

# Gatherings of Assembly Character

by H.J. Vine

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*The sermon underscores the vital importance of gatherings of assembly character for spiritual growth and unity in anticipation of Christ's return.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:18, Matthew 18:20, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 1 Corinthians 10:17, Ephesians 2:21, Ephesians 4:16, Hebrews 10:25, Hebrews 13:15, Revelation 22:16

**Topics:** "Assembly Character", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the importance of maintaining gatherings of an assembly character, emphasizing the dangers of being carried to extremes during seasons of revival and the need to stay grounded in the faith. He highlights the significance of understanding the present truth of Christ and the assembly, and the ongoing construction of the assembly as the bride of Christ. Vine stresses the value of these gatherings for both believers and God, as they lead to spiritual growth, edification, and preparation for the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

During special seasons of revival, and the various activities which accompany such times, there is usually present the danger of being carried to extremes, so that the safe ground of the faith is practically forsaken, and that which is designated by the Spirit of God, "the pillar and base of the truth," is either neglected or abandoned altogether. That is the danger.

Until they were well disciplined, and seasoned by experience, the British army in France lost largely through the zeal and energy of keen soldiers whose valour often carried them too far, taking them beyond the limits set by military wisdom, and so putting themselves out of touch with support from the base of operations.

It is of the utmost importance that the present truth of Christ and the assembly should therefore be understood by us; otherwise, even our zeal in service may put us practically beyond the direction of Headquarters; and we may carry others with us to disaster, even when we think success is attending our aggressive campaign as we pierce far into the enemies' lines.

It is right to "fight the good fight of faith". We are told to do so. But the base must be well established, and the communication lines maintained intact. To abandon gatherings of an assembly character, where the presence of the Lord in the midst is known, is to court defeat; showing, shall we say, either ignorance or

independence of God's present order.

## The Assembly

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, as He looked forward to the present time, "I will build My assembly" (Matt. 16:18). He also indicated that the schemes and attacks of Satan would be directed against it; but, He gave us this assurance, "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it". We should, therefore, be encouraged, and remain true to that which shall come through in triumph and victory, as being loyal to Him who is engaged in the construction of His assembly, allowing no wile of Satan to turn us aside.

This building is in progress now. Having secured eternal redemption by His sufferings and death at Calvary, Christ ascended to God's right hand and gave the Holy Spirit to be in us and with us till His return. We are, therefore, thus formed into one--"built together for an habitation of God in the Spirit"; and upon "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (whose teaching is still the groundwork of the assembly), the building being fitted together in Jesus Christ the Corner Stone, "increaseth to a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21).

It cannot be gainsaid that this glorious work still goes on, for the Holy Spirit Himself in the above Scriptures tells us so; but we may ask the question, Why is the assembly being thus builded? The answer is quite plain. In the future God is going to have a universal metropolis, where His Throne will be, with Christ as the Centre. This is the assembly, "the bride, the Lamb's wife". At the present time the material is being gathered together and fitted for the day of glory; and it becomes, meanwhile, as we have seen, an habitation of God in the Spirit. In the past, before Christ ascended to God's right hand, this building did not exist at all. The dealings of God with the nation of Israel and the other nations and peoples (who are to be ranged under the King of kings and Lord of lords in the millennium) are in abeyance till the assembly is complete, and till it is glorified with our Lord Jesus Christ. It is now being prepared for that glory.

The Head of the assembly is already glorified; and the assembly is not only the house of God, it is also the body of Christ. Over all things Christ is exalted as Head, and He holds this headship in relation to the assembly. He is Head over all now, though it is only apparent to faith. In the future it will be seen publicly that this is so; and the assembly which is His body, complete then in glory, is the fullness of Him who filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23).

At the present time the assembly as Christ's body is said to "grow up to Him in all things who is the Head, the Christ; from whom the whole body, fitted together, and compacted by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building-up in love" (Eph. 4:16). Mark, this is no question of gift, but of each member fulfilling its function in the body which is the assembly. To neglect this for any other sort of religious activity is a very serious matter. Nothing furthers this "increase of the body" like gatherings of an assembly character.

As to the past, before the Head of the body, the assembly, was glorified, there could of course be no body on earth united to a Man in heaven at all. That is a self-evident fact.

When our Lord Jesus Christ ascended on high, in view of filling all things, He gave gifts to men. These, we are told, were given for the "edifying of the body of Christ, until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God". A definite end is in view. The work of the ministry at present is for that purpose. This refers to the exercise of gift very specially; but it is important to see that even in this case the prosperity of the assembly is the object. Where, then, is the loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ on the part

of those servants who are indifferent to gatherings of an assembly character?

The gifts are enumerated in Ephesians 4:11. In the past--before the Giver of them, the exalted Man, gave such gifts--they clearly did not exist. The new work, in relation to the glory which is yet to be manifested, is that for which our Lord Jesus Christ gave them to men. It is for those who are thus gifted to be true in their work to Him who gave them for the edifying of the body, the assembly.

