Will we say "No" or "Later" or "Maybe" to Him?

"In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, *in remembrance of Me*" (v.25). This cup of "the fruit of the vine" (Mt.26:29), of wine, pictures the value of the blood of Christ poured out at the cross. His death, His blood shed, entirely replaces the *conditional nature* of the old covenant of law, where *life* was promised only upon perfect obedience (and all fell short). The Lord's shed blood is the *basis* for the still future *new covenant* with Israel (Jer.31:31; Heb.8:6-13), which will be *unconditionally* based on the grace of God made possible by Christ's shed blood. "Without shedding of blood, there is no remission [forgiveness]" (Heb.9:22). We are not now under the new covenant, it being future and for Israel only, *but we share in the blessing of it*, based on the death of Christ! Again, taking the cup is something we are to "do"! And it is a *collective act of the assembly*, not something done independently at home.

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim [announce] the Lord's death till He comes" (v.26). Remember, this is a *collective* act. The "you" is plural: the "eating" and "drinking" was part of the functioning of the Corinthian assembly and written to those "within," whether at Corinth or elsewhere — "all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor.1:2). It is also a *proclamation* of the *Lord's* death. Both the bread and wine speak of death. In it, we don't celebrate His life, His service, His resurrection, He now being at the Father's right hand, *but particularly the narrow focus of Him in relation to His death!* This should be a *serious* consideration when we gather to

break bread, in our prayers and hymns — even which verses of a hymn we sing.

In verses 27-34 we get into the *responsibility* of each person who is *already* breaking bread, of the *individual* with his Lord. *Every great privilege carries responsibility!* “Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (v.27). What is an unworthy manner? One example would be the abuses of verses 17-22 where the Corinthian brethren were having a “love feast” before or combined with the breaking of bread, where they were acting anything but like brothers and sisters in Christ, even getting drunk! But a list of “unworthy ways” is not given so we might all be exercised that our conduct all week long matches what is pleasing to our Lord when we gather around Him (Mt.18:20) to remember Him. Being guilty in respect of the Lord’s body and blood has the thought of not considering how holy and solemn was the Lord’s work on the cross — that great sacrifice that satisfied a sin-hating, holy God! God *hates* sin, and unjudged sin brought to the Lord’s supper is inexcusable!

“Let a man *prove* himself and thus eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (v.28, JND). The word *examine* in the KJV/NKJV/NIV/NASB is *dokimazo* in the Greek and means “to prove with a view to approval” (Vine). It is two steps beyond mere examination. I may examine myself (first step) and realize my conduct during the week was not always right (second step). I may realize that I still really dislike a certain brother or sister, or something he said or did, but I “eat” anyway. *That’s not the force of the verse!* Instead, I make things right with God and man (third step), and *then* I eat. Nor is there the thought of me staying away for a few weeks or months — maybe even breaking bread at home, an act of independency — while my anger cools down or I stop doing what I know the Lord wouldn’t like. No, day by day, *I keep short accounts with God* and make things right so quickly that I can continue week by week to remember Him in the breaking of bread, without danger to myself from God’s chastening hand, *as had previously been my custom!*

This verse 28 is used over and over again by those who insist that the only requirement to break bread is one’s personal examination: if he or she feels it’s OK, then no one should interfere. They believe that breaking bread is simply a *personal* responsibly, not an assembly responsibility in any way! But this verse wasn’t written to Christians in general, regardless of their “church” position, but to ones *already breaking bread in the Corinthian assembly and in all like-minded assemblies*. Those “within” or “inside” (1 Cor.5:12) are to break bread with pure lives before God and man. *Reception* to

assembly fellowship is *not* in view here, and is an entirely different subject!

Verses 29-32 show the seriousness of not doing the above *approving*. “For the eater and drinker eats and drinks *judgment* to himself, not distinguishing the body. On this account many among you are weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep [died]. But if we judged ourselves, so were we not judged. But being judged, we are disciplined of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world” (JND). God takes the work of His beloved Son very seriously and will act in governmental judgment, in chastening or child-training (Heb.12:5-12), on Christians who are careless in this holy remembrance of His Son. And we who have been blessed with much teaching on the Church — who should know these things — are particularly responsible! We need to consider very seriously if our general infirmity, sickness, injury, lack of joy, etc., is related to carelessness or other sin in relation to remembering Him.

Only the *Lord* knows how much grief we have caused ourselves by being careless in our assembly responsibilities in the breaking of bread. On the other hand, none of us has any right to *assume* some unpleasant thing happening to another Christian is a result of sin in breaking bread. *But the person to whom it happens has a very great responsibility to search his or her life as to what the Lord is seeking to communicate*. It could be the Lord is displeased with our attitude or worldliness or assembly-position ... or carelessness in relation to breaking bread. It also could be a toughening process to better become a “good soldier.” The answer is *self-judgment* — judgment and confession not only of the sin, but of *ourselves* in allowing it. *Self-judgment prevents the Lord’s judgment*. But we are *never* condemned with the world. There is a huge difference between the chastening of a holy but loving Father and the wrath of a sin-hating God against those who reject His Son. See John 3:36.

“Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home lest you come together for judgment” (vv.33-34). There is no place for prominence of person or gift at the Lord’s supper, nor is it a place to satisfy natural hunger or thirst. *It is a spiritual matter!* We worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn.4:24).

None of us wants to walk or ride the bus everywhere we go. So most of us sought to get a drivers’ license as soon as we could, and a car when we could afford one. We

counted it a great privilege to be able to drive legally. Yet we realized that it was a great responsibility: in a moment we could kill someone, or be killed or maimed for life, or be heavily fined or even spend years in jail, so we drive with care and within the rules of the road (which is also obedience to God — Rom.13:1-7). But very few have refused to drive because of the responsibility entailed. *It is a far greater privilege to remember our Lord in the manner He has prescribed, but many shy away because of the spiritual responsibility attached to it.* Why? Is it too much for Him to ask us for a godly life lived according to His “rules” for personal and assembly conduct? He asks for nothing except what should be normal Christian practice anyway! If you’re not remembering the Lord, why not?

In the next issue we will look very briefly at 1 Corinthians 10 to see the spiritual meanings of the bread and wine, and we will briefly look at some of the things that *exclude* from breaking bread. We have covered many of these in a great amount of detail in past Newsletters, but here we want a brief explanation especially for our younger and less informed readers.

Remember, if you’re not getting answers elsewhere, we will publish and answer your questions. It may take a while, but be patient with us.

RPD