

Captive's Corner



"Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"

2 Corinthians 10:5

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The Sunday Morning Meeting

Christ loved the church so much that He purchased it with His own blood. Therefore, motivated by love for our Savior, we should want to present a faithful witness to the great Scriptural truths concerning His church (His body) in all ways as a local assembly and especially as we meet or gather to worship God and build up one another. As all believers throughout the world are collectively the church, the body of Christ and the temple of God, every local body of believers meets as a miniature of it. Locally then, we are the place God has chosen to put His Name and manifest His glory, as the Temple or House of God in the Old Testament was a witness to the world of the same. The world is not alone as it observes the church. The angels also look in and they marvel at the wisdom and glory of God as fallen, sinful man, by God's grace, presents a faithful witness of Him in His church (assembly) on the earth. What a marvel it is when you consider that Satan is the prince of this world, and it is in the midst of a world system dominated and controlled by Satan that we witness Christ. Hence, the instruction of the believer's armor of God for those who are about this purpose (Ephesians 3:10; 6:10-18; Acts 20:28).

In this age of grace, God abundantly enables us to do all he expects of us. He has given us a Helper (His Spirit) Who empowers, equips, and guides us into all the truth we need to know to be a faithful witness when we gather as well as when we go out into the world. He has not given us a particular form or frequency for meeting, but He has established His order for His assembly's gatherings. As we meet on Sunday morning we should continue in "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer" (Acts 2:42). The order, length, and combining of these activities may vary as the Spirit leads each meeting. We have examples, mainly in Acts, of gatherings of believers (Acts 1; 2; 20:7, 36). We also have principles or truths given in the epistles which our meetings should accurately reflect, such as all believers are gifted priests who should be functioning in Spirit led ministry of gift to one another, worship of God, and prayer. (See the Captive's Corner *Great Truths Concerning the Church* for a description of 7 of these truths). Finally, God has given us some specific instruction, primarily concerning speaking and the use of speaking gifts in our meetings (1 Corinthians 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:18-20). Christ is to be central in our activities when we meet, and His Spirit is to be controlling and leading just as He should be in every aspect of our lives. You will notice as we discuss each of the activities in Acts 2:42 that they involve various or all of the gathered believers, each in turn, being led by the Spirit of God to lead the assembly by speaking out loud to God in prayer or by speaking to the assembly in any of the various forms of edifying speech. All, of course, is done and said in the presence of our Lord Who loves us and laid down His life for us. However, the flesh is still active in the believer's life (it never sleeps). Within us, it wars against the Spirit, and it is an enemy of Christ (Gal 5:16-17; Romans 7). Therefore, it strives to prevent a faithful witness of Jesus Christ in every believer's life and in the gatherings or meetings of the saints, just as Satan does. However, in light of God's abundant provision for us by His Spirit and His Word, we are more than able to faithfully witness Christ and the great Scriptural truths of the church to the angels as well as to this corrupt world as we sojourn in it as strangers, all the while being citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

The early church was birthed in the atmosphere of prayer. The saints were burdened to pray, and as they waited on the Lord they experienced the baptism of the Spirit, enabling them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with power (Acts 1:8, 14; 2:1-4, 40-42). This pattern of prayer continues throughout the book of Acts: prayer, power, proclamation, persecution ... prayer etc. The early church came together to pray, exalt God, and edify one another. They scattered to evangelize. In the epistles Paul urges saints to strive together with him in prayer (Rom 15:30; Acts 20:36; Eph 6:19). Paul seems to be constantly praying for the spiritual growth of others (Eph 1:16-19; Phil 1:3-5; Col 1:9; 1 Thes 1:2). In Acts 1 we see Peter's first message after Jesus' ascension occurring out of the midst of corporate prayer. After his message, the saints prayed further, and direction from God resulted. Direction for our assembly as well as Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered ministry of the Word to the edification of all will be the result if our hearts are burdened for such and, thus, we pray depending on the Lord in all things, waiting on Him. The church must maintain a constant sense of need and dependence on God. We are many unique members, but we can pray with one

