

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

03-65

Dear Reader

We would like to continue our study of *attitudes* by looking at Acts, Romans and 1 Corinthians. All of Acts and the last quarter of Romans are rich in attitudes because these portions are based on experience and the practical application of truth. As we review the attitudes seen in Scripture, please honestly look within and consider your own attitudes with the thought that we should conform our attitudes to Scripture and not try to conform Scripture to our attitudes. Remember that the Bible says, “Let him who stole, steal” (Eph.4:28). That’s how a thief would seek to conform Scripture to his bad habit so he could continue in as a thief. But it would not be *God’s* intention, for the verse continues with the words, “no more,” which is the opposite from what the thief wanted it to say. We may smile at this example, but some of us sometimes do the same thing when it comes to our attitudes. We try to force Scripture to conform to our personal belief. Beware!

Acts

The words “with one accord” and “together” are found throughout especially the first part of Acts beginning with 1:14. It indicates an **attitude of prayer and seeking the mind of God**; letting the Word have full control; appreciating the togetherness of the body of Christ. And in 1:14 the Holy Spirit hadn’t yet come to form the one body. But He has now come! Do we actively search the Scriptures to be of one mind in the local assembly?

“What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). These exercised people were **willing to do things differently** to please the Lord. What a great example of a Christlike attitude! Are we prepared (as said in the opening) to be molded by the Word in attitude and deed, even if it means a change in our life?

“Steadfastly” (Acts 2:42). The early Christians “persevered” (JND) in the apostles’ doctrine, etc. Their attitude **was not to give up**, not to stop/start/stop/start, but to be steadfast, regardless of the external hindrances! That is the attitude our Lord wants to see!

The **selfish attitude of self-gratification**, and not afraid to lie to get their way, caused the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). It shows how God hates the display of our fleshly attitudes. The early Church got the message loud and clear (v.11). That account is in Scripture that we too might get the message. Do we?

Assuming the great teacher **Gamaliel** was an unsaved man, the advice he gave in Acts 5:34-39 shows that

unsaved people can display a good attitude and sometimes give good, biblically-based advice. Think of the television personality Dr. Phil or the radio personality Dr. Laura. If this is true of the unsaved, how much more it should be true of us believers!

Peter and some of the other apostles had been beaten for preaching in the name of the Lord (ch.5:40). What was their attitude? They were “**rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**” (v.41). Our attitude should reflect their wonderful attitude of being happy to suffer for Christ’s name.

We too often are a **complaining** people and so were the early believers. Complaints generally come from fleshly pride – I don’t get what I think I deserve. It generally indicates a bad attitude. But sometimes complaints are valid, at least in part. The Greek-speaking Jews felt they were being discriminated against. The apostles could have said, “Stop being a bunch of cry-babies and get your eyes on the Lord.” But they didn’t: they solved the problem! That was an **attitude of grace** which many of us could learn to have much more than we do.

Acts 6:11-14 shows an **attitude of a lying spirit** out of hatred, employed as seen in Scripture a number of times by unsaved people to undermine the work of God. Let us never be used by Satan in this way! Have we ever lied to our brethren to get out of an uncomfortable situation?

Stephen displayed the same **attitude of forgiveness** upon his murder that we saw the Lord displayed at His crucifixion: “Do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). Then why do we so often have such a hard time displaying the same attitude under much less trying circumstances?

Saul showed in Acts 9:1-6 the same amazing attitude-change that should accompany everyone’s salvation. “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord . . . **Lord, what do You want me to do?**” Do we still ask this question of our Lord in day-by-day decisions? If so, it displays a Christ-honoring attitude!

We have a **faithful Ananias** in Acts 9:10-17. The Lord told him to go to meet Saul. Ananias was concerned because of Saul’s reputation, but had the attitude of trust in the Lord. The Lord could have said, “I *command* you to go.” No, He had a gracious attitude and explained Himself to Ananias. And Ananias went and brought blessing to Paul and consequently to the whole Church and thousands who later were saved through his preaching.

