

# **WORSHIP FREELY**



**Discovering One Another  
Outside Institutional Assembliology**

**DICKSON**

# Worship Freely

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## PREFACE

We are now living in times when the foul play of Satan has been unleashed on society in the form of a pandemic. This book was first published in 2010 when there was no pandemic. But in 2020/2021 the world population was jolted by a dreaded pandemic. This pandemic encouraged the health departments of many governments to shutdown all assemblies within their nations for a brief period, including religious assemblies. The reason for the shut down was for obvious health reasons, but we see some other good in the matter.

Regardless of the trials of the times, we as Christians must always be reminded of the encouraging words of Romans 8:28: *“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God.”* Though the pandemic brought sadness to many households around the world, we must look for the good that would be revealed by such adversity. And when we see this good, it is then that we must as Christians do as James instructed: *“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials”* (Js 1:2).

The good that we see in the dire straits of a pandemic is that the shutting down of church assemblies has inspired many Christians throughout the world to take another look at the purpose of the assembled worship of the saints, specifically how the saints behave themselves in their worship. Once again we open our Bibles in order to discover what the early Christians did when they came together. Of the many things that we have started to rethink is the fact that the traditional assembly of churches today is vastly different from the assemblies of the first century church.

The assembly of the church for worship is thus under scrutiny. In our reevaluation of worship, some have discovered that the influence of the religious groups in our communities have to a great extent influenced the manner by which the saints collectively worship. Unfortunately, when a man-made religious pattern of behavior becomes common within the religious community, the influence of that pattern becomes so strong that everyone in the community seeks to conform to it in order to draw attending members to their particular assembly. But when all assemblies are banned, then we are driven to search the Scriptures. When we search, we often discover that we may have been influenced more by the religious community, than the word of God.

This book is about challenging traditional worship patterns that are in many ways foreign to the word of God. It is about challenging the reader to the point that he or she must look to the word of God in order to discover the freedom that Christians have in expressing their worship. The reason for this needed investigation is that if we discover something in our worship that is either contrary, or at least eschew from the worship that God seeks, then the pandemic will have accomplished a great deal of good in realigning our worship.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult changes that one might have to make in life are changes in reference to worship. If one has possibly come to the conclusion that he has created a vain worship after his own desires, and especially, the traditions of one's religious fathers, then it is very difficult to make changes. In our restoration to simple Christianity, we are calling on people to return to the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith, especially in those matters that pertain to our worship. If this restoration calls on one to make changes in reference to worship, then certainly changes must be made. If one is sincere, and seeking to live according to the word of God, then such changes are easy and rewarding. It is easy for the sincere to confess the misguided worship of the past, and then restore themselves to a closer worshipful walk with God.

The traditionalist, however, finds it very difficult to make changes, even though he or she may realize that his or her present religiosity is the product of a misguided religious heritage. Since the validation of the religiosity of many is based on the traditions of the fathers, then one often finds it difficult to make a change to that which he or she has learned in the word of God. In order not to confront the need for change, therefore, many religious people have simply given up a study of the word of God, lest they discover some area where they have gone astray in their relationship with God.

But for the sincere and dedicated, it is the task of their walk with God to challenge continually their thinking and behavior with the word of God. In fact, we discover the disciples of Jesus by their willingness to turn away from the wayward ways of the past in order to comply with the wishes of their Master.

In order to guard ourselves against apostasy, we are students of the apostasy of Israel that is recorded in the Old Testament. The examples of apostasy of the Israelites are a warning to all who would seek to create religiosity after their own desires. God formerly said of the apostates of Israel,

*I hate, I despise your feast days. And I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments (Am 5:21-23).*

The above judgment from God concerning the spiritual and moral state of the Israelites in apostasy should be our motivation to study the subject of apostate worship. Israel was obediently and legally keeping the feast days according to the Sinai law. But God despised their obedience. They continued in their sacred sacrifices, but their hearts were far from God. They continued in the rituals of their sacrifices according to the law that was given by God, but God would not accept the sacrifices because of their wayward hearts. They had no law for the stringed instruments. That was David's invention (Am 6:5). Nevertheless, God turned away from their songs for the same reason He despised all their other religious inventions. They conducted their legal religiosity with self-righteous hearts. Therefore, in order to repent, they needed to stop seeking evil and start seeking good (Am 5:14,15).

Amos' message is a relevant warning to all of us today. A form of "Christianity" has evolved throughout the years that in many ways is based on the self-righteous religiosity of those whom Jesus confronted during His ministry. This seems to be the curse of faith in this century. People legally perform the rites of their respective religious faith, but often they are as the Jewish religious leaders about whom Jesus spoke in the following indictment:

*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs that indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Mt 23:27,28).*

The subject of Jesus' indictment in His day was nothing new. Throughout history there have always been those who ceremonially

performed their religiosity, but inwardly the adherents were filled with the bones of mediocrity, traditionalism, and a host of other attitudes and practices that lead people away from God and His word.

**Institutional worship with a self-righteous heart is despised by God.**

Once an apostasy has occurred, as in Israel, the leaders themselves, as it was in the days of our Lord, are the problem. But we would be as Amos. There is a problem in Christendom today to which we seek to alert the worldwide body of those who believe in Jesus to be the Son of God. We encourage repentance if we find within ourselves any of the self-righteous behavior about which Amos spoke, or the attitudes of the “whitewashed tombs” Jesus condemned during His earthly ministry. In the following words, the Holy Spirit revealed a fearful warning concerning all those who would seek to perform their religiosity before God, and at the same time have little respect for the word of God.

*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved. For I testify of them that they have a [religious] zeal for God, but not according to knowledge [of the word of God]. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness [through religious performances], have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:1-3).*

## Chapter 1 LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Paul wrote that “*the doers of the law will be justified*” (Rm 2:13). James added, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). We live in a time wherein many in the religious world are not known for being doers of the word of God. There are too many people who claim to believe the Bible, want to do what it says, but the heritage of their religiosity is too strong for them to turn to simple obedience of what God directs through His word. We have had studies with hundreds of people who say they believe the Bible, but

when it comes to doing what the Bible says, the intimidation of their peers and past are often too strong for them to initiate repentance to what they learn from the Bible. This is a problem with those who have turned away from a Bible-directed way of life to a religion they have either inherited from their fathers or created after their own desires. This was the problem with Israel as they led themselves away from God (Hs 4:6). Nevertheless, we must be challenged to consider where we are. And if repentance is needed to turn back to the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith, then we need to make the turn.

### A. Challenging religious assemblies:

When one turns from the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith, then his or her religiosity usually turns to religious behavior that is orchestrated in a manner by which assemblies for worship are used to either identify or validate one's religiosity, or both. We would challenge this foundation upon which faith should be built.

Our objection to the validation of one's faith by the performance of some assembly involves a challenge of those who are just short of cutting their wrists in religious assemblies as the self-righteous religious leaders during Elijah's contest with them on Mount Carmel (See 1 Kg 18:16-46). Elijah mocked such behavior. We would do the same in reference to the extreme measures to which some today have digressed in their assembly behavior.

**Assemblies must reflect sobriety and self-control.**

In these times, assemblies have often gone from the small and solemn home fellowships in the first century to hysterical chaos that is patterned after the worshippers of Diana who hysterically cried out in a worship house for two hours, "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*" (At 19:34).

We must question why people of faith have digressed from the quiet and ordered house assemblies of the first century to the theatrical performances of chaos and madness in church houses around the world. Since the arrival in these days of a pandemic, it seems that those who found "religion" in the hysterical atmosphere of a large assembly, have



now discovered the simple worship of a house assembly. In many cases, however there are individuals who believe that they are not worshipping God now because they cannot perform in the theater of a church house.

There is an example in the New Testament of how assemblies can digress into emotional, self-righteous chaos. The Corinthians had digressed to a point of madness in their regional biannual assembly during the Isthmian Games. They had digressed into confusion to the point that Paul stated that if the unbelievers came into their assembly, they would consider those who were assembled together to be mad (1 Co 14:23).

Since the assembly in the context of the Corinthian letter was the occasional gathering of all the disciples in the province of Achaia to some location in or near Corinth, this assembly represented many dysfunctional points in the Corinthians' relationships with one another, and subsequently, their relationship with God.

By studying Paul's instructions in order to correct their dysfunctions, every Christian must conclude that the assemblies of Christians should reflect the sobriety and self-control that is befitting of those who are directed by the word of God. Assemblies should never be the opportunity of the members to either compete or express pseudo-religiosity, which things some among the Achaian disciples were guilty. In order to correct their dysfunctional assemblies, Paul instructed, "*Let all things be done properly and in order*" (1 Co 14:40).

## **B. Challenging a "whatever" generation:**

When we come forward two thousand years from Corinth to the latter part of the twentieth century, there has arisen in society a generation of people whose culture could be identified with the word "whatever." Because of their resistance to the confrontational generation of their fathers who often argued over inconsequential opinions, this "whatever" generation simply concluded that whatever was right for the individual was right for all. This thinking has moved a generation of people into religions that condone whatever.

The "whatever" generation now leads the vast majority of the "mod-



ern-church generation,” and thus whatever religious faith one may profess is validated by whatever one believes. Though there are some favorable aspects about this generation in helping us to avoid nonsense debates over things that are just not necessary to argue, especially tradition for which there is no foundation in the Bible, the world view of the “whatever” generation is in some ways directly opposed to a faith that is based on the authority of the Bible. Actually, there are some aspects of the “whatever” world view that hinder any attempt to validate one’s faith with Bible authority. The world view of the “whatever” generation is basically against any final standard of moral authority.

**Man does not have the right to worship God in whatever manner he so desires.**

The “whatever” generation has now produced “whatever” churches that seem to identify Christianity as a people who are simply spiritual, but are not motivated and directed because of any beliefs or moral standards that may originate from the word of God. The “whatever” churches are stirred into action, not because they are moved by their knowledge of the gospel that is reported in the Bible, but because of their “spiritual humanism” to meet the needs of their fellow man in a benevolent context. Subsequently, a self-sanctifying spirit of self-righteousness has taken the place of a gospel-motivated life.

### **C. Delving into challenging thoughts:**

If one is not a diligent student of the sober and self-controlled discipleship that is defined in the New Testament, then what will be said in the following discussion will probably be somewhat irritating, if not rejected. Those areas into which we must delve will be disturbing to some because this subject of discussion is directed to the very core of our faith. Inherent in the discussion is a challenge to what people believe and do in their religious behavior, particularly when they come together into some religious assembly.

But all of us must be challenged concerning our religiosity. We must be challenged concerning our beliefs, and then, we must be challenged concerning how we carry out those beliefs in our behavior.

Therefore, we must continually accept the challenge of our beliefs and behavior in our relationship with God. If we do not continually challenge ourselves with the word of God, then we will follow Israel into apostasy. We do not forget Paul's exhortation in Romans 15:4: "*For whatever things were written before [in the Old Testament] were written for our learning, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope.*"

We constantly challenge ourselves with the Scriptures in order to validate who we are in our relationship with God and one another. And since people too often define their faith by their assemblies, we must challenge ourselves concerning this supposed foundation of our faith.

#### **D. Challenging traditions:**

We also want to challenge those who are the products of traditional religions. The problem with traditional religion is that the heritage of such religions often takes the place of the word of God. What our father and mother believed and taught often becomes greater than what our heavenly Father teaches and has revealed through Jesus, which knowledge comes only through the word of God.

Most heritage-driven people, therefore, are afraid to study their Bibles simply because they might discover that the spiritual heritage that was handed down to them by their forefathers erred in some form or fashion. The desire to honor their forefathers is often much greater than their desire to search the word of God. This was the problem with the apostate Israel that existed during the ministry of Jesus. Jesus said of that generation, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9).

• **Challenging heritages:** When any believer is studying the subject of restoring New Testament Christianity, one's spiritual heritage should always be set aside as a final authority in our faith. The problem is that heritage will often not allow us to be totally objective in our search of the Scriptures for that which is often so simple. Whenever there is a conflict between Scripture and heritage, **heritage must al-**

**ways give way to Scripture.** If we are not willing to question, or possibly sacrifice our heritage for the instructions of the word of God, then we are hopelessly challenged in our quest to discover the simplicity of New Testament Christianity.