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accord and with one mind because we are all joined by and led by one Spirit Who knows the mind of God (Rom 8:26-27; Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:32; 5:12; Eph 4:4). Prayer in the Sunday morning meeting is like a prayer meeting within a meeting. Time is limited because of the other activities so we should be very brief and specific in our prayers so that several may participate. Preaching to the assembled saints is not appropriate in our prayers. Prayer is to be heart-felt and directed to God, not man. In addition, and very important, all too often the church has tended toward emphasizing the material things of this world which are passing, including our bodies, instead of the spiritual things which are eternal and, therefore, of far more value (1 Timothy 4:8; 2 Corinthians 4:18; 1 John 2:17; Matt 6:33; Philippians 4:19). God's word assures us that we cannot keep the body alive forever or take anything of this world with us when we die (Hebrews 9:27). However, we may keep body and soul from going to Hell. Therefore, why not emphasize praying for lost souls to have their eyes opened to their lost condition and the sufficient Savior Jesus in our prayers? Finally, two aspects of prayer often overlooked are that of thanksgiving and worship. Even our requests are to be couched in thanksgiving (Phil 4:6-7; 1 Thes 5:18). Thanksgiving should be emphasized in our prayers as well as simply exalting, magnifying, and adoring the character of God. How sweet it is when the saints together worship God in their prayers (Luke 11:2; 90:1-2; Rev 4:8-9). God's Spirit within us enables us to pour out worship, thanksgiving, and petitions to God as our Father (Romans 8:16; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). This can include Psalms spoken to God (Psalm 89:1-2; 93; 96; 98; 100; 103).

The apostles' doctrine means the whole of Scripture. The apostles taught from the Old Testament and also gave us the inspired teachings of the New Testament (Jude 3; Eph 4:5; Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 1:1; Acts 20:7). The doctrine of

the church, having been a mystery, needed unfolding once the church was birthed at Pentecost. Such a new creation would need new revelation and instruction as to its character, life, conduct, interests, purpose, and future. It was given orally by the apostles at first, but now it is preserved for us in writing (1 Cor 2:13; 1 Jn 1:4; 5:13; John 20:31). This revelation is complete and needs not to be added to, only to be understood and obeyed (Rom 1:5; 16:26; 15:18). The activity of teaching in the assembly helps the body to understand the doctrines of the Word of God in a practical and balanced way. God's Spirit enables this teaching, helps us to understand His Word, and empowers us to obey it (1 Jn 2:20-27; Jn 14:26; Eph 4:11-16; 2 Tim 2:2; Phil 2:12-13). We are to hold fast to the Word of God and the teaching which is consistent with it. We are also to pay close attention to our doctrine and conduct (1 Tim 4:16; Rev 3:3; 1 Cor 15:2; 1 Thes 5:21). It is the holding in common of the apostles' doctrine and, therefore, the apostles' fellowship that distinguishes the church apart from the world and all other assemblies and organizations therein. The basis of our fellowship is the Incarnate Word made flesh (which we have not seen, heard, or handled). The apostles did see, hear, and handle the eternal Son of God in flesh, God incarnate—living, dying for our sins, resurrected, and ascending into heaven with a promise to always be with us and return for us (1 Jn 4:4-6; 1:1-3; 1 Cor 15:1-6; Matt 28:20; Acts 1:9-11; John 14:1-3). Their witness is, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him Who is true, and we are in Him Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the True God and eternal life" (1 Jn 5:20). The apostles' fellowship is with the Father and the Son. Therefore, we have this fellowship in common with them and one another

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by believing their report (apostle's doctrine) (Rom 10:17; 1 Jn 1:3, 7). Fellowship means "to hold in common." As the one body of Christ we also share in the same common life (resurrection life), Spirit, future, trials, interests, goals, access to God, enemies (esp. the enemy Satan), struggles, griefs, truths, needs etc. (all different than the world's fellowship which we have been called out of to Christ). As one body, yet many members, we also in a very real sense hold one another in common (1 Cor 12:13). This relates to our responsibility to love, care for, and build up one another. We are joined in a living union by God's Spirit, possessing the same new life from above. We are dependent on one another to mature in the faith and to experience God more fully. If one hurts, all are hurt. If one learns a truth and applies it in the experience of life, he can then share it with others in a very practical way to the profit of all (Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim 2:2). No one knows all the truth. God has not given it to just one person. Therefore, God desires to speak through various members at each meeting and eventually all—that encouraging Word, that verse with or without a comment about it, that practical wisdom from His Word, that teaching, or exhortation, etc. The Bible was written through about 40 men with varying backgrounds, cultures, languages, styles, and personalities. Two, three, etc. are better than one (Eccl 4:9-12). This is true in the body, and it is to be reflected in our meeting. As those who have come prepared are led by God's Spirit to share the Word, all should be edified with a view to every man of God being thoroughly equipped for every good work (1 Cor 14:3, 6, 26, 29; 2 Tim 3:16-17). By various ways to minister to one another through speaking, God's Spirit provides a means for various members, unique in style, personality, gift, experience, maturity, etc. to participate in the ministry aspect of the meeting (the apostle's doctrine and fellowship). With God's Spirit leading, our fellowship (sharing what we have in common) will be Christ-centered, affecting a common growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18; Eph 4:16). Christ gives an eternal, spiritual, and heavenly aspect and purpose to our speech toward one another. To God be the glory! This fellowship is clearly like no other on the earth. You would have to go to heaven to find a comparison (Matt 6:10; Rev 5:12). The Word of God gives substance to our fellowship—"Comfort one another with these Words" (1 Thes 4:18). The spiritual hunger of the believer (new and old alike) cannot be satisfied by anything other than the Word of God. Sharing the Word all together provides a living and dynamic

