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Assembly Privileges and Responsibilities (Jun 1960)

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Association with a scripturally gathered assembly is an inestimable privilege. New Testament teaching shows that it is the Lord's desire that such an assembly should be the spiritual home of those who have been born of God. We have biblical authority for meeting together in His precious Name, apart from the organizations of men. It is, therefore, sad to see that many dear brethren and sisters in Christ have not yet appreciated the dignity and the distinctive character of a local New Testament church.

Church fellowship embraces many responsibilities which are commensurate with its privileges. In the letters to the seven churches of Asia which are given to us in Revelation chapters two and three, are revealed some of these responsibilities.

Divine Observation

Each of the assemblies gathered in Asia Minor was made to realize that it was under divine observation. The repetition to each church by the Lord of the words, "I know," clearly indicates that the penetrating eyes of the august person described in chapter one, the Lord Jesus now glorified, were upon it. Consequently, each church knew that the Lord was cognizant of every inward motive, and of all outward service.

Let us remind our hearts that those same searching eyes scan with holy scrutiny the deeds and the desires of

those who own His name in public testimony. A realization of this solemn fact would surely strip us of all hypocrisy and lead to a deeper exercise of heart that our motives and services might be for His pleasure now, and be worthy of His approval hereafter.

When we are gathered together, an attitude of reverence should prevail, and words should be weighed and checked in the consciousness that Christ sees and knows all. It therefore behoves us to remind our hearts of the words of Hagar: “Thou God seest me” (Genesis 16:13).

Dignified Occupation

Furthermore, each assembly in Asia Minor was expected to function as a lamp-stand. In the power of the Holy Spirit of God, it was expected to shine as a light in the darkness of this night. In other words, each was given a dignified occupation which could only be fulfilled as each individual member of these churches became, like John the Baptist “a burning and shining light.” Each assembly was to be as a “city set on a hill, whose light cannot be hid.”

The light in some modern assemblies has grown dim; in others, it is almost extinguished. Where such conditions prevail, the Lord may see fit, in His governmental dealings with His own, to remove the lamp-stand. The possibility of such extreme action should stimulate afresh a zeal to shine as luminaries in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and to reflect the character and ways of Him who was Himself “the Light of the World.”

This diffusing of light is essential if men, blinded by the god of this world, are to learn of the “light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God.” It is incumbent upon us to take up the torch and wave it wide, for men are dying in darkness with no ray of hope to cheer the tomb. May God give us grace to arise and shine, remembering that, in order to shine in glory it is essential that we first of all shine here: “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

Light has its own attractiveness, if assemblies reflect divine light in the power of the Holy Spirit ungrieved, other believers who may be groping in the gloom of human systems may be attracted to the place where, in a special way, His honour abides. “In His light,” we read, “we shall see light.”

May we realize that it is both a privilege and a duty to let our light shine as the darkness of this night of apostacy deepens; otherwise we are failing Christ, and ignoring the purpose for which He has set us as churches of Christ in this world’s night.

Definite Obligation

Lastly, we observe that members in each assembly were placed under a definite obligation. Seven times the appeal is made, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” All were invited to heed, not only the words of the Spirit given to their own particular church, but also to those He had spoken to the other churches. This reiterated statement shows that the Spirit, now as then, applies the words of Christ to the heart and conscience of those with the hearing

ear. It ever has been the desire of the Lord that we should listen to the voice of the Spirit. He speaks in various ways, particularly through the reading of the Scriptures and through the ministry of the Word of God. A servant of the Lord, now at home in Heaven, frequently used to call the Bible “God’s speaking book.” If we have never heard the voice of the Spirit in our reading of the Scriptures, we would be well advised to examine the foundation of our professed spiritual life. This is a day in which there are many voices clamouring for attention, but the Christian who desires to please his Lord will close his ears to the babel of voices in the world, and in the quietness of the divine presence will open the Bible and open his heart to the still small voice of God heard in the reading of its sacred pages. To neglect this holy exercise will not only deprive the soul of necessary guidance, but will weaken its defences and make it an easy target for the dart of the evil one. The oppositions of the flesh and the world are strong and subtle, and in order to withstand them, it is imperative that we be constantly “strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.”

Many can recall occasions when they trembled at God’s Word as the Spirit spoke through the ministry of His servants. Such occasions should not be rare for in the measure the believer is exercised to know the mind of the Spirit, to that extent is he blessed and helped by the ministry of the Word.

All should listen and obey because of the person who speaks through the inspired page; He is no One less than God the Holy Spirit. To close our ears to His gracious pleadings and warning, will rob us of true God-given instruction and will result in the ruin of our

testimony in the world. Furthermore, we are encouraged to obey because of the award held out to the overcomer. The approval of the Lord on the Day of Christ will compensate for any little sacrifice we make for Him.

May the Lord give us daily grace to appreciate our individual privileges and responsibilities in order that we may live and serve in the consciousness of His imminent return.