**Heritage must always give way to truth.**

- **Challenging beliefs:** When our eternal destiny is at stake, nothing should sway us from investigating the word of the One before whom all of us must eventually stand in judgment. It is imperative, therefore, that we allow ourselves to be challenged continually concerning our beliefs and our religious heritages. But above all, we must be obsessed with our study of the Bible in order to stay as close as possible to the One with whom we seek to spend eternity. This was certainly the sentiment behind Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15: "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

- **Challenging to repent:** We must continually alert ourselves concerning being led astray from the word of God. We must continually remind ourselves of how wayward religiosity has been played out in the assemblies of those who have strayed from the direction of the word of God. We must awaken those who sincerely seek to be obedient to the will of God, but have traditionally been led astray to an institutional religiosity that is foreign to the pages of the Bible. We must stand and speak as Peter instructed this wayward generation of religionists who had been carried away by their own religious heritage: "*Therefore, repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*" (At 3:19).

## **E. Focusing on our love:**

Now one final word before we delve into a very sensitive area of religious culture. The assembly of the saints is a privilege. It is an opportunity for worshipful people to come together in order to collectively direct their attention on God in worship, and not on themselves.

**Loving disciples naturally assemble together.**

Assembly is the natural result of the disciples of Jesus who love one another, and thus, out of their love, fall down in worship of the One who first loved them (1 Jn 4:19). Forsaking the opportunity to come together with other disciples in assembly manifests a lack of love for others and for God (See Hb 10:24,25). By forsaking the assembly of just two or three others, one cheats himself of an opportunity to worship God with those who are like-minded. If one would claim to be a Christian, therefore, he or she will seek out other Christians with whom to meet for mutual encouragement and worship.

As we study through the following chapters we must not be diverted into thinking that the disciples must not come together in some form or fashion for mutual encouragement and worship. What we are discussing is the erroneous conclusion that an organized assembly is the validation of our faith, or definition of the church. In the minds of some, unfortunately the assembly has actually become an entertainment session for personal aggrandizement on the part of the main performers in the assembly. Supposed worship assemblies have subsequently become rock concerts or “healing” sessions, void of worship, and with little concern for one’s fellow brother or sister. In such cases, religious assemblies have become narcissistic opportunities to self-sanctify oneself before God. In some cases, religious assemblies have often become social gatherings where attendees come to see what they can get, not what they can give in worship of God. To a great extent, therefore, many religious assemblies that are considered worship assemblies are actually weekly events in the lives of those who are looking for an escape from the hardships of their own difficult lives.

**Assemblies for worship must not be hijacked for oneself.**

One can never be against the assemblies of Christians for worship. What Christians should stand against are assemblies with religious people who have strayed from the word of God. If one is not cautious about this matter, then he or she might end up in an assembly of some radical cult. Or, he may have been hijacked by a wayward and false identity of the church. Therefore, we must be awakened to a restoration in worship of God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).

We must keep in mind that every assembly of Christians need not be an assembly for worship. Christians assemble to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). They assemble to discuss doctrinal matters (At 15). They assemble for mutual Bible study (2 Tm 2:15; 4:13). They assemble to discuss the needs of widows (At 6:1-7). Sometimes Christians assemble to be exhorted by the teaching of others through song (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). Not every assembly of Christians, therefore, is an assembly for worship. However, when Christians designate an assembly specifically to bring individual worshipers together for worship, the assembly must be for worship, and not an opportunity for the personal aggrandizement of any one or two individuals during the assembly. 1 Corinthians 14:26 indicates that every attendee of an assembly must have the opportunity to share something in the assembly.

**God is the only audience in an assembly that is designated for collective worship.** If any individual, or group of individuals, make those who attend an assembly to be the audience, then the assembly ceases to be an assembly for worship.

## Chapter 2 SO HERE WE ARE

After working for more than fifty years with Christians throughout the world, one thing seems to constantly plague the saints. Because there has been a general apostasy away from gospel-driven behavior among many people, members of the body have become, in some cases, obsessed with issues that have no bearing on the actual function of the body of Christ. Many have forgotten that the church is composed of a gospel-driven people. However, it seems that the motivation of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and kingdom reign of Jesus plays only a small part in the religious behavior of many. In some groups, focus is more on doctrinal purity, than grace-motivated obedience (See 2 Co 4:15).

**Legal ritualism  
necessitates  
revival.**

This is an unfortunate state of faith, but one that seems to prevail

throughout the world. In fact, some have fallen into the quagmire of a legal religiosity to the point that the ceremonial function of one's unique religion is more important than gospel-motivated living.

### **A. Misguided focus on ceremonial legalism:**

Many years ago we showed up at a small assembly of disciples in order to begin a week-long series of studies. Before starting the meeting, some of the members approached us with an issue that was causing some problems. The discord that was prevailing among this small group of disciples was that one elderly brother contended that a prayer should be said after the contribution was taken on Sunday morning. Others disagreed, saying that there was no Bible scripture that stated when a prayer was to be made in reference to the contribution, or if a prayer should even be offered.

Some discord had been going on over the matter before we came in at the front lines of the debate. The problem was not the issue. The issue had been made the problem. At the time, we dealt only with the issue, reassuring everyone that since the Bible spoke nothing of such a proposed "prayer ritual" in reference to the offering, we should not bind on the church anything in reference to such in reference to the contribution.

Unfortunately, our answer did not focus on the root of the issue. The real problem was the continuation of a particular ritual that the elderly brother strongly believed should continue as a part of a unique Lord's Supper ritual that they had maintained throughout the years. At the time, no one was really concerned about the contentious spirit of the cantankerous brother, but focused only on the ritual of prayer after the Supper. There was more concern over the ritual than over the contentious spirit of the brother. We forgot Paul's instructions on this matter: "*Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition*" (Ti 3:10).

On another occasion, a good brother once prayed for the Lord's Supper, and then served the fruit of the vine first. Before the tray of cups reached the people, however, he realized his supposed mistake. He then recalled the tray, and then "properly" served the bread first, as

he supposed Jesus did during the last supper with His disciples. Little did he know, however, that Jesus at least one time before He distributed the bread among the disciples, He dedicated and served the cup. After the bread, according to Luke's account, He again offered and served the cup (Lk 22:17,19,20). If we read Luke's account of the event, **there is no proper order of serving the bread before the cup.** Luke recorded that the disciples drank, ate, and then drank again. Where and when did we miss this?

Almost all the arguments and divisions among disciples center around things that take place during the assemblies, specifically during the partaking of the Lord's Supper. When some work up enough courage to initiate some "changes in the traditional order," the changes center around things that are done on Sunday morning in the assembly. But at the same time, there is little serious discussion over changes in the life-style of the attendees. We have almost forgotten that assemblies of the saints result first from our gospel response to the incarnate Son of God, not because we seek to legally justify ourselves through obedience to supposed "attendance laws."

## **B. Misguided focus:**

"The preacher ran off with the secretary!" So we were informed by another distraught member of a church that we visited some years ago.

"We had to entrust the women of the church with all the contributions because the preacher kept stealing the money," so said a frustrated member of another church.

You have heard a host of similar problems among those who profess to be leaders, but carry on with ungodly behavior. We wonder why those who have been entrusted with such leadership responsibilities would behave contrary to what we consider to be "faithful behavior." We wonder why there is little change of behavior in the lives of those who are supposed to lead us down the narrow road of spiritual growth.

While understanding that there will always be those who yield to the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life, the answer as to



why we have not affected life change in many is because of the nature of the religion that we have constructed after our own desires. The problem is that we have construct a religiosity that is validated by the legal performance of law, and not motivated by grace. Law-driven people will always stumble over their self-righteousness. On the other hand, gospel-driven people will always fall before the cross in thanksgiving for the grace of God (2 Co 4:15).

We were once emailed an advertisement, or promotion, for a lectureship that was to take place in an area where the church had been burdened with legal religiosity. The theme of the lectureship was on how to enhance the assemblies of the saints in order that the assemblies be more appealing to the attendees. In the announcement of the lectureship, the theme was focused on John 13:34,35.

**Love for one another is the true signal of discipleship.**

In view of all the contention that prevailed among the disciples in the area where the lectureship was to take place, the theme of the meeting seemed to be appropriate. However, must we continually remind ourselves of that which is the very signal of our relationship as disciples with one another? Since we love because we were first loved (1 Jn 4:19), then we do not exist as disciples of Jesus unless we are identified by our love.

Have we developed an assembly-oriented religion that focuses more on our performances on Sunday morning, than on our behavior in relating with our fellow disciples the rest of the week? Some have unfortunately turned the “corporate worship”—wherever that is in the New Testament—into a theatrical performance that appeals to the lusts of the eyes and ears. Some of our assemblies have gone from worship to concert performances! Those who favor mechanical instruments have often hijacked assemblies in order to conduct a Sunday morning concert. In doing so, they have made the people an audience. The once peaceful background music became an on stage performance with a full orchestra of musicians. We know of one church that has even added smoke to the performance in order to enhance the theatrical atmosphere of the Sunday rock concert. It is an assembly that has truly

**Some are known for noise, others for love.**

gone up in smoke. All of these added attractions have distracted us from our focus on the gospel.

Our obsession with the performance of Sunday morning rituals has often redefined the church. Instead of focusing on life changes in response to the gospel, we have started to focus on Sunday morning service performances. However, we must consider where this Sunday morning obsession is in the New Testament? The instructions in the New Testament focuses on life behavior more than assembly performance. If our focus is more on the performance of our Sunday rituals than life behavior, then we will start validating our relationship with God by how we perform on Sunday morning.

Rock concert assemblies are now the identity of many churches. When we moved to a particular suburb of Cape Town several years ago, and subsequently talked to the neighbors about our move into their community, their immediate response, because we were evangelists, was, “You are not going to play loud music here, are you?” Some churches that were meeting in houses in the capital city of Namibia moved the city to speak out against all the noise in houses where believers met for assembly.

Sunday morning noise is how some have started to identify themselves as Christians in their neighborhoods. At least this is how some unbelievers have started to identify Christians. Some believers are known for their noise, and not for their love of one another, and especially, their love of their neighbors. So we are reminded of two thoughts from the word of God: “*But we urge you, brethren, ... that you make it your ambition to lead a quiet life*” (1 Th 4:10,11). “*The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him*” (Hk 2:20).

So here we are, living in a world where the assemblies of the saints have been hijacked by theatrical performers and controlled by assembly teams. We are wondering if there is not something empty, void and vain about our assemblies where we walk away every Sunday with ringing ears and exhausted emotions. Have we constructed a religion that is foreign to the assemblies of the first century? In our efforts to establish a weekly emotional experience to generate worship in the hearts

**Assemblies  
for worship  
cannot be  
narcissistic.**

of those who are not worshipping in their hearts before they arrive at the assembly, have we forgotten that the Lord is in His holy temple, so let all the earth keep silence before Him?

### C. Assembly-oriented religion:

Throughout the centuries, some in their zeal to establish a self-righteous religiosity have developed an assembly-oriented identity. And subsequently, they seek to validate their existence as Christians by a legal pattern of structured assemblies. Since they have validated their existence by either performance of “acts of worship”—again, wherever that is in the New Testament—or, by “concertists” who seek to deafen us by turning up their amplifiers, we have become a religion of “assembliologists.”

Of course there is no such word as “assembliology” in our English dictionaries. But we have a tendency to allow the times to invent new words that explain current phenomenon in the behavior of the religious world. (Our dictionaries would be very small if we did not allow change into new social paradigms to stir the invention of new words that define new social orders.)

And so it is in the religious world today. Because the phenomenon of assembly oriented religiosity developed before and out of the Reformation Movement centuries ago, assembliology may not be something new in the realm of religion. Its roots of formal religiosity were already in the very fabric of Catholicism, and subsequently was to a great extent copied by the Reformists. Because we find it difficult to go back two thousand years to the days of the early church in order to validate many of our assembly rituals we carry on with today, then a study of the assemblies of the modern church is a very challenging study. In fact, if either Peter, or Paul, or one of the early disciples stepped into one of the common concert assemblies of churches today, they would probably think that they had stepped into something very strange. If Paul stepped into such assemblies, he might think that he had actually stepped into another temple

**ASSEMBLIOLOGY:  
Identity of  
the church by  
a Sunday morning  
ritual.**

of Diana, with only a change of the name from Diana to Jesus. People would be crying out, “Great is Jesus of our church.”