commentary in the body on the Word of God—light shining on it by each one who speaks to the benefit of us all seeing its truth more clearly.

As the apostles' doctrine and fellowship relates to saints ministering the Word to one another for edification, the Breaking of Bread portion of the meeting focuses the saints on Christ-centered worship of God. In the former, each member is the recipient, but in worship God is the recipient. The Breaking of Bread is also called the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, The Remembrance Meal, or Communion. It was initiated by our Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed during the Passover feast (Matt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-26; Lk 22:7-34). It was practiced by the early church (Acts 2:42; 20:7) and taught in the Epistles: We are to keep the Feast to remember our Lord Jesus [1 Cor 11:24-25 (We have the weakness of forgetfulness as Israel did—part of the human condition obviously—see Mal 1:2a)]. We are also to keep the feast because it is a communion with the saints and a proclamation of our Lord's death and resurrection until He returns. No form or frequency is commanded, but the concern is rather on one's focus (1 Cor 11:27-31). The

pattern of the early church is to observe it daily to weekly (Acts 2:42; 20:7). As the New Testament priesthood, the church is to worship God in this World (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The Lord's Supper is a time of remembrance of God in flesh (symbolized by the bread) shedding His blood (the cup) to die for us (sinful man, rebellious and hostile toward Him). This is cause for worship more so than any other motivation, as it is with the heavenly beings who gather to Jesus as the Lamb Who was slain but Who is now highly exalted in heaven. They marvel in awe-filled worship at the fact that God has taken on flesh to shed His own blood for a fallen creation—such power and infinite wisdom manifest in such love. This was a mystery to the angels before the cross. If they marvel in awe-filled worship, how much more should we as the recipients of His Person and work to the salvation of our souls? (Rev 4:8-9; 5:9-14). As you can see, to behold (remember) the Lamb is to worship Him. Nothing else could be the result for the one who has seen Him for Who He is and is content to remain with Him because in Him is the true life which answers to the human condition (John 6:68-69). God has purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). Without His shed blood there would be no church, no one saved from sin, and certainly no Sunday morning meeting. Therefore, our remembrance of the Lamb Who was slain is vital to, the basis of, and that which inspires our worship. As mentioned, no form is given in Scripture for the Breaking of Bread, but we see in general from 1 Corinthians 14 (esp. verse 23 and 26) that the early church had meetings open to spontaneous and multiple participation from the saints gathered. The Corinthian church was being corrected in chapter 14 for allowing open participation to turn into

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disorder. The Scriptural ideal is *open but orderly* so that the Holy Spirit can lead prepared saints to pray, speak, and worship as He sees fit. Even without this example we know that the format must encourage, not hinder, all saints to fulfill their priestly duty of worship ("the sacrifice of praise to God"—Hebrews 13:15). Therefore, the format must allow for all to participate in spontaneous (Spirit led) Christ-centered worship of God if the great truths concerning the church are to be accurately reflected. When we think of worship, singing of course comes to mind. However, worship in the meeting can be anything that focuses gathered saints on the Person and Work of God. This is our single focus of worship. Praise comes from contemplating Him. It may be the suggestion of a hymn with or without a comment for everyone to sing, a prayer of adoration and exaltation of the character of God as mentioned earlier, a word of praise, a Scripture reading with or without comment, the giving of thanks after the bread and cup are passed out for God in flesh shedding His blood, or a teaching that unfolds and exalts the Person and Work of Christ to those assembled. Clearly, worship involves much more than just singing. It is "the overflow of a grateful heart under a sense of Divine favor", "the outpouring of a soul in the presence of God", "the occupation of the heart, not with needs, or even with blessings, but with God Himself," and "the ascription of worth to the One Who is worthy." Since he is our object of worship, our speaking and singing at this time should describe His character (Holy, Just, loving, etc.) or His work (Creator, Guide, Sustainer), especially His work of redemption. The worshipper that the Father seeks fulfills the highest of all acts—he glorifies God.

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