

# 6: GATHERINGS

## *Expressing Dynamic Life*

Meeting together was an essential part of life in the new Kingdom Community. In this unit we will consider the importance of gathering together and what we can expect during these times.

### WHY AND HOW?

The first question to ask is 'Why?'. The writer to the Hebrews explained the purpose of the church coming together.

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:24-25)*

When we gather together in His name, He has promised to presence Himself amongst us (Mt 18:20). Together we can enjoy God's presence in a special way, that we do not experience on our own, encouraging and building up one another (1 Co 14:26).

Given the spectacular growth of the church we should ask 'How?' they achieved this. The answer lies in different types of gatherings:

- **Congregations** – The church met corporately all together in a *locality*, enabling the Apostles to teach and envision the whole body.
- **Small Groups** – Day to day they met in smaller groups, usually in *homes*, enabling practical application of teaching and outworking through Spiritual gifts and loving each other.

This '**2 Winged**' approach to meeting enabled growth to continue without compromising the pastoral needs of the body of Christ. In both these contexts different aspects of church life could be experienced in all their fullness – both were equally essential.

Let us consider some of the acts that take place during these gatherings.

### WORSHIP

We start with Worship for it is our highest calling. We were created to worship Him (Col 1:16) and were redeemed to do so (1 Pe 2:9). It is also how we come into God's presence together, with thanksgiving and praise (Ps 100:4).

*How we approach God* in our worship is extremely important. It must be on the right basis (Heb 10:19-22) as we enter the throne room of heaven.

- Who He is (i.e., worthy of worship – Ps 48:1) and not who we are.
- Christ's sacrifice for us, which has dealt with our sin completely.

It is all too easy in the ups and downs of life to lose sight of these things based on our feelings. However if we remind ourselves of them when we come into God's presence together, then we can expect our worship to be **sacrificial** (Ge 22:5), **unreserved** (Mk 14:3) and **exuberant** (2 Sa 16:14-16, 20-23).

### PRAYER

Prayer is the engine room of the church. It has always been the way the church battled in the heavenlies (Eph 6:12) to get things done here on earth (Ac 4:23ff, 5:12).

We are therefore encouraged to **pray about everything** (1 Tim 2:1-4) petitioning God to move in situations (Phil 4:6) and to pray **persistently** to this end (Mt 7:7-8).

As His body we share Christ's anointing, and so we are also encouraged to pray with His **authority** and in His name (Ac 3:6). As we come together to pray, we are able to find the power of **agreement** (Mt 18:19) and to **bind and loose** things here on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 16:19, 18:18). Jesus

also expected us to accompany our **prayer with fasting** (Mt 6:16, 17:21) as we are led by the Spirit.

Finally prayer often requires **the laying on of hands**, to impart something by the Spirit, such as:

- **Healing** (Mk 16:15ff)
- **Spiritual gifts** and **anointing** (2 Ti 1:6)
- **Commissioning** and **delegation of authority** (Ac 14:23).

As the body of Christ, the church is as tactile as Jesus Himself was!

## HEADCOVERING & UNCOVERING

The church is a 'gateway into heaven' (Ge 28:17, Eph 2:19-22) and as such our gatherings require appropriate honouring of God's authority. One aspect of this is when any believer speaks on behalf of God to His people (prophecy) or to the Lord on behalf of the church (prayer). When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth he gave clear instruction on how this should happen (1 Co 11:2-16) and why:

- **All authority** comes from God in accordance with His 'order of creation'.
- **Authority in the Godhead** and therefore in the church is unrelated to value or worth, but instead role (cf. Gal 3:28).
- When acting in a **priestly function**, representing either God or His people (v.3), men are required to uncover their heads (v.4 - covering the head was common for men at the time) and women are required to cover their heads (v.5), to differentiate their genders and places in God's created order.
- This act provides an **outward symbol of God's authority** and confers His authority (v.10) upon the 'speaker'. This symbol of authority is observed by the angelic order, which is a mystery perhaps we don't yet fully understand.

- Paul's main point here is not cultural but gender distinction in God's created order, so he permitted no other practice in **all** the churches, whether Jewish, Gentile or mixed (v.16).

## GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

All of these things should **only be done in the Spirit**, which requires us to be consistently **full to overflowing** with the Spirit of Christ (Acts 13:52, Eph 5:18). The Spirit gives us 'gifts' as He wills (1 Co 12:4-11), to enable us to fulfil our role and calling (Ro 12:4-8).

### 9 Gifts of the Spirit (1 Co 12:7-11)

<i>Inspiration</i>	<i>Revelation</i>	<i>Power</i>
Prophecy Tongues Interpretation	Wisdom Knowledge Discernment	Faith Healing Miracles

Again our approach is important: -

- Ask the Spirit to fill you every day
- Develop intimacy with Him
- Eagerly desire the gifts and ask Him to use you (1 Co 14:1)
- Believe you can be used
- Die to yourself
- Respond to the witness of the Spirit
- Be bold and step out in faith
- Always operate in love and grace



What are the respective goals and purposes of our congregational and 'life-group' gatherings?  
How can you play your part in each?

## GATHERINGS – KEY POINTS

- Kingdom-perspectives will mean we place high priority on gathering together.
- Small and large gatherings are both important, helping us express and enjoy the whole of church-life.
- Worship is more than just singing.
- Prayer powers the life of the church.
- Head coverings demonstrate order and authority.
- The gifts of the Spirit are vital in our gatherings and are available to all believers who are filled!