Our religious history in the last few centuries has encouraged an interesting obsession in religious behavior that is used to define one’s faithfulness to God, or at least validate one’s relationship with God. In the Protestant world, assembliology was born out of the Reformation Movement. It has intensified in the last half of the last century. It has intensified to the point that it has given birth to an assembly-oriented Christianity that is somewhat void of personal relationships that would enhance one’s relationship with others and God. Those of this new doctrine obsess over the assembly of the saints as the sole identity of the existence of a local church and the faithfulness of the individual believer in his relationship with God and other Christians.

**Faithfulness  
is not determined  
by perfect  
attendance.**

**Assembliology would be the study of our obsessive focus on the ceremonies of the assembly of the saints as the identity of the church.** The assemblologist seeks to validate his Christianity by his performance during an appointed “hour of worship.” In his theology, true assemblies can be determined by ceremonies and rituals of behavior or orders of worship, depending on the assembly of each particular religious group. Assemblologists seek to perfect their assemblies, either for “evangelistic” purposes, or to be in competition with the assemblies of other groups. The departmentalization of their Christianity to a “worship hour” has moved them to perfect the identity of their churchianity by the vibrancy of the assemblies that are locked in between an opening and closing prayer. All is done in order to win or retain the “faithful” in order that one’s church (assembly) grows.

The success of the assemblologist, therefore, is measured by the size of the assembly. We thus judge the success of a particular pastor/preacher by his ability to assemble and retain a great number of spectators who would sit before him and be entertained by the orchestra and lecture. Now that the Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged assemblies around the world, those who took pride in their assemblies are left at home alone, having lost the very foundation upon which they existed.

Before we venture too far into this new identity of church, we

would do well to investigate the refinement of the assembly of Christians that has developed over the last one hundred years. A brief review of the evolution of this religious phenomenon will lay the foundation for our discussions later. We must understand why the identity of the church in these times has strayed from the gospel-obedient lifestyle and participatory fellowship that Jesus mandated in John 13:34,35, which fellowship would identify His people.

### **Chapter 3**

## **ORIGIN OF PROTESTANT ASSEMBLIOLOGY**

We need to go back about 450 years in order to understand where we are today in reference to the behavior of our faith. Sometimes this journey into the past can be quite enlightening, but sometimes painful. Nevertheless, we must take this journey in order to discover where we should go from here.

Our infatuation with the Sunday morning ritual is not something that is recent in church history. Its origins in the Protestant world in many ways dates to the time of the Reformation Movement in the 1500s, a time when people of faith were groaning in order to deliver themselves from centuries of religious oppression under the dominance of Roman Catholicism.

If we dare to make this journey, we will discover why the Sunday morning assembly ritual characterizes almost all Protestant churches throughout the world today. In fact, whatever is performed on Sunday morning often becomes the identity of many protestant churches.

To begin, we must confess that all of us have revealed our theology by our speech and behavior. We speak of the “opening prayer,” “hour of worship” and “closing prayer.” After the opening prayer comes singing, sermon, Supper, singing again, and then, the closing prayer. With a few variations, one can step inside almost any Protestant church throughout the world today and find similar rituals performed during the common Sunday assembly. Some assemblies will be more reserved, others livelier, but all with basically similar rituals will carry on with

some system of assembly. It is the Sunday morning ritual that defines the church for the non-Christian world.

Now the problem is that we cannot find in the New Testament this common Sunday morning system of rituals that are hailed to be the identity of the church. Some groups have sought to piece together with proof texts a codified system of assembly by which they separate themselves from other churches. Basically, however, Protestantism is defined by some Sunday assembly among all religious groups that fall under the label of the Protestant world. But nowhere in the New Testament do we find a system of assembly that is characteristic with most Protestant churches today. In fact, it is quite impossible to identify any ritual of assembly in the New Testament that exists among religious groups today who identify themselves as protestant.

**The Sunday assembly  
is a unique ritual  
of Christianity.**

So where did the Sunday morning ritual originate? If the common ceremonial ritual of assembly of churches today are not found in the New Testament as the identity of the church, then the origin of an organized assembly must be discovered somewhere in the history of Protestant Christendom between the establishment of the church in the first century and Christians today. In reference to the assembly structure of Protestant churches, we must go back at least 450 years, to the days when those who sought to be free were struggling out of the clutches of the Dark Ages and the dominance of the Roman Catholic church.

In his book, *How to Meet in Homes*, Gene Edwards wrote,

But herein is the greatest tragedy for *all* of us . . . domestic or foreign: That pitiful, dead ritual, which supplanted the ekklesia, is *not* an organic expression of the Christian faith. Read that again!

That ritual was invented in Geneva, and even *in* Geneva that ritual was not an organic expression of the faith in that city. It moved from Geneva to Scotland. When it got to Scotland . . . it was foreign to the Scots. When it spread to the English, it did not match the English. When that awful ritual got on a boat and came to America, landed and began cursing us here, it did not fit the American disposition or mentality. This

pitiful ritual is not Albanian and does not fit Albanians! Nor any other ethos on earth. Yet in every nation on earth this very life-killing ritual *defines* our faith. That pernicious ritual is proclaiming to the world: “*This is Christianity.*”<sup>pp 12,13</sup>

In order to understand the reinvention of the Sunday morning ritual by the Protestant reformers, we must go back another one thousand years to a second major player in the Sunday ritual. This would be Pope Gregory the Great. This pope of the Roman Catholic Church, around A.D. 540, prescribed in a written decree how Catholics should conduct themselves during their Sunday assemblies. Basing his instructions on the pagan religious rituals of the times, Gregory outlined how assembly adherents should conduct themselves when they come together into the basilicas for worship.

Gregory’s mandate in reference to how Catholics should meet identifies the origin of the Sunday morning ritual. Since Gregory’s assembly policies were not Bible based, the assembly rituals he imposed on the Catholic Church were invented by man. They were later slightly modified by Protestant reformers as John Calvin, and subsequently became the pattern by which churches of Christendom conducted their assemblies for centuries to come, even to this day.

Throughout the centuries, slight variations of the Sunday morning ritual often denominated religious groups. In general, one can go from one assembly to another in Christendom and expect to experience some system of ceremonial assembly. Some have added unique practices to their assemblies. The Eastern Orthodox Church, for example, imposed on attendees the posture of standing for two hours in the assembly. There are no seats in their assembly halls. Some groups identify themselves by the hysterical emotional nature of their assemblies. Some emotionally lose control, rolling on the ground, and crying out in gibberish. Others have invented orchestras or healing services, and a host of other inventions that are carried out during the assembly in order to encourage the adherents to return. Regardless of either silence or confused commotion during the assembly, there is always a primary speaker, congregational singing, spectators during speaking, and often, a domi-



nant band playing instruments for the entertainment of the audience. And of course, we must not forget the collection plate. Every ceremony is sprinkled with prayers, and sometimes chants. Since Christendom is identified by this assembly ritual that may vary in some aspects from one group to another, it is helpful to understand how such performance oriented assembly was entrenched as the mark of identity of Christianity, and subsequently made the signal by which churches presently validate themselves as “Christian churches.”

For example, John Calvin was a religious leader of Geneva, Switzerland during the sixteenth century. He was a diligent student of the Bible, and subsequently, he marshalled people into strict assembly adherence in order to have an audience before whom he could proclaim his Bible interpretations. Geneva was controlled by what was called the Consistory Committee. All citizens had to conform to the rules of the city, which rules were maintained by this committee of seventeen men (Will Durant, *The Reformation*; Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 1957; pp. 472-484). Five of these men were preachers and twelve were elders. Calvin, of course, was over the seventeen. Essentially, Geneva was a religious police state ruled by religious despots. Calvin was at the top of a controlled religious “military” that subjugated all citizens to the mandates of his assembliology. As a reformer, Calvin actually circled around and became that which he and the other reformers fled in the pope-controlled Catholic Church.

The religious leaders of Geneva ruled by lordship and fear. For example, adultery was punished by burning at the stake. Witchcraft was punished by burning at the stake. And pity the poor soul who missed the assembly. If one missed too many assemblies, he or she was also burned alive. A heretic was anyone who disagreed with Calvin, and thus, heretics were also burned alive. However, there was some mercy. You could get off with the first offense. But if you were caught and tried for the third time, it was death.

**Individuals  
should never  
use assemblies  
of the disciples  
to promote power.**

Since Calvin believed in predestination, his conscience was soothed by the thought that harsh judgments were inflicted on those who had already been predestined by God to eternal hell. He simply began the

burning of those who had themselves revealed that they were predestined to burn in hell anyway. During this religious reign of terror, fourteen women were accused of witchcraft by his seventeen enforcers, and subsequently, all fourteen were consigned to begin their burning in hell in life by being burned at the stake.

Calvin was a religious tyrant who could not cope with disagreement. The environment of religious behavior in Geneva, therefore, was molded around one who enforced his beliefs and practices on the people. Calvin was a great thinker and writer, and thus corralled people into assembly on Sunday in order to impart his dictates. Assembly, therefore, became the occasion where he could expound and impose his studies on an audience, which was mostly illiterate.

Calvin subsequently judged faithful those who did not forsake the assembly. His seventeen enforcers made sure that everyone showed up at the assembly. The speaker-audience assembly thus became a system of assembly that has identified Protestant Christianity ever since. Out of Geneva, Switzerland, therefore, the Sunday ritual was given birth in Protestantism and entrenched in those churches that followed the system of assembly that was imposed on the residents of Geneva.

Because of his enforced system of assembly, Calvin enthroned the position of the clergy. He marshaled the assembly into a silent stupor, and subsequently, under the control of the clergy he drained the organic life out of the adherents. With the heritage of the Catholic Church that prevailed during his time, and the dominant control of Calvin and other reformers, the Protestant world today perpetuates the identity of a church through the performance of a Sunday morning ritual. Though the ritualistic assemblies continue, the number of attendees in the pre-pandemic era is shrinking in many areas of the world. When the Covid-19 pandemic came, millions around the world began to rethink the purpose and function of the Sunday morning ritual.

We must keep in mind that the Sunday ritual was created by man. It is man perpetuated. It is neither first century nor New Testament, simply because the first century disciples met in homes throughout their communities (Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15; Pl 2). We would add that the Sunday morning identity is not natural when we consider the one-

another relationships between Christians that is defined by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (See Jn 13:34,35). And because such is not characteristic of our desires to connect with one another, a wave of change has come among those who seek to restore the organic nature of simple New Testament faith.

**Our desire to be loved moves us to meet with loving people.**

This cultural paradigm shift has already started in the religious world. The ekklesia (church) is arising out of dead ritualism in order to regain its organic life. Even in America, the latest statistics show that over a greater percentage of attending Protestants meet in small fellowships in the homes of the members. One of the reasons for this is because of the Covid pandemic. But this house-assembly behavior started long before the Covid pandemic forced people to stay at home. It was started the latter part of the last century because people of faith began to realized that Christianity was behavior-oriented, not assembly-defined.

As we venture into this restoration of the behavior of our faith, we must keep in mind that the Sunday ritual is not wrong in and of itself. It is not wrong for Christians to come together in assembly, even if those assemblies are in the thousands and follow a prescribed order of performance. These occasional assemblies occurred in the first century (See 1 Co 14:23,26). However, a consistent diet of large single-assembly attendance on Sunday morning week after week, without small group fellowships of the attendees sometime during the week, is a detriment to the relational growth of the individual adherents.

**Small assemblies are the spontaneous result of our search for fellowship.**

A large single-assembly church has proved one thing in this postmodern world. Meeting exclusively on a weekly basis in large assemblies does not produce the desired numerical and spiritual growth that perpetuates the church. The stalemate and shrinking numbers of adherents of the traditional church in the last part of the last century proved this point. What has happened in areas where the church is growing *en masse* is where small assemblies of 25-50 people come together in small fellowships wherein there is personal interactivity.

When a group grows above this number, the level of personal interactivity decreases. The larger the assembly, the less the personal relationship the members have with one another.

Because members have decided that they want friends and fellowship on a personal basis, a shift in focus has come. The Covid pandemic has driven people to discover the joy of small house assemblies. However, this paradigm shift from large to small is not without criticism from those who have promoted and perpetuated the means by which power, purse and pomp can be protected and perpetuated in exclusively large single-assembly churches. Nevertheless, there is a revival, a restoration that is arising out of the ashes of institutional churchianity that gives us hope for the future.

