

Chapel Flock



~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

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Vol. 39 Issue 748

Sept. 17, 2013

Worship Music

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Prayer

Lord, please forgive me for the times I have been two-faced and double-tongued, speaking different things to different people. After reading the Bible, I realize it is wrong to act this way with those who are over me in authority. They need to be able to rest assured that I am being truthful with them, and now I see that I have given them a cause to doubt my word. Forgive me, and please help me conquer this serious character flaw in my life. Holy Spirit, help me today to uproot this double-tongued tendency from my life. Teach me how to habitually speak the truth, in Jesus' name. Amen.....

Sparkling Gems from the Greek.

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Matthew 24:36 (AMP)

36 But of that [exact] day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

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1 THEN JOB answered, 2 Hear diligently my speech, and let this [your attention] be your consolation [given me]. 3 Allow me, and I also will speak; and after I have spoken, mock on. 4 As for me, is my complaint to man or of him? And why should I not be impatient and my spirit be troubled? 5 Look at me and be astonished (appalled); and lay your hand upon your mouth. 6 Even when I remember, I am troubled and afraid; horror and trembling take hold of my flesh. 7 Why do the wicked live, become old, and become mighty in power? 8 Their children are established with them in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes. 9 Their houses are safe and in peace, without fear; neither is the rod of God upon them. 10 Their bull breeds and fails not; their cows calve and do not miscarry. 11 They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children skip about. 12 They themselves lift up their voices and sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. 13 They spend their days in prosperity and go down to Sheol (the unseen state) in a moment and peacefully. 14 Yet they say to God, Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. 15 Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him? 16 But notice, [you say] the prosperity of the wicked is not in their power; the mystery [of God's dealings] with the ungodly is far from my comprehension. 17 How often [then] is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out? That their calamity comes upon them? That God distributes pains and sorrows to them in His anger? 18 That they are like stubble before the wind and like chaff that the storm steals and carries away? 19 You say, God lays up [the punishment of the wicked man's] iniquity for his children. Let Him recompense it to the man himself, that he may know and feel it. 20 Let his own eyes see his destruction, and let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty. 21 For what pleasure or interest has a man in his house and family after he is dead, when the number of his months is cut off? 22 Shall any teach God knowledge, seeing that He judges those who are on high? 23 One dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet; 24 His pails are full of milk [his veins are filled with nourishment], and the marrow of his bones is fresh and moist, 25 Whereas another man dies in bitterness of soul and never tastes of pleasure or good fortune. 26 They lie down alike in the dust, and the worm spreads a covering over them. 27 Behold, I know your thoughts and plans and the devices with which you would wrong me. 28 For you say, Where is the house of the rich and liberal prince [meaning me]? And where is the tent in which the wicked [Job] dwelt? 29 Have you not asked those who travel this way, and do you not accept their testimony and evidences— 30 That the evil man is [now] spared in the day of calamity and destruction, and they are led forth and away on the day of [God's] wrath? 31 But who declares [a man's] way [and rebukes] him to his face? And who pays him back for what he has done? 32 When he is borne to the grave, watch is kept over his tomb. 33 The clods of the valley are sweet to him, and every man shall follow him to a grave, as innumerable people [have gone] before him. 34 How then can you comfort me with empty and futile words, since in your replies there lurks falsehood?

By Chuck Smith

This time shall we turn to the book of Job, chapter 21.

Zophar has just concluded in chapter 20 his second speech in which, again, he sort of just gives some of the traditions and quotes some of the proverbs that are common, and sort of reiterating some of his accusations against Job. "Knowest not this of old, since man was placed on the earth" (Job 20:4). "You see, don't you know that man has known this forever?" Going back to some of the old proverbs and so forth.

"That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?" (Job 20:5) This is just some of the old proverbs. "The triumphing of the wicked is short, the joy of the hypocrite is for a moment." And then the insinuations there is that Job actually is a wicked man and that he is a hypocrite. And then he makes accusations against Job in verse 19: "Because he has oppressed and forsaken the poor, because he has violently taken away a house which he built it not." In other words, he made a foreclosure against some poor people. And so, concluding in verse 29: "This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him from God." That is the calamity and the destruction that will come upon him for doing these wicked things.

So Job answered and said, Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations. And allow me that I may speak; and after I have spoken, just mock on (Job 21:1-3).

Job has just really had it with these guys and he's not really very kind in his remarks to them anymore. But I can sort of understand Job's position. They just...he's looking for sympathy; he's looking for understanding. He doesn't have it. They just are convinced in their minds that Job is a wicked, ungodly man. Though they can't point it out to him, though he's challenged them to, "point out my wickedness," they can't do it. Yet they're convinced of this fact. Job cannot convince them otherwise.