We have spoken of the assembly as the house of God and as the body of Christ, and of the ministry, and of each in relation to the future, the present and the past. We will now consider what is the Scriptural ground of gatherings of an assembly character.

### The Ground of Gathering

In the first intimation of the assembly, in Matthew 16, we are told that the rock foundation of Christ's assembly is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16-17) as revealed by His Father who is in the heavens. That is the ground upon which it is constructed as a whole. All gatherings which partake of the character of the assembly also find their ground in who and what He is, as we shall see.

Fellowship is involved in such gatherings, and all true believers are "called into the fellowship of God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). If the upbuilding or edification of the assembly be in view, we are reminded that the Foundation already laid is "Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

"The Church's one Foundation

Is Jesus Christ her Lord."

If the gathering be for prayer then it is said, as an abiding fact, by our Lord Jesus Christ, "where two or three are gathered together to My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). This covers a wider field than prayer simply, though it is in connection with prayer that the words were spoken. The Name of Christ is the ground given here. The Name speaks of who and what He is. Those gathered know this. They are gathered "to His Name", and He Himself is in the midst of them thus gathered.

In the last book of the Old Testament, when failure abounded, we read that those who feared the Lord got together, and the theme of their meditation and conversation was "His Name"; what He is became everything to them. That brought them together, and made their gatherings seasons of delight both to themselves and to the Lord who hearkened to what they said of Him. It is the same today! In Himself perfection is found by those that fear the Lord, although unrighteousness marks "organized religion", which professes His Name.

If the gatherings be for thanksgiving, for praise, or for worship--to "offer up spiritual sacrifices"--to exercise the functions of the "holy priesthood"--we are told that such offerings are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". We draw near to God "by Him": He is the One by whom we approach. In Him we have boldness, and He it is also who is the Stone, elect and precious, the Foundation of those who sing the songs of praise in Zion. He is the chief Corner-Stone likewise. He first suffered in the outside place to sanctify the worshippers by His own precious blood, and then passed in to the near place in God's own presence. "BY HIM therefore", it is said, "let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is the fruit of the lips confessing His Name" (Heb. 13:15).

Gatherings of an assembly character are "to His Name" and "in His Name". It is as He is known that the true ground of gathering is understood. We ourselves--the saints, the assembly--could never be the ground. The assembly is builded by Him, and upon Him, and in Him. It should be noticed that the Philadelphian character of the assembly, which goes right on till the Lord's return, is faithfulness to His Word and His Name. What is involved in that Name--who and what He is--may be entered into more by some than others, and this will greatly affect the tone of the gatherings. Those who thought upon His Name in Malachi's day would increase in the knowledge of it; and now it is fully revealed, and the Spirit is given, therefore we should advance much more in the excellent knowledge of its preciousness. Moreover, those who are of His assembly stand in relationships to Him which were unknown to these godly saints of Old Testament times as we have shown.

The recognition of this will greatly enhance to us the wonderful privileges which are connected with gatherings of an assembly character of today, for He who is Lord of all, exalted to God's right hand in glory, is known now to the assembly as its Head and its Bridegroom. They are united to Him by the Spirit as His body, and they are brought into union with Him as His bride. Indeed, the truth of the one body should affect all our gatherings of assembly character now. Twelve loaves on the table in the Temple might remind the priests who drew near that the twelve tribes were always represented before God, but the one loaf on the table of which we partake today reminds the worshippers in the presence of God that all true believers "are one loaf, one body" (1 Cor. 10:17). This should never be lost sight of.

However much the assemblies may have been corrupted, the Scriptures are enough for us. They are able to "fully furnish" us. The Spirit who inspired their writing is in us. He leads us into the truth, and He forms us into one body. He is here, moreover, to glorify the Son of God. We have no authority to form religious gatherings after our own ideas. Necessity is not enough, as some say. We are told in 2 Timothy 2 to follow righteousness, as having departed from iniquity. This must necessarily involve our coming together in a right way--"with those that call upon THE LORD out of a pure heart".

All instructed believers will admit that the final words of the Bible have in view the close of the assembly's history in this world. It is there we are told of a special ministry of Christ "in the assemblies" in view of His return (Rev. 22:16-17), with the result that true believers are awakened to invite Christ to come--"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!" These "assemblies" then are found at the end! Who therefore could think of giving up gatherings of an assembly character? Nay, rather let the word of exhortation be heeded as never before, as we draw near to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ--"not forsaking the assembling (complete assembling, i.e. of all the saints) of ourselves together, as the custom is with some; but encouraging one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

### The Value of Such Gatherings

This question has been raised. One would otherwise be exceedingly slow to propound it or answer it. Their value to those who are saved by God's grace cannot be estimated. It is so vast. Scripture shows us also that such gatherings are of priceless value to God Himself. There is glory to God in the assembly in Christ Jesus eternally, and the praise that rises to Him now brings glory to His holy name.