People are weary of sitting in idleness on pews and staring with boredom while listening to the humdrum of professional lecturers. A movement of seekers has arisen who seek relationships. It is a religious culture of people who want to connect, to love and to be loved. There is a revisiting of the organic ekklesia of the first century. People are discovering that there is a vast difference between assembly-oriented churchianity and one-another relationships. They are discovering that assemblies in the New Testament sprang out of one-another relationships. Contact is made in assemblies, but relationships are developed through personal encounters. It is love that should generate assembly, not law.

The ritualistic assemblies of the institutional church are lacking in that they seek to produce relationships through large assemblies, dynamic speakers, and inspiring singing or bands. The New Testament teaches a one-another context of believers, from which assemblies of various flavors naturally originate. There is a vast difference between “one another” Christianity and assembly-oriented churchianity. One focuses on bringing individuals together into an atmosphere of love and good works, while the other simply focuses on the performance of a few and the attendance of the many.

Large single-assembly churches that are surviving have also organized into small house fellowships throughout their communities. They are able to continue with the large Sunday assembly simply because

they have taken their focus off the Sunday morning ritual and focused on evangelistic house fellowships that inspire relationships. Churches that grow become known for their house fellowships, not their legal performance of Sunday morning ceremonies. Of course, those assemblies that have been small from their beginning are not challenged in the area of relationships. These assemblies have always been small and relational. It is only when people start taking pride in large assemblies that relational problems begin to occur among the members.

## Chapter 4 FROM WORSHIP TO CONCERTS

While living in Brazil in the middle of the 1970s, we experienced an interesting religious phenomenon that began in the 1950s in Latin America. The traditional mass that was conducted by the Catholic Church priests was cold, quiet and centered around one man, the priest. However, experiential Pentecostalism captured the imagination of the people. The experiential movement completely changed the nature of most assemblies.

The Pentecostal/charismatic assembly was loud, centered around all the participants, and often resulted in chaotic episodes of frenzied hysteria. The assemblies became opportunities for adherents to find an emotional release from the poverty-stricken lives they had to endure in the midst of the economic depression of those years. One no longer went to an assembly in order to worship, but to find some release from the throes of poverty. The purpose of the assemblies in most religious groups, therefore, began to change. They changed from worship in a subdued silence to an opportunity for experiential escapism. Even some Catholic Churches adopted the charismatic assembly.

**When the people  
become an audience,  
they are no  
longer worshipers.**

Such was the general trend among all those of the charismatic movement in those days that swept across Latin America. This movement was characteristic of the Pentecostal charismatics in all of the

Americas during the latter part of the twentieth century. The movement changed the nature of the assemblies of Christendom when opposing churches began to compete with one another for attendees. Powerful amplifiers were brought into assemblies for the purpose of stirring up the people with sessions of melodious sound that reverberated in church buildings and school halls around the world. The louder the sound, the more assemblies began to grow, as well as the coffers of the collection.

What subsequently developed in the latter part of the twentieth century was the cloning of church assemblies after the secular world of rock concerts. Rock concerts were opportunities for young people to swarm together in order to lose themselves in the music of the performing artists in an environment of thousands of entertained spectators. When this generation of concert lovers showed up at the church house, they expected no less. Noise had been broadcast into their ears as high fidelity music through radio, TV and rock band groups who roamed the country and played before thousands in stadiums.

So it was concluded by a young generation that rock concerts were bigger and better than the normal church assemblies of reverential worshipers. As a result, an atmosphere of musical and emotional ecstasy was brought into church assemblies by another generation who demanded that the assembly of the church should compete with the secular concert of the world. Woodstock developed a culture that defined the assemblies of many churches for the next fifty years. If the church was to “retain their youth,” churches could not be left behind in a rock concert culture. Religious culture had to follow rock concert culture.

**Rock concerts  
focus on people.  
Worship focuses  
on God.**

By the end of the twentieth century, a generation of rock concerts often determined the culture, or atmosphere, of the assemblies of Christendom. This change would go into the twenty-first century, and subsequently has been with us for the last two decades.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the behavior of church adherents in assemblies had changed. Assemblies changed from opportunities to worship with one’s fellow believer in the solitude of a quiet environment, to something that is modeled after the environment

of a rock concert. In order for the preacher to grow his assembly, therefore, he had to buy larger speakers and turn up the amplifiers. The electronic industry followed suit by producing amplifier/speaker systems that were built specifically for church assemblies.

And thus, cold Calvinist and Catholic assemblies of the past have since given way to rock concert events every Sunday morning to which attendees often go to entertain themselves with instrumental performers who produce sound that comes forth from an array of electronic machinery. Assemblies have since drifted away from opportunities to worship God. People now fall on the ground, some foaming at the mouth and writhing in emotional hysteria because the fervor of the event appeals to the emotional appetites of the participants. As the unbelieving world looked on such religious assemblies, their only conclusion was that there is madness among the people (1 Co 14:23).

Now somewhere between the cold, ritualistic formalism that was void of worship in the traditional assembly, and was born out of the Reformation Movement, to the emotionally chaotic assemblies of the experiential charismatic movement—also void of worship—many lost their way. Many lost sight of the purpose for which God exhorted His people to come together.

We must recognize that not everyone expresses his or worship of God in the same way. We must give everyone that freedom. Our worship of God stirs our emotions, but we must in the spirit of self-control, keep our emotions under control. Sometimes emotions have been used to stir worship. And in our efforts to become emotional in reaction to cold assemblies, we have allowed the stirring of our emotions by a concert to be the objective of our assemblies.

**Worship should be a stirring of our emotions because worship originates from within our hearts.**

Some have forgotten that the stirring of our emotions should be caused by the grace of God that was revealed through the incarnate Son (See 2 Co 4:15). This is a gospel stirring, not a mesmerizing response at a concert. In forgetting this vital aspect of true worship, we have lost sight of God by focusing on ourselves. Many assemblies, therefore, have developed into sessions of narcissistic focusing on the lusts of the



ears in order to stir the emotions of the heart that we have passed off as worship. We must never forget that in true worship one never becomes emotionally exhausted to the point of losing control of his or her demeanor. But when one offers subjective emotionalism as worship, he or she often falls to the ground in an out-of-control frenzy.

The preceding assemblies of the religious world have generally been shut down during the Covid pandemic. If religionists cannot participate in such an assembly, they feel that their relationship with God is broken. The experiential assembly of the twentieth century became so entrenched in religion that during times of a pandemic, religionists feel cheated if they cannot come together to participate in experiential assemblies of emotional exhaustion.

We must not be fooled by this urge to lose oneself in an emotional extravaganza. Such is not worship, but a delusion on the part of deceived people who have been hyperventilated by the performances of beating drums and clanging symbols as in the animistic African cults of yesteryear. We wonder what Jesus would do if He were to walk into one of these concert assemblies? On the other hand, we wonder what He would do when His ears stopped ringing after walking out, and He then walked into your closet, finding you on your knees with tears in your eyes, reaching out to the Father with a humble and quiet spirit?

## Chapter 5 MULTIPURPOSE ASSEMBLIES

For purposes of mutual edification and encouragement, Jesus taught that His disciples love one another as He had loved them (Jn 13:34,35). This mandate of Jesus must always be the focus of the Christian's behavioral standard by which His disciples are identified as Christian. If we stray from our identity of loving one another as He loved us, then we will become ships without anchors on a religious sea where we will wander aimlessly among other misguided vessels with the same problem as the religious groups in previous chapters.

**It was not the mission  
of Jesus to establish  
assemblies, but reveal  
the love of God.**

## A. Assemblies of the loved:

It is an axiomatic truth—this is a truth that is self-evident—in reference to all that Jesus lived and taught that His disciples are to be identified by their mutual love for one another. This is the very heart of gospel-obedient people. Therefore, Christians are not identified by the successful performance of a codified ritual of assembly on Sunday morning. Nevertheless, since many churches have determined to be identified by some legal assembly ritual, then we must pursue this matter with great diligence, especially in the context of a pandemic throughout the world where many health departments, for the purpose of slowing down an infectious virus, have shut down thousands of church assemblies. We must do this search also because a structured legal obedience almost always sets aside love, and thus, leads us away from one another. There is certainly a difference between being validated as God’s people by a relational love for one another, as opposed to a legal performance of some selected rituals or ceremonies that are performed on Sunday morning.

**The existence of the church in a city is not identified by legal assembly rituals.**

For example, the religious leaders of Israel at the time of Jesus went so far as to set aside the responsibility of the children to take care of their aged parents in order to enrich themselves. They did so by pronouncing the money “Corban” (“dedicated to God”) that was to be used to support the parents (Mk 7:11). Corban means that the parental support ended up eventually in the bank accounts of the religious leaders. This is how far legal religiosity will take religious people away from love. It was in this context of discussion that Jesus accused the religious leaders, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God [that children take care of their aged parents] so that you may keep your own tradition [of consuming the ‘Corban’ money for your own support]*” (Mk 7:9).

Therefore, we must go on this journey to investigate our somewhat misguided identity of the church of Christ. We must lest we, too, be moved away from the love that identifies us as the true disciples of Jesus. We must continually remind ourselves that love keeps us to-

gether and identifies us as the church, not our coming together in order to validate ourselves as the church by the performance of some Sunday rituals. (If we were to identify ourselves as the church by the legal performance of Sunday morning rituals, then at this time in history during the Covid pandemic in South Africa, the church does not exist.)

Suppose we would ask if the church existed in Timbuktu, Algeria—yes, there is such a city in Africa. If we did not know if there were a church in Timbuktu, then how would we identify the existence of the church in the city? Most people would identify the existence of the church by the performance of certain rituals that were performed in the city of Timbuktu on Sunday morning. Therefore, we might respond to this inquiry that the assembled disciples in Timbuktu performed a system of legal acts of worship, and thus, because they successfully performed these acts, or rituals, they existed as a church.

Now consider this: At the time of our inquiry, this same group of people in Timbuktu might be at war with one another in biting and devouring one another in senseless disputes and arguments over endless genealogies (See 2 Tm 2:24; Ti 3:9-11). Nevertheless, we would answer the inquiry as to whether the church existed in Timbuktu because certain rituals were regularly performed on Sunday morning. Would this be the manner by which Jesus would identify the church in Timbuktu? If this is how we would identify the existence of the church, then we must find in the New Testament where the existence of a church in any city was identified by specific rituals that the disciples successfully performed on Sunday morning, while living contrary to love.

**Sunday ceremonies do not identify the existence of the church.**

Jesus wanted His disciples to be identified by the love that He manifested toward them, not by their performance of certain ceremonies of assembly. We must not forget this very important point. According to His statement in John 13:34,35, it would be by their love for one another that the world would believe that people belong to Him, not by either dynamic assemblies or a ritualistic system of assembly.

Because of their response to the gospel that God loved them through Jesus, the early disciples sought to be with one another. It was in one

another's company that they stirred themselves on to a greater love for one another (1 Th 3:12). In their assemblies, they planned and encouraged one another to maintain good works (Hb 10:24,25). The purpose of the assembly, therefore, was to encourage their love for one another and to motivate good works in their communities and among themselves (Gl 6:1-10). Their assemblies were the result of their "one another" relationships that were built on love. This center of relationship could be accomplished even if only two or three were able to gather together at any one time. They came together because they loved one another. Love was their motive for staying connected, even though they might periodically be hindered from coming into one another's presence. Coming together was the serendipity of their love.

**The early church met in small fellowships in the homes of the members.**

Christian assemblies are identified by how Christians manifest their love for one another because of their love for God. John was right: "*We love because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). Assemblies of Christians, therefore, must be occasions wherein love is encouraged (Hb 10:24,25). For this reason, our assemblies must be participatory, not spectator oriented. There are no audiences in the assemblies of Christians. **Loveless people can assemble as spectators, but loving people are never spectators of one another.** Loving people participate in one another's lives, and thus, the love of the disciples for one another is never confined to Sunday morning, or limited to a Sunday assembly.

## **B. Small relational assemblies:**

In the first century there were assemblies where only two or three were gathered together in His name. On other occasions, there were larger assemblies, assuming that the Christians showed up for evangelistic reasons among the unbelievers who were in the temple courtyard in Jerusalem (At 5:42). But when the disciples came together on a regular basis for mutual edification, and to stir up good works, they met in small house fellowships. There is no evidence in the New Testament where assemblies are defined as the large corporate and concert assemblies that we experience today. This does not mean that large

assemblies of the disciples are wrong. What is questionable is our obsession with large assemblies to the exclusion of one-another assemblies wherein there is mutual participation by all individuals who are present. Such assemblies give everyone an opportunity to express love for one another. Unfortunately, our obsession to “build a large church” (assembly), has marginalized, if not excluded, small assemblies wherein disciples have the opportunity to manifest their love for one another.