Peter had a bad attitude as to those of other races, coming from his Jewish upbringing. The Jews were to have nothing to do with Gentiles. But all that changed in Christianity and Peter's attitude needed **adjusting to the grace of Christianity for all peoples** of every race and national origin. Peter got the message (Acts 10:15) that "what God has cleansed, you must not call common." And he was used in the eternal blessing of the Gentile Cornelius and his family. The Jews of the Jerusalem assembly had this same prejudice (11:1-17), but were convinced by Peter's explanation. What is your attitude towards others of different races, nationalities and languages whom God has cleansed? Do you consider yourself better than they?

Peter refused worship (Acts 10:26). Do we have the **attitude of refusing or desiring man's honor**?

The account of Peter's miraculous release from prison in Acts 12 gives us insights into our possible **attitudes towards the prayer meeting**. The local assembly was earnestly praying for him (v.5), certainly indicating a good attitude towards both God and Peter. Then Peter arrives at the door and the brethren were *astonished* (v.16). This was an attitude of lack of faith. How do we feel about the prayer meeting? Are we there? Do we pray believing? Do we really believe God will answer? Are we amazed when He does answer?

The dispute between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (Acts 15:36-40) shows how easily fleshly attitudes can break out even among the most able of God's people – even the closest of friends. Being Mark's uncle, Barnabas evidently **allowed family ties to interfere with proper judgment** and was *determined* to take along on a missionary trip the young man who had previously deserted them. The contention became "sharp" and they parted company, evidently forever, for we never again read of Barnabas. We know Barnabas' attitude was dead wrong; we can't say how Paul acquitted himself, but my own sad experience is that we all sometimes say things (even if technically correct) in the heat of battle that come straight from the flesh and must be confessed. What a shame that such a small thing forever split this team that God had so used! But Silas and Timothy filled the void that Barnabas' departure made, and further blessing resulted for many dear people. If this happened between these two spiritual giants, how careful *we* must be of family ties and resulting bad attitudes in the things of God!

The influence of the so-called "**almighty dollar**" on **peoples' attitudes** is seen in Acts 16:19. Let us believers be careful. We should know the corrupting power of money.

Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. What a time for anger and pity! But "Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns**, and the prisoners were listening to

them" (Acts 16:25). What a marvelous attitude when things seemed bleak. As a result we have the well-known story of the "Philippian Jailor."

God tells the good and the bad. I for one believe Paul allowed his **nationalistic attitudes** to surface in the few words of Acts 18:18: he took a Jewish vow which he had no business doing! This is again seen in Acts 20:22 when he went bound in his own spirit to Jerusalem despite the Holy Spirit's direction for him not to go (v.23; 21:4, 11, 26). There, he heeded bad advice and went to the temple to be purified (21:23-24), and as a result suffered many years imprisonment. He even swore at the high priest (23:2-3). One wrong attitude, even if it seems right to the flesh, and years of faithful service can be jeopardized. Be careful of unjudged fleshly attitudes!

Romans

In Romans 1 God explains man's terrible downfall. Some practice every perversion. Some suppress the truth in unrighteousness, do the perversions themselves and also *approve* of those who practice the perversions (vv.18,32, and all in between). In a study of attitudes, that little word *approve* – have fellow-delight in – stands out. A JND note says, "It means that not only their own passions carry them away, but being thoroughly corrupt, they enjoy other peoples' sinning, taking pleasure in them doing so." Think of the glorification of homosexuality in the media. This is the **terrible attitude of self-gratification** that even Christians can fall into. Note the Christian in 1 Corinthians 5.

"You are inexcusable ... whoever you are who judge" (Rom.2:1). God hates a **judgmental attitude**. Yes, we must judge teaching and practice: Scripture is plain as to that (1 Cor.5), but our failure comes in judging motive and non-scriptural matters of everyday life.

In Romans 9:1-4 Paul shows **the good side of a nationalistic attitude**. He loved the Jews so much that he could sincerely wish himself accursed from Christ if they would be saved. Do we have such love for *anyone*?

Romans 12:1-19 is attitude-rich. We must have Christlike thoughts and attitudes to truly be able to present our bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice and to know His will for us. Our attitudes as to ourselves must not be puffed up (I'm really important) or degraded (I'm useless to God), but think as He thinks of us. We then will desire to use what He has given us in His service, for the blessing of others. We will not be hypocrites – deliberately acting one way but thinking the opposite – an attitude people soon catch on to, and despise. We truly will be **kindly affectioned** one to another, desiring the best for others, and people will be comfortable as they see our good attitude towards them. We will show **diligence** in serving the Lord. We will strive to be of the same mind and this will

require good attitudes and openness with each other. We won't be wise in our own opinion. We will seek to have an attitude of *peace* wherever possible without denying any truth of Scripture. We will give place to wrath. Look at this portion in detail and seek out more godly attitudes!