As to ourselves, first of all, we are kept in the sense of the love of Christ when we are together in assembly to remember Him in the great expression of divine love, when He died for us. Then there is also the building up of our souls in the things of God; the edifying of the saints in the truth. This takes place in ministry when we are together in assembly character as nowhere else. Special addresses and preachings,

important though they be, cannot do what the other does for us. Even prayer and thanksgiving in such gatherings are edifying, we are told in 1 Corinthians 14:12-19. All the Scriptures are open to those who thus meet together. A great part of them are closed to those who do not. Ignorance of these is freely admitted by many who follow the religious meetings of expediency which abound in Christendom, to the neglect of the order given in the Word of God for the coming together of the saints.

The truth thus learned sanctifies us, and by it we become partakers of the divine nature. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth when unhindered, and we are liberated from the influences of the world which is made up of lust and pride. We are filled with divine joy in a deepened knowledge of God as He is made known in His beloved Son, and He becomes the rejoicing of our hearts as He manifests His presence in the midst of those gathered together. What words can express the riches of the glory of this? Our gain is beyond telling! It is not simply that we are freed from the oppression of Egypt, but we are brought into the wealth of the land of God's promise in Christ according to His eternal purpose, as the Spirit brings the glory of Him who is the blessed Object of that purpose before our glad hearts.

Moreover, in the exercises connected with such gatherings we are being prepared for the coming glory of which we have spoken. The trial of our faith in regard to this will be found to praise and honour and glory in that day. To miss these exercises means to miss a great deal for the time of His glorious reign. In Ephesians, where the saints are viewed as set in the land in Christ, we are told of the conflict which goes on in relation to this. The hosts of darkness seek to get us to give up in our souls the heavenly ground on which we are set in Christ, but we are told to "stand", not in our own strength, but as "strong in the Lord". The gain of all this is great indeed.

We are not, however, to think only of the value of gatherings of an assembly character to ourselves. Are we not told that the Father seeks worshippers? Where does He receive worship in Spirit and in truth as He does from those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit when assembled together? The vast creation cannot render this to Him as they do! It is said, Let all the angels of God worship Him. They do this, but they have not the same Spirit of relationship, nor do they yield the same character of worship as the redeemed. Even our growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is furthered in such gatherings, is not only of great value to us but to God also. We are told that "a wise son maketh a glad father". As we grow in wisdom we minister to the pleasure of God. Is not this an incentive to us to seek to promote each other's spiritual advance--for His sake? The praise and honour, and glory too, of which we have spoken, found as the result of trial of the faith of these wise sons in the day of Christ's glory, will be of great value in His holy sight.

These gatherings not only promote that which is of surpassing value to us, but, we repeat, that which is of value to God, who is ordering all things at the present time in view of the day when everything in the heavens and upon the earth shall be headed up in Christ, the glorious Centre of all. To gather around Him now prepares us for that day, when the assembly which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all, shall be glorified together with Him. He fills our hearts together now in His presence before that time, when He will fill all things. We learn now something of the order which is pleasing to Him, and in the precious knowledge of the Father and the Son, the high privileges of eternal life are enjoyed already.

"Brought to rest within the circle

Where love's treasures are displayed,

There we drink the living waters,

Taste the joys that never fade."

When in Israel, that which typifies our gathering to Christ's Name was maintained, all prospered; when the exercise Godward of the priesthood, which drew near to Him at the place of His Name, at the temple, was in full function, there was prosperity, peace, and blessing to the uttermost bounds of the kingdom. This gives some idea of the value of assembling together to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such help in the outgoing of the light and the truth more than is usually understood. "Bring in" and I will "pour out" is the order (see Mal. 3:10).

In conclusion, we would emphasize the importance of having no pattern before us less than that which is given by the Holy Spirit in Scripture as to the assembly. If we yield to other ideas we shall not be following righteousness, however near the original they may seem. We have no authority to forsake the path of God's will made known in the Word. There it is said by the apostle John, "He that knows God heareth us: he who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). More are affected by the latter spirit than they are aware of. If we love God we love His children, and shall desire to gather with them. If we do not, where are we? It is written, "Everyone that loves Him that has begotten loves also him that is begotten of Him". He loves God's children, and how can any do this and deliberately avoid gathering with them before the Lord?

We are doubtless nearing the return of our Lord Jesus Christ! That longed-for day is swiftly approaching! Not only do we see signs in the nations and in the awakening of national hopes in Israel, but the revival of the ministry of Christ Himself and His love, as foretold, shows this. At that glorious time all the saints of God will be gathered together to Him in the air, as we are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, where we are besought to be unshaken in view of it--"by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our complete assembling unto Him". This word "complete assembling" is used in one other place, Hebrews 10, as we have already pointed out. There we are exhorted not to forsake the "complete assembling" of ourselves together, as the day of His return approaches God would not have just some of them, but all true believers assembling around the Lord. Then, as He Himself and His love fills every heart, that precious Scripture shall be fulfilled--"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come".

"Spirit and bride with longing voice, say, come;

Yea, Lord, thy word from that bright home, is,

'Surely, I will quickly come!'

E'en so, Lord, come."

Meanwhile, gatherings of an assembly character are to be maintained, and will be, even as the Word of God, which never fails, shows. To deliberately neglect these, therefore, is a very serious matter, whatever the pretext may be.

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