**Fellowship is not defined by assembly attendance, but attendance to one another’s needs.**

One might argue that the early Christians did not have the finances or opportunity to regularly have large corporate assemblies that are typical of many churches today. However, there is absolutely no evidence that the modern mega assemblies that are conducted today existed in the first century. As previously stated, this does not mean that the mega super Sundays of today are wrong. However, we should be cautioned about reading the environment of the mega assemblies that occur today into the assemblies of the early church. This is very important because the assemblologists of today want to read their emphasis on assembly-oriented Christianity into the pages of the New Testament. We must always keep in mind that the assemblies of the disciples are an opportunity to participate lovingly in one another’s lives, not to attend the performances of the few.

We must also keep in mind that the early church assembled in the homes of the members. The early church continued in the members’ homes for over three hundred years after the establishment of the church in Acts 2. During the early persecution of the church, some disciples

**The church grows in numbers when members grow in fellowship with one another.**

went into “seclusion assemblies” when the Roman Empire unleashed its fury on those they considered to be insurrectionists against the Empire. No historian rejects the fact that the early church met in the homes of the members. Why the early

Christians met in small fellowships in their homes had more to do with maintaining loving participation in one another’s lives, than conducting a supposedly institutional ritual that identified them as a church.

## C. Assemblies and ritualism:

This brings us to a very important point. **If the assembly of the disciples were to be the focal point of faithfulness and identity of the church, then we wonder why there is no emphasis in the New Testament placed on the disciples' ritualistic performance in assemblies?** Other than a few passages, there is little discussion in the New Testament letters concerning what the early Christians did in their assemblies. Anyone who has a minimal knowledge of the epistles that were written to the early church understands that the focus of every epistle is on the behavioral life-style of the saints, not on how they might have ritualistically performed acts of worship during their assemblies. But it seems that some have reversed this focus. Assemblologists today often stir up contention over what might be erroneously conducted in the assembly, but remain mute concerning the conduct of the unloving behavior of the members after the closing prayer. The fact that this is often the case is evidence to the fact that we have developed a theology of assemblology that is foreign to the Scriptures. Our obsession with the function of our structured assemblies lends us to being quite contentious with one another over any changes in the assembly structure.

**Because the church is not identified by ceremonial assemblies, there is no emphasis in the New Testament on what Christians should do in assembly.**

Our obsession with our assembly rituals has often become an occasion where we manifest our unloving attitudes toward one another. In other words, wrangling about changes in the assembly ritual has actually manifested that some disciples are not identified by that which Jesus said they should be identified, that is, by their love for one another.

## D. One another assemblies:

The epistles are saturated with “one another” statements. But these statements are always in the context of the mutual interactivity of the disciples with one another. This interactivity is not sitting beside one another in an assembly in order to perform according to structured ritu-

als by which we seek to identify ourselves as the church. The Corinthians were exhorted to correct some key dysfunctions of their assembly when they occasionally came together from throughout Achaia (See 1 Co 11,12,14). For the sake of those unbelievers who might come into their assembly, Paul gave some instructions concerning structure that would prevent chaos during their assemblies (1 Co 14:26-40). However, the instructions were given in reference to their consideration of one another, **not in order to solidify the uniqueness of a Sunday morning ritual.**

We must keep in mind that Paul's exhortation concerning the assembly consumes only three chapters of all the New Testament. When considering 1 Corinthians 13—the chapter on love—that is placed in the context of the problems surrounding the Corinthians' assemblies, we would conclude that their dysfunctional relationships outside their assemblies had spilled over into their assemblies. Their assemblies were only the opportunity for their unloving hearts to be manifested. But if they followed the instructions of chapter 13, then all their assembly problems would be solved. In other words, the Corinthians would have had no need for the instructions concerning the structure of their assemblies as stated in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 if they had not digressed from assemblies that were expressions of the loving fellowship they were to have with one another outside their assemblies.

**Contention among members concerning assembly rituals denies the very signal by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified.**

One should be challenged to read every “one another” passage that is in the New Testament. In every “one another” passage, emphasis is not on the assembly, but on the fact that Christians were to maintain a relationship of consideration for one another's needs. For example, the Spirit said, *“Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”* (Ph 2:4). Passages that discuss the assemblies focus on how Christians can enhance their one-another relationships by the opportunity of interactively participating in one another's lives.

**Our assembly is the result of our love, not the result of obeying legalistic rituals.**



Hebrews 10:24,25 speaks of exhorting one another to love and good works. However, we must be careful in reading Hebrews 10:24,25—the favorite passage of assemblologists—lest we miss the point the Hebrew writer was trying to make. This particular text reveals that the assembly of the saints was not for entertainment, nor an opportunity for one person or group of persons to be the sole participants in the assembly. It is not a passage to guarantee that the disciples submit to a legal order of assembly and obedience to codified ceremonies. “One another” in the text does not mean one to the others. No spectator assemblies occurred in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:24,25 is a reference to participatory assemblies wherein adherents have a responsibility to become involved with one another through love and good works. There are no spectator references in Hebrews 10:24,25.

**Hebrews 10:24,25 is not a proof text for spectator assemblies.**

We must keep in mind, however, that it is not wrong for Christians to assemble together in large assemblies to enjoy teaching from the word of God or speaking to one another through song. “*I will declare Your name to My brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You*” (Hb 2:12). We would certainly assume that the assemblies of the early saints varied from one group to another. The Jews certainly did not conduct their assemblies as the Gentiles, and we would assume that in some ways the culture of the people was reflected in the behavior of the disciples in their assemblies.

There were also different assemblies of the early church for different purposes. In reference to 1 Corinthians 14:26 there may have been occasions when no one came with a song, or a teaching, or a language, or a revelation, or an interpretation. At least in reference to there being no one present who had the gift of interpretation, the one with the gift of languages had to keep silent. We would conclude, therefore, that each assembly of the Achaian church may have been different every Sunday, depending on who was present. There was thus no prescribed actions

**Participatory assemblies focus on people, not pomp and power.** of worship that were to take place that would validate their meeting as an official assembly. Another example were the prayer meet-

ings that took place in Jerusalem at the time Peter was in prison. The assemblies that were taking place throughout Jerusalem at the time were prayer assemblies on behalf of Peter (See At 12:12). One thing is certain in reference to these assemblies of the saints that were recorded by the Holy Spirit is that there was no established system of performance that valued that an assembly of the saints was “official.” The saints simply came together to worship on some occasions, to pray on other occasions, or to discuss points of faith as the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15. In other words, it is superfluous to believe that there was an “official” assembly of the saints on Sunday morning, and then other assemblies that were not “official.”

### E. Assembling for teaching:

One of the favorite passages that is commonly used by assemblologists actually emphasizes the opposite of what they assert from the historical context. This is Luke’s historical account of Paul’s visit to Troas that is recorded in Acts 20:7. In this passage one would think that the type of assemblies that were characteristic with churches today would be found in this passage.

The occasion of Luke’s historical statement in Acts 20:7 was Paul’s trip to Jerusalem during his last missionary journey. He passed through Troas. The event of this assembly was recorded by Luke: “*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul **preached** unto them*” (KJV). The *American Standard Version* has a better reading: “*And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul **discoursed** with them.*” The *International King James Version* is even better: “*Paul **had discussions** with them.*” The *World English Bible* reads that Paul “***talked** with them.*”

The Greek word for “preaching” in Acts 20:7 is **not** *kerusso* (to preach), but *dialegeto* (dialogue), to have dialog or discussion. One would think that if the type of assemblies we have today were characteristic of the first century church, then certainly such an environment of assembly would be found in Acts 20:7 on Paul’s last visit to the church in Troas.

The fact that such an assembly as we have today is not found on this occasion, and other occasions of assembly in the New Testament, should alert us to the fact that something may be wrong with our assumption of what supposedly constitutes a valid assembly of the disciples. Have we strayed from the “one another” (interactive) assemblies of the New Testament church? And in our “assembly culture” of today, have we read into the New Testament the performance assemblies that we conduct among ourselves?

Because we cannot read of our assembly culture of today in the New Testament does not mean that the way we conduct assemblies today is wrong. However, it does mean that we should be very cautious about emphasizing the manner by which we assemble. If we assemble in a way that hinders the individual worship of the attendees, then it is time for reform. If our assemblies misdirect the attention of the attendees to focus on themselves, and not on God, then it is time to repent. If all our assemblies are spectator oriented, then we have strayed from the rich relational gatherings that were typical of the early disciples.

## **F. Participatory assemblies:**

The early church customarily had participatory assemblies. By participatory we mean that in some way almost everyone was involved in the assembly. 1 Corinthians 14:26 still says “every one of you has a song ... teaching ... etc.” The Acts 20:7 assembly was a participatory assembly because of the Holy Spirit’s use of the Greek word *dialegeto* (dialogue). Paul did not endlessly lecture during this particular assembly. We might assume that he would have done so since it was his last visit to Troas. But Paul did not prepare and deliver a sermon. The Troas disciples certainly had a great number of questions that had to be answered. Therefore, the occasion demanded dialogue, not lecture. If we would refer to the disciples in Troas, as well as the Corinthian assemblies that Paul corrected with the Corinthian letter, then we could conclude that the early disciples had weekly participatory assemblies, not theatrical performances by

**The “Corinthian Problem” reveals that assemblies should never be used to promote oneself.**

a few participants. Some Corinthians tried to be performers with focus on themselves. But Paul said they were puffed up. He subsequently corrected their puffed up performances by writing the greatest chapter on love in human history (1 Co 13).

The “Corinthian problem” of puffed-up performers using their gifts to exalt themselves in competition with one another evidently did not exist among other churches in the first century. The assemblies of other churches reflected the one another relationships that prevailed among the disciples, which relationships were generated out of a heart of the disciples’ love for one another. The regular assemblies, therefore, were opportunities for the disciples to manifest their love for one another, not an opportunity for performances.

## Chapter 6 LIFE-STYLE CHRISTIANITY

Some Bible students often read the behavior of their modern assemblies into the “one another” relationship passages of the New Testament. This practice could be defined by the Greek word, *eisegesis*, that is, reading our modern-day definition of works and words into the works and words of the Bible. This is probably one of the most violated principles of Bible study that we encounter today, particularly in reference to the subject under discussion.

Two passages that are often misunderstood in the preceding manner are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16:

*“... speaking to **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ep 5:19).*

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing **one another** in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Cl 3:16).*

## A. Singing is a demeanor of gospel living.

It is often assumed that these two passages refer exclusively to an assembly context of the church. Subsequently, it is then assumed that singing is an “act of worship” that validates an assembly as true worship. The result of this unfortunate hermeneutic is to use these two passages as a mandate to add another “act” to a codified ritual that must be performed during the Sunday morning assembly in order to determine if a church exists at a particular location. There are three reasons why neither passage is teaching this assumption in their original context.

**1. No assembly context: Nowhere in the context of either passage is the Sunday assembly mentioned.** It is just not there. Such a time for singing is only assumed by those who read their present religious assembly pattern into the biblical context of each passage. Such is done in order to use the exhortation to sing in these passages to validate the assumption that singing in an assembly of the saints during the “worship hour” on Sunday morning is an “act of worship.”

But when we consider the preceding assumption in the context of both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, we must conclude that Paul was discussing the life-style relationship that must be characteristic of every Christian anytime and anywhere. In the context, exhorting one another through song was one of the manifestations of our relationship with one another.

**Christians  
should sing  
ANYTIME  
and  
ANYWHERE.**

True, singing can take place during the general assembly of the saints on any occasion, but not exclusively during an assembly. Anytime and anywhere Christians are together with one another they can break out in song in order to exhort and teach one another. If there were only two Christians who have come together, then they can still fulfill the mandates that Paul wrote to the Ephesians and Colossians.

**2. Singing everywhere and anytime: The singing that is mentioned in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 does not demand that**

**singing take place during every encounter that Christians have with one another.** Assembly does not mandate singing. This would include the general assembly of Christians on the first day of the week, as well as times when two or three Christians might encounter one another anytime and anywhere. All that is said in the passages is that Christians exhort and teach one another through the medium of vocal singing. Neither the occasion nor the context of the singing are mentioned in reference to when the saints might carry out the exhortations to encourage one another through song.