When I owe something to someone, I need to pay him. God says I need to *constantly* owe you love (Rom.13:8)! If we all had this **attitude of owing each other love**, what happy assemblies we would have! Virtually every need would be met, the deepest friendships would develop, problems would be solved. There likely would be growth both spiritually and numerically. Why not? It can start with you and me! *We do it for God.*

Chapters 14 and 15 also are attitude-rich. We are not to judge or despise **the spiritually weak** (Rom.14:1-21). What is our attitude towards those who think differently about certain foods, certain days and other non-essential things? They may not fully understand their Christian liberty, but it is not our place to look down on them. We all will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give account of our actions to God. *Then*, how we will wish our attitudes had been more Christlike! Only time will tell how much we have lost in "rewards" because of our lack of faithfulness to Him now!

Are you strong? Then **bear the infirmities of the weak** (Rom.15:1-3). Or do we have the attitude that we are so superior we can't be bothered with those poor souls who just don't understand. No, God says, have the attitude that you will help them!

Chapter 16 displays the **attitude of desiring to greet individuals and commenting on their service for the Lord**. Paul mentioned 36 persons! Do we make it a point to say "hello" to each one and encourage them in their service? Paul put it in writing when he couldn't do it personally! A really good and worthwhile attitude!

1 Corinthians

'Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and ... judgment" (1:10). "No divisions among you." These Corinthians had a **me-first attitude** – contentions and a tendency to want that which pleased them instead of what was right for the assembly. They needed a spiritual attitude adjustment. They had "the mind of Christ" (2:16), but weren't using it. We too have that mind. Are we thinking as He thinks?

Paul spoke of the Corinthians as carnal (fleshly; living according to their old nature) and as babes. We know a **baby's attitude**. It's all me; my wants; my desires; and if I don't get it, I know how to have a tantrum. Would the Lord think our attitudes deserve to be called those of a baby instead of an adult Christian?

The Corinthians were boastful, puffed up, arrogant. What **selfish attitudes!** But what they had, they received from the Lord, not by their own skills (4:6-8). Even though they had a sexual scandal in their midst which defiled the assembly, they were still puffed up – **an attitude of superiority** (5:2, 6). They were an attitudinal mess! But before we condemn them, we need to be sure the finger can't point back at us! How would the Lord consider our attitudes? Are we puffed up? Do we think ourselves superior?

They were taking each other to the courts because of an **I-demand-my-rights attitude**. Paul rebuked them and said the Christlike attitude was to "accept wrong" (6:7-8). This same attitude was displayed with respect to eating food sacrificed to idols (8:7-13). It didn't seem to enter their heads that they might be offending a weaker brother or sister. We should have a you-first attitude that always considers others.

Even though the Corinthians ought to have been supporting Paul and the others who ministered to them, their *me-first attitude* made them neglect to do so. Paul had a far better **attitude when it came to money**. Although he told them that God required those who are helped, to in turn help the preacher, Paul worked to pay his own expenses so he could preach to them without hindrance (9:7-15).

Paul preached **an others-first attitude**. "Let no one seek his own, but ... the other's well-being" (10:24) which would give "no offense" (v.32).

A **contentious attitude**, as some at Corinth were displaying as to the symbols of headship (11:16), was shown to be of the flesh, not of God. Neither the apostles nor the assemblies in general were contentious when God had spoken. The Corinthians seemed to stand alone with this bad attitude – a dubious distinction! Perhaps being a large assembly contributed to contentions, but that is no excuse.

The importance of a **genuine loving attitude** is detailed in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 as in no other place. We commend these verses for your careful meditation. Without genuine love, having other important traits doesn't profit at all. Do you pride yourself in your knowledge, in your assembly pathway, in your spiritual gifts, in other spiritual things? All good in themselves, but how about your genuine Christian love? Dear brethren, do we not often fail here to our great spiritual harm both now and in the future?