Now this brings up a very interesting point in reference to assemblies and singing. Is the mandate of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to be carried out on every occasion when Christians come together? And if an assembly does not include singing, is such a valid assembly?

We would have to conclude that Paul did not mean that Christians **must** sing to one another every time they encounter one another. If they encountered one another on the street or in the field, they would not have to break out in song in order to relate with one another. If they encountered one another in a corporate business meeting, they would not have to start singing in the presence of the unbelievers who were present.

So what if Christians encountered one another at 10:00<sup>am</sup> on a Sunday morning? Would they be under a mandate to sing to one another in order to validate their encounter as an “official assembly”? If Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to the daily living of the Christian—and they do—then we must assume that two or three Christians **do not have to break out in song** when they meet one another on Monday morning at 10:00<sup>am</sup>, or while working on the job throughout the week.

**Assemblies  
of Christians  
are not validated  
to be official by the  
legal performance of  
legal acts of worship.**

Now if Christians encounter one another on Sunday morning, the exhortation of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 does not change in meaning or application. The point is that Christians can meet together and not sing, as they can meet together and not study the Bible or pray or take up a contribution. There is thus no mandate in the Scriptures that assumes that worship takes place when certain performances, in-

cluding singing, are acted out. An assembly of the disciples is thus not validated as such when a particular system of rituals is performed. Singing, therefore, is generic in the gospel life of the Christian, not specific in reference to being legally performed in order to validate a Sunday assembly.

**The New Testament does not reveal all that Christians did on Sunday.**

It is natural for Christians to sing when they are together. When they come together on any occasion, it is only natural for them to speak to one another in song as they sing praises to God. While in prison, Paul and Silas behaved in this manner in a Philippian jail (At 16:25). There was no “official assembly” application to their singing in that jail house, neither did their singing validate an “official” assembly because they sang. They were simply praising God while in chains in the darkness of a prison. After the singing, there was no “closing prayer.”

What Paul was discussing in the context of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 was the nature of the behavior of Christians in their relationship with one another and God **at all times**. Paul was not giving a mandate that would become a legal code of identity to determine an “official assembly” of the saints. Christians must exhort one another through song, but they do not have to do so every time they come together.

Is it natural in their behavior to sing when Christians come together? Absolutely! But mutual exhortation through song was never given in the New Testament as an act by which some concept of an “official assembly” of the saints was to be identified or validated. Neither was singing given as a validation that worship takes place. Singing spiritual songs to one another is the result of a gospel-obedient heart, not a manifestation that an assembly must be validated as true because an act of singing has been legally performed.

**3. Mediums of teaching:** Both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 explain that singing is a method of communication by which the saints can edify and teach one another. **When we teach and admonish one another through song, we are not worshiping one another.** Worship, therefore, is not inherent in spiritual songs. Spirit-

**Assembly rituals should never be used to divide disciples.**



tual songs can be used to teach spiritual truths, which they should. But when one is teaching others a spiritual truth through song, he or she is simply doing as the preacher who teaches spiritual truth by communicating truth in the words he speaks from a podium. Therefore, singing is not a signal to proclaim that an “official assembly” of worship is being conducted. Singing is simply a signal of the Christian demeanor of life seven days a week by which truth is proclaimed. Christians can, and should, bring their spirit of singing together in an assembly by which every attendee gathers together to sing praises to God in worship.

## **B. Singing is not a legal act of worship.**

This is a very important point in reference to our study of assembliology. Assembliologists consider singing on Sunday morning to be one of the key points that identifies the church. Some groups have added instrumental bands and orchestras to the vocal singing, and thus throughout the religious world, music, one instrumental and the other acappella, have become an identity mark of what is considered to be a church that has a valid assembly on Sunday. Our point is that in many cases the singing and instrumental performances have taken the purpose for assemblies far beyond worship. Religious groups have moved into rock concert religiosity for the entertainment of the people.

**Legal actions  
cannot produce  
a spirit  
of worship.**

The conclusion to the preceding thoughts is very practical. Suppose we lived in the second century when many Christians had to live and worship in the caves under the city of Rome because they were persecuted as insurrectionists of the Roman Empire. If such a group of Christians were assembled in hiding for purposes of safety, and thus could not sing aloud lest their presence be discovered, did they do wrong by not singing aloud? Should they have broken out in song in order to validate their assemblies as “official”, regardless of being caught and thrown to the lions? Also, if a group of Christians know no songs to sing, are they also wrong when they assemble together and do not sing some song?

Singing may be the natural result of our gospel obedience, but not the identity of our sonship, nor the validation of our worship. Our obedience to the gospel is what identifies us as sons of God. We must keep in mind that God added about three thousand newly gospel-obedient believers to His family on the day of Pentecost before they sang their first song (See At 2:41). We must always keep in mind in this discussion that it is love, not the performance of legal rituals, that defines us as the disciples of Jesus (Jn 13:34,35).

## Chapter 7

### A BRIEF WALK THROUGH HISTORY

Since Luther, Calvin and others during the 1500s ingrained in the minds of people an assembly-oriented religious discipline as the identity of their churches, others followed with their own unique organizational and doctrinal systems to likewise denominate themselves from one another. In the 400 years that followed the Reformation Movement, the uniqueness of many churches was often identified by what took place on Sunday morning. The unique assemblies and doctrines of each group was subsequently identified by a name on the outside of the church house.

**Those who codify  
assembly rituals  
will alienate  
Christians  
from one another.**

In order to promote the identity of each particular religious group, unique rituals, or ceremonies were adopted that identified each denominated group as unique. When one showed up on Sunday morning under the name of one of these denominated groups, he or she could expect what would transpire during the “hour of worship.” How the members behaved themselves throughout the week was often inconsequential.

#### **A. The assembly of restoration churches:**

When restoration movements came forth out of such assembly-oriented religiosity over the next 400 years following Reformation lead-

ers as Luther and Calvin, restorationists likewise called their adherents around a particular name or ritual that was ceremonially performed during the assemblies of their churches. Every group identified itself with a unique flavor of assembly, and then indoctrinated adherents to preserve the movement by preserving unique assembly rituals. If no name was attached to a particular building in which the various assemblies took place, then unique groups could usually be identified by their unique ritual of assembly. Regardless of some variations, however, every Protestant church had basically the same ritual on Sunday morning.

An example of this would be the Restoration Movement that originated out of America in the latter part of the eighteenth century, which actually had its initial origins in Europe. When the nineteenth century Restoration Movement developed in America, one task of the leaders was to establish an identity of the churches of the movement by a unique assembly. Though not intended by the leaders in the early part of the movement, identity by unique assembly ritual eventually became the hallmark of all those assemblies that would be identified with the movement, and thus, considered restored churches.

The movement continued in unity until the Sunday ritual was changed by some with the addition of instrumental music. The change in the ritual divided the movement, and subsequently, gave rise to two different groups, one instrumental and the other acappella. Regardless of the division, the “restored” churches have been propagated throughout the world, and now, both groups of this movement are identified by what happens on Sunday morning, not necessarily by a love factor that exists in the relationship of the disciples for one another during the week. In many cases, the adherents of the two groups manifested a loving relationship with one another during the week, but revealed their division with one another on Sunday morning, meeting in church houses across the street from one another.

In debates with the reformation churches in America, a legal theology of systematic assembly subsequently arose among those churches who considered themselves to have restored the New Testament pattern of worship. Faithful adherence to the fabricated “acts of worship”

became the identity of true restoration churches. True worship was identified by faithful observance to the Lord's Supper, singing, preaching, praying, and contribution on Sunday morning. Some later added teaching, reading Scripture, and instrumental music.

**The more emphasis that is placed on acts of worship, the less emphasis we place on moral acts of behavior.**

These performances were enshrined around the assembly to the point that any group that would be identified as the true church must carry on with some system of legal assembly performance. This legal system of theology was subsequently taught around the world through missionaries who encompassed the earth. The gospel was preached, but tagged on to the gospel was the addition of a legal performance of assembly rituals.

What eventually played itself out in the history of this restoration movement was that the acts became the identity as to whether one was a member of the universal church. If he were not identified with a "restoration church," then he as an individual was a member of some denomination. In other words, if one did not assemble with those who were performing the approved acts of worship, then he or she was not a Christian, and thus not saved. The Sunday ritual, therefore, superseded obedience to the gospel as the validation of one's sonship. If one did not participate in the ritual that was sanctioned as "true worship," then he or she could not be one who was in a covenant relationship with God. Obedience to the gospel by immersion for remission of sins, plus the legal ritual of the Sunday assembly, therefore, determined if one were saved (See At 15:1; Gl 1:6-9).

## **B. Debate ensued**

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, and first of the twentieth century, a debate raged among restorationist churches concerning acts or practices that took place during the assembly on Sunday morning. Because of the debate, "acts of worship" were legally enshrined, and eventually, the "acts" became the identity of an "official" Sunday assembly that identified the true church. After one went through

the five steps of conversion (hear, believe, repent, confess, and baptism), his or her faithfulness was determined by a legal compliance to the acts of worship during the assembly ritual of the saints on Sunday morning.

We would not argue with the simplistic nature of this system of theology. However, the focus of the five acts of worship was on a system of self-justification through legal obedience, not on obedience to the gospel of Jesus' atoning sacrifice and resurrection. Legal performance of the acts became the legal performances of "true worship" on Sunday morning. In this way, the "five acts of worship" inherently became a system of legal self-justification. If one did not show up to be self-justified in obedience to performance of the "five acts," then he or she was considered unfaithful.

**Obsession on identity by law, overlooks identity by love.**

The obsessive focus on performing the acts of worship elevated the acts to be the legal identity of the church, regardless of whether those who performed the acts were worshiping in their hearts during the time of their performance in the assembly. They may have simply carried out the ceremonies of "the service" as preprogrammed religious robots.

In such a state of mechanical function, a Christian was subsequently identified by his legal obedience to the acts. Such a theology opened wide the door for Satan to divide the disciples over trivial matters that took place in reference to the acts during the Sunday assembly. If someone wanted to change the programming of the robots, it was assumed that he was seeking to program in a malware virus. Debates subsequently raged. If there were any flaws in the performances of any act of worship, or if the robots did not wear ties during their robotic performances, then there was no self-justification. One's worship was judged vain because the acts were not legally performed in the manner by which each particular church had customarily performed any of the acts.

### **C. The birth of assembliology:**

One can now determine if he is an assembliologist by his view of what takes place on Sunday morning. He can do so by determining if

he believes that he is self-justified by a legal compliance to defined performances during the “hour of worship.” If one concludes that worship is legally defined by the performance of some “laws of worship,” then he would be responsible for identifying those laws of worship in the New Testament. Once defined, then obeying them was a means of self-justification and church identity. Of necessity, the conclusion would be that any church that did not perform the “laws of worship” on Sunday morning would not be the church the Jesus built. In other words, the assemblologist who legally defines his assembly by legal codes of performance has denominated himself from those he accuses to be denominational because they do not adhere to his assumed “laws of worship.”

**Assemblologists define faithfulness by adherence to laws of worship.**

Because assemblologists obsess over legal obedience to supposed laws of worship, they can never understand why the one who took up the collection on Sunday morning would later steal it for his own benefit. Assemblologists could never understand why the preacher would commit adultery, while faithfully preaching ceremonial acts of worship during the “worship hour” in order to confirm that he was preaching for the true church. In the obsession of some to maintain a codified definition of worship as the identity of the church, such theologians have had a difficult time understanding why those who legally kept the codes so precisely would behave so imperfectly.

The error of the theology of assembliology was to think that the legal performance of rituals of “worship” was the manifestation of a changed life that sought to worship God in truth. In thinking that the saints could legally perform their worship through singing, prayer, offerings, listening to preaching, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper, some were led to trusting in their performances, rather than the effect of the gospel on their hearts. The performance of the “acts” gave the “worshippers” a sense of self-justification, and thus they went on their way after the “closing prayer” with the same ungodly attitudes and behavior they had prior to their performance. The error of the theology of assembliology is in the fact that such leads to a religion of self-righteousness. And the self-righteous always conclude that they have sanc-

tified themselves through their perfect performance of law.