They had a **zeal for spiritual gift** (14:12), but the context indicates it was to exalt themselves. It fed their superior attitude. They were only too eager to speak up, to be heard, as it were, to be exalted, but the right motive for the use of any gift was to help others grow spiritually (v.26).

Rather than so many negative attitudes, the Corinthians needed to have a **watchful, brave attitude** and to stand

fast in the faith, with all done in a loving attitude (16:13-14). The Corinthians could turn themselves around with God's power from a self-centered assembly to a God-centered assembly. It appears from 2 Corinthians that at least some of their attitudes had changed for the better. Each of us individually can also become increasingly God-centered in our attitudes, desiring to build up the Lord's people everywhere.

A question has been raised as to the teaching of Matthew 18 on the infallibility of assembly decisions. We want to emphatically state our position that assembly decisions are *not* infallible and those not made according to the mind of the Lord are *not* bound in heaven. Yet for every assembly to simply decide on its own what decisions to accept or reject is giving up the principle of derived assembly authority and every sin would be soon found among us. We covered this in detail in *Assembly Messenger* 98-14 which we encourage you to reread on our website, assemblymessenger.com if you don't have a hard copy. We will quote below a few paragraphs from Issue 14.

Now we come more to our subject. We want to dwell on two verses. We will quote from the J.N. Darby translation because of its exceptional fidelity to the Greek.

“Whatsoever ye [plural] shall bind on the earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on the earth shall be loosed in heaven ... for where two or three *are gathered together unto My name*, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt.18:18-20).

“For I, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged as present, to deliver in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (ye and my spirit *being gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ*), him that has so wrought this: to deliver him, I say, being such, to Satan for destruction of the flesh ... Remove the wicked person from amongst yourselves” (1 Cor.5:3-5, 13).

These verses are perhaps made clearer in the generally excellent NASB. It says, “For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, *when you are assembled*, and I with you in spirit, *with the power of our Lord Jesus ...*”

The context of both these passages makes it clear that they are speaking of the local church gathered together *as a local assembly*. It is not a gathering of clergy or a board of elders. Yes, an apostle was guiding the Corinthians because they had no written instructions as to how to act, but that does not detract from the principles of action he laid down for us today in 1 Corinthians. *The only derived reli-*

gious authority today resides in the local assembly gathered together! But the assembly does not have authority to enforce some man-made regulation or to “receive” to its fellowship anyone it desires, apart from the scriptural qualifications, or to discipline one for non-scriptural reasons. *The assembly in exercising authority is gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and acts with His power!* If the Lord is not in it, there is no *divine* power to act, although an assembly may still act in *fleshly* energy. Such an action then is *not* bound in heaven. *But if the assembly action is scriptural, then the action is bound in heaven and sanctioned by Christ, and woe to anyone who refuses that action or is careless as to it!*

What Are Assembly Actions?

An assembly action is a spiritual judgment of the assembly that has to do with the spiritual welfare of the assembly and affects one or more persons. The most common assembly action is the “reception” of one to take part in the fellowship of the local assembly, including the breaking of bread. Most commonly a visitor comes from out of town with a letter of commendation (Rom.16:1; 2 Cor.3:1) from a like-minded assembly and the *assembly* receives the visitor as one of its own. Others may be received for the first time, after the assembly has enquired in view of the person meeting the scriptural qualifications for assembly fellowship together. These are pleasant decisions; so pleasant that one may not realize that an assembly action has taken place which has been ratified in heaven by the Head of His Assembly (assuming it was a proper reception).

The case of the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5 is an example of an unpleasant but sometimes needful use of assembly authority in the form of an assembly decision. Generally, there are assembly decisions involving lesser forms of discipline for both moral and doctrinal sin, but if the sin proves to be a *course of action*, the person is put outside the functioning of the local assembly (1 Cor.5:12); he is “removed ... from among yourselves” (1 Cor.5:13). Note that the removal was not only from among the Corinthian brethren, but from *all* who call on the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor.1:1-2). That is the practical truth of the one body.

Next issue, the Lord willing, we will finish our study of attitudes. We pray this study will lead to confession of many wrong attitudes and the evidence in assemblies and elsewhere or many more Christlike attitudes being displayed by us all..

RPD