[To be honest, we must leave preaching out of this orchestrated system of self-justifying worship because the preaching is often carried out by only one person during an assembly. Add to this the fact that preaching, according to the use of the word *kerusso* (preach) in the New Testament, took place in reference primarily to preaching the subject of the gospel to unbelievers. Though the gospel can be continually taught to believers in order that they understand all aspects of the gospel journey of Jesus into and out of this world. However, through the ministry of preaching gospel is announced as good news to unbelievers. In reference to the disciples, teachers (prophets in the New Testament) instructed the people in all aspects of the gospel (See Rm 1:15). A search in a Bible concordance reveals that the Greek word *kerusso* is used in reference to the announcement of news, and in reference to the good news (gospel), the announcement of the gospel is primarily to the lost. The church is to send out the preachers as evangelists in order that they preach the gospel to the lost (Rm 10:14,15). The teachers stay home in order to teach the gospel to the senders.]

**Preachers announce  
the gospel to the lost.  
Teachers teach  
the word to the saved.**

#### **D. Self-righteous churchianity versus gospel-relational Christianity:**

Legal adherence to codified worship worked well until the latter part of the twentieth century. As a baby-boomer generation grew older, those of this generation began to conclude that obedience to legal-oriented assemblies placed a ceiling on spiritual growth. The adherents performed all the legalities of the acts of worship, but walked away with a sense of spiritual unfulfillment after the “closing prayer.” The baby-boomer generation enjoyed the sages from the stages, but the generation of their children was more relational-oriented. When this generation show up at the traditional assemblies, they are not satisfied with the formalistic ritual-keeping that takes place between an opening and closing prayer.



Charismatic movements that began in the early 1900s, subsequently produced exciting assemblies that appealed to a new generation of experiential worshipers. Traditional churchgoers flocked to these charismatic assemblies *en masse* because they had grown weary of the stiffness of the traditionally structured assemblies of their fathers. However, as with both ritualistic and traditional assemblies, exhausted adherents in charismatic assemblies began to also wander away from these assemblies in search of relationships with fellow adherents. After a colorful assembly, even the exhausted experiential worshiper remained lonely because he or she had no relationship with his or her fellow cheerleaders during an exhilarating assembly.

Those assemblologists who had a list of scriptures below every point on an “act of worship” outline also began to wonder, and then wander. This migration from legalistic, and often self-righteous “worship,” struck fear in the hearts of a generation of leaders who were nurtured on a self-justifying performance of acts in order to identify the church to be “biblical.” As the X-generation, postmodern generation, and the 9-11 generation began to search for relational churches, they wandered from the boredom of ritualistic assemblies in order to find something that was more exciting and fulfilling. People yearned for a hug, instead of just the weekly hallelujah.

**One of the most  
lonely places to be  
is in the midst  
of a large assembly.**

The migration away from assembly-oriented churchianity gave further rise to the intensity of our focus on our assemblies. Assemblologists stepped up their defense of legalized assemblies in order to diminish the fallout. Many went into a competitive mode in order to attract adherents from competing assemblies. This gave rise to pulpit professionals, assembly leaders, digitally organized and electronic assemblies, and finally, to instrumentalists who could compete with any rock concert, and especially the church across the street. Even electronic engineers were hired to perfect the worship performance in order to develop a Hollywood production on Sunday morning. All such developments revealed the last groans of an assembly-oriented churchianity with which millions had become disenchanted. The failure of

assembly-oriented churchianity to produce the love by which Jesus' disciples were to be known, started to make itself very evident as history turned a new page into the twenty-first century.

### **E. In search of love:**

What is natural about the human being is that we seek to be loved and to love. The human spirit seeks love far more than a hysterical experience, or dynamically well-performed and engineered theatrical assemblies. In fact, 450 years of assembliology in the Protestant religious world has proved one thing. Codified and ritual self-righteous assemblies do not develop loving relationships between the saints. As assemblologists sought to preserve their identity through their assemblies, and hang on to their adherents by orchestrating a dynamic environment on Sunday morning, love-starved attendees continued to walk out the back door in search of a hug.

Where individuals had formerly gone to escape loneliness—the assembly of the saints—was where they were the most lonely, that is, in the large church assembly participating only as a spectator and crying out “Jesus, Jesus” in order to spur on the stage performers. Instead of being a participant in their faith throughout the week, they were submitted to being an audience on Sunday morning. No matter how well the pulpit professionals performed, the exodus continued by the lonely from the lonely assemblies. Widows still went home alone. No matter how systematically the worship leader perfected the theatrical performance of the assembly, love-famished people headed out in search of a well of love from which they could drink and satisfy their thirst for someone who cared for them.

**Legal obedience  
to laws of worship  
is not inherently  
conductive to  
spiritual growth.**

In order to stop this exodus, many churches brought in “vocal puppeteers.” These were those who seized a microphone, and through the aid of amplifiers and speakers, sought to chant the attendees into a state of emotional euphoria by pulling on their heart strings. The assembly thus became a place for emotional release from a desperate world in

which the attendees lived, not a place where worship is poured out from hearts that sought to worship God in thanksgiving for His grace through Jesus.

Vocal puppeteers can cheer lead the people into emotional expressions of hysteria, but after the emotional exhaustion, the attendees still leave the assembly in order to return to their lonely lives. And more critically, they return home alone without having learned any truth from a speaker who himself knows no Bible. The problem comes when emotionally-based assemblies generate emotionally identified churches. Learning to self-justify oneself on the foundation of one's emotions always leads to irrationality. Experiential (emotional-oriented) churches eventually suppress the truth. As a result, such churches promote religion that is void of Bible study. They are such because emotionality evades being questioned by the truth of the word of God. What we witness today throughout the world are churches that promote religion, not truth, for Bible study has long left the sanctuary where adherents assembled.

**Obsession with emotionality promotes irrationality.**

In order to boost emotionality, instrumental concerts hijacked the assembly of worshipers in order to at least present an ear-splitting performance before religionists who were muted in their efforts to teach and admonish one another in song. The attendees could no longer speak to one another because their speaking was drowned out by the decibels of instrumentalists and their music machines, whose noise was amplified many times over by gigantic speakers. But regardless of all the clanging and plucking, attendees left with ringing ears in search of a quiet relational worship of their Father with others of a kindred spirit. Turning up the amplifiers turned them away. It may be that God shut down most of the experiential church assemblies throughout the world with the Covid-19 pandemic in order to teach this lesson.

At the end of the twentieth century, the handwriting was on the wall for assembly-oriented churchianity. When the statistics began to manifest the diminishing attendance of ritualistic Sunday assemblies, assemblologists did their best to come up with solutions to preserve their churches. But no professional pulpiteer could perform in a way

that satisfied the basic need for love in the midst of a lonely human race. No large assembly environment of the masses could bring individuals together in order to find solitude with a few worshipful people with whom they could confess their faults and establish lifelong relationships.

And now during a pandemic, worshipers have had to take ownership of their individual worship in their homes alone. Closets have been opened, dusted out, and pillows for prayer restored. This is a time when we need to put aside all the theatrical assemblies, all the self-justifying and self-righteous forms of worship, and kneel alone before God in a closet in order to rediscover that indeed worshipful thanksgiving is still there for the precious and incarnate Son of God who suffered on a cross alone in order to bring us into eternity with Him. We must never forget as an individual believer that in the arms of God in our closet, all we need is the Book, a little fruit of the vine, and some bread.

## Chapter 8 KNOWN BY OUR ASSEMBLIES

There is almost an irony in history in reference to the institutional church assembly. In order to preserve the existence of the institutional church, professionals were hired for every department of ministry in order to perfect the assembly ceremonies. Unfortunately, the more prominent the professionals became, the more anonymous the individual attendee became. This was especially true in reference to the professional who regularly delivered a well prepared lecture on Sunday morning to an assembly of muted spectators. So the more perfected the assembly became, the more frustrated the individuals of the assembly became.

**The decline in assemblies has often led to competition of assemblies.**

Assemblies of the institutional church became impersonal meetings of the anonymous, and subsequently, the podium performers of the large assemblies were usually beyond personal touch by the people. The larger the assembly became, the more distant the individuals of the audience became from the conductors of the performance. The

adherent's identity with the pulpit personality was always restricted by the availability of the professional lecturer. If he were to do his job well, then he had little time for people relationships with those before whom he stood every week. This scenario of assembly developed a churchianity of people who were content to have only an impersonal "worship hour" experience on Sunday morning. After the worship hour, everyone willingly signed off one another with a closing prayer until another "hour" began next Sunday with an opening prayer.

**Large assemblies  
alienate.**

**Small assemblies  
bond people.**

### **A. The "empty-building" prophecy:**

Institutional church leaders have dealt with the inherent problem of churchianity from every angle. Every program, every professional, and every penny has been spent in order to revive diminishing attendance figures. But the exodus from assembly-oriented churchianity in

**It is a deception  
to believe that  
well-organized  
large assemblies  
develop loving  
fellowship among  
the attendees.**

Western churches reveals that the Sunday morning ritual has run its course. Will the large and dynamic assemblies cease to exist that were promoted throughout the last 450 years of the Reformation Movement? They certainly have in view of the reality of a worldwide pandemic during which many governments banned the large assemblies of

churches.

However, in view of the history of empty European church buildings by the middle of the twentieth century, large-assembly churches will certainly struggle to maintain large numbers. Statistics now prove that the downward trend of large single-assembly churches will continue. The assemblies will continue, though they will be greatly diminished in the decades to come. No longer do we see so many books written on how to build the large single-assembly church. Those large-assembly churches that do continue have all established cell or house fellowships in order to restore personal relationships among the members. This is a welcome change. But large single-assembly churches that are built solely around a dynamic personality will not be the future of Christianity.

We are ending a 450 year period of church history and things are changing. Only those who are aloof to the present paradigm shift that is permeating Christendom will cling to the sinking ship of man-made rituals of the past, and subsequently, go down with a dying generation of churchianists.

## B. Marches in the streets:

Does all this sound negative? If it does, then you may be clinging to a sinking ship, or maybe searching for a small lifeboat of survivors. But the present institutional and legally bound churchianity in chaos is a sign that the people are marching in the streets and struggling for release. As has been the case with many dictatorial countries in the past, the country of Tunisia in North Africa was under the bondage of a leadership that suppressed and rigidly controlled the citizenship. But in 2011 the populace had enough. They took to the streets, sent the ruling party members into exile, and formed a new government. Social chaos in the streets resulted in the peoples' release from the bondage of a dictatorial and unjust government. The Arab Spring was sprung into life.

**Large assemblies of the modern church are diminishing simply because they do not fill the emotional needs of the attendees.**

So it happens with the church. The present struggle away from complexity and control has given rise to a positive restoration of simple New Testament Christianity. As individual disciples shrug off the bondage of ritualistic organizationalism and professional performance religion, a whole new generation of disciples is being “born again.”

The masses have simply discovered an old biblical truth. The road to a personal relationship with God and others is not through complexity, but simplicity. We did not grow more spiritual through the complexity of our institutional religiosity and organized rituals. Through such we became more estranged, both from God and from one another. Only when we take the risk to march in the streets in protest against the bondage of organized churchianity will we enjoy the freedom that was promised by Jesus. *“If the Son will make you free, you will be free*

*indeed*” (Jn 8:36). Have we constructed a churchianity that is contrary to the very promise that Jesus made concerning freedom?

In the latter part of the last century, “church goers” began to speak by their actions. And their actions were not to show up on Sunday morning. They began to speak by their exodus from the professionally driven and organizationally complex church institution that was focused on professionally orchestrated assemblies and personalities. By meeting in small groups, wherever and whenever, a new movement began to speak with a reverberating voice of freedom that echoed throughout Christendom. Those of this paradigm shift have given birth to cell or house fellowships wherein they can find one another. This restorational wave permeates almost every religious group of Christendom. While professional assemblologists carry on with diminishing assemblies in half-empty buildings, relational Christians continue to seek love for one another in the simplicity of small groups throughout their communities. We are at the very beginning of a turning point in the history of Christendom that will play itself out in the next one hundred years. These are exciting times in the rebirth of simple Christianity.

**The road to fellowship is not through complexity, but through simplicity.**

It is as if God saw us in the streets marching against the legal establishment of institutional religion. Therefore, in order to expedite the movement that was drawing people closer to Him, He allowed Satan to unleash a virus on the world that would drive us closer together. Government restrictions drove the people away from large single-assembly concert events on Sunday morning. Covid-19 has driven us into searching out one another in the warm relationship of a small group of love-starved disciples.

**The secret to spiritual growth is not to bring the people to assembly, but to take the assembly to the people.**

tan to unleash a virus on the world that would drive us closer together. Government restrictions drove the people away from large single-assembly concert events on Sunday morning. Covid-19 has driven us

### **C. The wail of the elite:**

The intensity, or extremity, to which assemblologists led the church into a complex ritualistic religiosity is measured by the intensity of



their wail against those who seek love in small relational fellowships. This wail is primarily from the professionals of the assembly-oriented churchianists because they envision several things. They see the loss of contributors with the loss of attendance. (The nightly news in America reported that one of the famous mega churches in California had to declare bankruptcy because there was such a great exodus from their assemblies, which exodus meant a dwindling coffer.)

The professional religionists see the loss of adherents before whom they can perform their speeches. Some see the loss of people over whom they can exercise their narcissistic desire to control. And then some see the loss of those they have stolen from the lordship of Jesus. We can well understand this dismay if Christianity is an assembly-oriented institution that is defined by the modern large-assembly church.

If the church is defined by its assemblies in an assembly-oriented Christendom, then statistically the church is dying. But we would encourage another investigation of the Scriptures concerning the one-another, love-oriented Christianity that is revealed in the New Testament. This Christianity is not dying. It is vibrant, exciting and permeating the lives of millions of people throughout the world.

This is not a church that is defined by complex and ordered Sunday assemblies. It is a worldwide body of disciples who seek to encounter one another wherever and whenever, with no particular location being the “sanctuary” of their encounter. These are encounters that emphasize what Jesus prophesied for the Samaritan woman, “... *neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem ...*” (Jn 4:21). These disciples seek to encounter one another anywhere and everywhere, in coffee shops, homes, parks, schools . . . everywhere. The relational disciples of this generation are not defined by formal assemblies. They are defined by their love that leads them to seek out one another, whether in caves or closets.

**The more localized  
an assembly becomes,  
the more it isolates those  
who have no transport.**

## D. In search of the real:

Are we now in a generation of Christianity that is seeking to rediscover the essence of true Christianity? Are we in a generation that is exhausted with “going to church,” and now just wants to be church in their communities? We think so. At least the inner nature of the human spirit is driving people together of a kindred spirit who seek to establish the simplicity of Christianity in a relationship with Jesus. What the assemblologists constructed in the last 450 years, and intensified in the latter part of the last century, which system of religiosity continues today, does not seem to be sustaining the organized church. The decline in attendance of assembly-oriented churches is evidence that something in that state of religiosity was always lacking.

**Single-assembly churches focus on everyone to be at the same assembly. Multiple-assembly churches focus on assemblies close to the people.**

History is now writing a very clear statement for the annuals of humanity. The large, single-assembly church will not survive the tidal wave of people who are seeking to bond with others in order to survive the future. And when we refer to survival in matters of the future, we are not thinking about the next 25 to 50 years. What we are discussing are matters that take one or two centuries to play out in history. It took about a century to empty out church buildings in Europe after the Reformation Movement cooled. It may take about the same amount of time to do the same with the present assembly-oriented churchianity of the West. The Covid-19 pandemic may have been the last nail in the coffin, or at least signalled the beginning of a new era.

Those large assembly churches that will survive will be those who have encouraged their adherents to meet in small relational groups in order to establish loving fellowships with one another. The large assemblies may continue only because the members come out of small groups in order to meet with the larger fellowship. It is thus not the time to sell the basilicas to be warehouses as was the case in Europe, but time to change church buildings into work stations. If we do not, then take some time and travel through the empty corridors of former

church buildings throughout Europe in order to see the future. Travel around and visit large church buildings in America and be awakened by the vast number of empty pews.

In reference to large assemblies, we are not heading for the best of times. As the world becomes small in a digitally communicative populace, the negative forces of the world will become greater obstacles to Christianity. We speak as world citizens. Being a resident of the world since the early 1970s has taught us many things concerning the survival of the Christian in the world. It has also taught us that the world is unveiling a new order that is not friendly to institutional churchianity. In fact, the world population is becoming more antireligious.

### **E. The rise and fall of empires of faith:**

There are religious forces in the world that increasingly challenge Christianity. In particular, Islam, a theocratic system of political religion, has a difficult time separating Western government from Christianity. And thus, the hostility of Western governments towards Islamic countries has developed a fundamental Islamist culture that will not go away. Within the world view of Islam, time is not a factor. The true Muslim believes that the world will eventually become Islam. And when considering the fact that there are now over 1.5 billion Muslims in the world today, the typical Muslim is probably not far from this truth.

The mass immigration of Muslims to former colonial countries in the West will eventually change those countries into Islamic countries. Since these western countries are democracies, they will become Muslim led as the majority of the voting population becomes Muslim. Europe will become Muslim. Add to the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, the Buddhists of China, the Hindus of India, and a host of other non-Christian religions. The religious world that is growing is a world that will be hostile to those who believe that Jesus alone is the only way to the Father.

Historians have correctly concluded that the rise of the Western economy was to a great extent the result of embedded principles of

Christianity within the society. The irony of this story is that the more developed an economy becomes, the less it seems to focus on the principles of faith. When faith changes, new moral standards are adopted. When does the time come in the development of a society when it turns from the foundation or impetus of its growth to rejecting its original foundation of faith? America was founded on moral principles that came straight out of the Bible. But as Europe, to a great extent America rejects their original founding principles. With development came materialism, and with materialism came secularism, and with secularism came humanism. And thus the Western resident now lives in an era of the demise of its roots.

It must be said that Christianity in many ways has failed the West because the Western “Christian” shut up his Christianity inside a church house on Fifth and Main. Have you ever wondered why a Muslim remains a Muslim? Or a Jew a Jew? We have discovered that it is very difficult for Western Christians to understand Muslims, Hindus, Jews and many other non-Christian religionists throughout the world. The Western Christian has wondered why the adherents to such faiths can be so faithful to their catechisms. The answer is in the fact that a Muslim does not confine his religion to an assembly in a Mosque. He does not define his faith by an assembly. He is a Muslim by culture, faith and life, not by some performance in a ritualistic assembly as does the Christian. Assemblologists can never understand this. A Jew is a Jew, not because of any synagogue assemblies. He is a Jew by culture, faith and life. Now think of the difficulty of trying to “convert” a Muslim or a Jew to our assembly-oriented religiosity.

**Christians must  
be known  
for their beliefs  
and behavior,  
not by their  
performance  
in assemblies.**

Though the demise of Christianity is often reserved for those in Western urban areas, the same pattern prevails in developing countries. We would challenge the reader to investigate any mega city of the world. The number of disciples in these cities are few. Establishing fellowships among disciples in urban cities of the world is very difficult. Africa and India are known for great church growth. But this growth is not in the urban centers. It is among the rural people.

Mix development and urbanization together and we come up with a society that makes it very difficult for the survival of the Christian. It is axiomatic that the more the urbanization in a developing country, the less the church growth. And now in Africa, more than half of the people of Africa can be found in some large mega city.

**The church exists wherever there is just one Christian.**

Ironically, China might be the last bastion of Christianity in the centuries to come. The present oppressive policies of the China government are conducive to church growth. As with Rome two thousand years ago, Christians in China are forced to remain disorganized and in small groups, often meeting in secret in their homes. The restrictions on Christianity that were carried out by the Roman government in the last half of the first century and throughout the second and third centuries are being carried out by the government of China today. Christianity grew during those oppressive Roman years, and so the same is occurring today in China.

If the existence of Christianity in the context of the suppression of the Roman government teaches us anything, it teaches us that Christianity grows under suppression. When Constantine hijacked Christianity for his own political objectives in the fourth century, all that changed. When the church was at ease under Constantine, Christians, to a great extent, lost much of their survival instinct.

But for now, China is stirring a massive underground church movement. This movement will result in the preservation of Christianity in the midst of a rising Islamist movement worldwide that will not tolerate Christianity when it has the majority vote. There is simply no harmony between political Islam (the Taliban, for example) and Christianity. We have to thank the China government for not allowing Christianity to be identified as an assembly-oriented organized institution.

**The universal church is not defined by numbers of assemblies, but by individual members throughout the world.**

## **F. The purpose of the world:**

Will the church ever go out of existence? To that question we would have to answer absolutely not. As long as there is one soul on earth who loves and obeys the gospel, the church will always exist. The sole purpose of the existence of the church is to populate and prepare people for heaven. The eternity of the righteous in the presence of God teaches this profound truth. This world is not our home. It is only the opportunity to populate heaven. As long as there is receptivity for populating heaven, God will allow this world to continue. But when the receptivity of the world diminishes to the point where the church cannot carry out its mission of populating heaven, then there is no longer a purpose for the existence of the world.

We know that God would leave at least “five faithful” for whom Abraham would plead, or in the case of Noah, at least eight faithful souls. But we would not assume that God will allow the world to exist beyond the opportunity of the church to bring souls into eternity through the preaching of the gospel. When the hostility of the world, or the indifference of Christians, makes it useless for the church to carry out her mission, then we would assume that the end is upon us. Why would God allow a world to continue to produce souls who would only end up in hell? And what good for God is an indifferent and “whatever” church that will not accomplish His work of populating heaven through the preaching of the gospel?

We do not assume to be a prophet. Nevertheless, we would assume that the end of the world is much closer now with an urbanized society of people that is steeped in materialism, and a religious environment that is hostile to Christianity. As the institutional church becomes more indifferent to her calling to evangelize the world, then why would God still need the world if the church no longer sees the world as an opportunity to populate heaven? We would ask Jesus to hold off His coming destruction only in view of the fact that there are still some sincere souls out there who want to hear and obey the gospel. There are still some who want to preach the gospel to them. But when there is no one who will hear or preach, then we can only say as both Paul and

John, “Come, Lord Jesus” (1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:20). In other words, if that which was created in order to accomplish the purpose of populating heaven no longer functions to accomplish such, then bring this thing to an end.

## G. The living dead:

The church in Sardis gave the appearance that she was alive. Jesus said, “*I know your works*” (Rv 3:1). The Sardis disciples were active. Their “works” gave them a name that they were alive as a church (Rv 3:1). This was the church, therefore, which people knew because they were active in works and appeared to be alive throughout the community. They were doing things, and assuredly, they were a vibrant church who possibly had vibrant assemblies. However, Jesus’ judgment of this church was, “*You are dead*” (Rv 3:1). They were a church of the living dead.

For some reason their “*works were not perfected before God*” (Rv 3:2). Jesus’ exhortation was that they remember and repent (Rv 3:3). They were exhorted to remember how they had received the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1,2). They must remember the gospel that they had been taught. The lesson is that active churches are dead if they forget the word of the gospel by which they were begotten (1 Pt 1:23).

If the Sardis church did not repent, then Jesus’ coming upon them in judgment would be as a thief. Thieves are not expected. Indifferent churches become unconcerned about the coming of Jesus, and thus, Jesus’ coming in time in judgment on them is as a thief. The light of the Sardis church would go out long before the members realized that they ceased being a church for Christ.

Simply because a religious group exists who calls on the name of Jesus, does not make that group a representative of Jesus (See Mt 7:21-23). Jesus knows only those who know and do His will. We can be known for our works, but we must be zealous to do works according to His will. “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples’*” (Jn 8:31).



## H. Restoration of love:

Almost all those who fall under the umbrella of Christianity focus on single assemblies once or twice a week for the members. Throughout this book we have challenged the theology that the Sunday morning assembly should be the identity of the church. We firmly believe that such a means of identity is contrary to the nature by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified (Jn 13:34,35).

It is the outreach of love by the heavenly Father that laid the foundation for the establishment of the church. This love was revealed through the gospel of the Son of God: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (Jn 3:16). This is the foundation upon which the church is built and identified. Those who believe will respond to this gospel revelation of love. It is for this reason that the church will always be defined by love.

The object of the Father’s love for us was the giving of His Son for us. The Father is the object of our love. All those who have obeyed the gospel have revealed their love for the Father. If we seek to “grow the church,” then we must restore our love for one another. When Jesus judged a falling church with the statement, *“I have this against you, that you have left your first love,”* then we must assume that if we are to restore the church, then we must restore our first love for Jesus and His body (Rv 2:4).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**