And so let me speak and then after I have spoken, go ahead and mock on.

As for me, is my complaint to man? if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled? Go ahead, mark me, be astonished, put your hand over your mouth. Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling takes hold on my flesh (Job 21:4-6).

Now, Job shows the fallacy of the whole arguments that they're putting against him, because the arguments are this: That the righteous prosper. If you're really a righteous man, you'll be prosperous, that it just follows. And that if you are wicked, then calamity is sure to come, thus any calamity that comes into your life is a sure sign of wickedness. And any prosperity is a sure sign of righteousness. This is the basic fallacious philosophy.

Now in the New Testament we find this same philosophy is spoken against. As those who think that godliness is a way to gain, or it's a way to prosperity. That is spoken of in the New Testament, it says, "from such turn away" (I Timothy 6:5), those that say living a godly life is a way to be prosperous. So Job is putting down their whole philosophy by just pointing out basic facts, and it is this:

Why do the wicked live, become old, yea, they are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not;

their cow calveth, and casts not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, their children dance. They take the timbrel, the harp, rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave (Job 21:7-13). In other words, they do not have a prolonged suffering at the time of death. They live, their children are happy, their children are in the dances, and so forth. They are the wicked, they seem to be prosperous and then they die suddenly rather than having a long suffering, lingering kind of a death. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; we don't desire the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? (Job 21:14-15)

In other words, they scorn God. They shun God. They say, "Hey, why should I serve God? Look, I'm happy. I've got everything I want. Why do I need God? You know, God can take a walk as far as I'm concerned. I don't need Him. I'm doing fine." And so this is, Job pointed out, this is the way the wicked are. Now you say the wicked are cut down, the wicked are cursed, the wicked, you know, are cut off and all. But wait a minute, that's not my observation. Wicked people oftentimes prosper, prosper abundantly. In fact, in the seventy-third Psalm, this was a situation that almost caused the psalmist to stumble.

If you want to turn for a moment to Psalm 73, you'll see that the psalmist was observing much the same things as Job here concerning the wicked, as he declares, "Truly God is good to Israel, and all those that are of a clean heart" (Psalm 73:1). In other words, he starts out with a basic, foundational truth. I know this: God is good. I know that. It's important that you know that. It's important that you have certain foundational truths upon which you stand. Upon which you can fall back, because you're not going to always understand why certain things have happened to you. You're not going to understand that. So whenever you come up against something you don't understand, you must fall back on what you do understand, certain foundational truths. And this is one: God is good. I know that. But, the psalmist said, "I know God is good."

But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped. I was envious of the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: [Much the same thing, they don't go through prolonged periods of suffering before they die. They seem to die quickly without a lot of suffering.] their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than their heart could wish. They are corrupt, they speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and the waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they said, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Psalm 73:2-12).

Now, you see, the psalmist is observing much the same as Job. That wicked people oftentimes prosper. In fact, sometimes they prosper abundantly. Job said, "Their children grow up before them. They don't have any trouble. Their bulls gender. Their cows, you know, caste their calves and they don't die. They're prospered. They're blessed. And they're cursing God. They say, 'Why do I need God. I don't need God. I'm happy. I'm satisfied.'"

And the psalmist is observing much the same thing and he said, "It almost wiped me out. It almost caused me to trip up when I saw this." It drew him to false conclusions. He said, "I've cleansed my heart in vain. I've washed my hands in innocency. For all the time I am plagued. I'm chastened" (Psalm 73:13-14). "It doesn't pay to try and serve God. The wicked have it so good, and here I'm trying to do what's right and I'm in trouble all the time. I'm plagued. Everything's going wrong. You know, I can't pay my bills, and all. And it doesn't pay to serve God." It is really sort of the suggestion here.

"When I thought to know this," he said, "it was too painful for me. Until I went into the sanctuary of the Lord, and then I saw their end" (Psalm 73:16-17). You see, our problem is that our vision oftentimes is too narrow. We see only that which is seen and it will cause you to trip up. I can't understand the disparities of life. I don't understand why wicked people oftentimes prosper and why godly people oftentimes suffer. There are disparities that I don't understand. I know that God is good. I know that God is righteous. I know that God is fair. But I don't know why good, godly people have to suffer. I don't know why ungodly people who really curse God, who want nothing to do with God, are so oftentimes very prosperous, seemingly always in excellent health, never seeming to have problems. "Until I went into the sanctuary of the Lord. I was almost wiped out. I almost... it almost caused my foot to slip. I was almost gone." What did he discover in the sanctuary of the Lord? He discovered, then, the end result. "Then I saw their end." You see, I see now on out beyond. I see the eternity and the long-term view. And when I look out beyond just today and tomorrow, and I look into eternity and I see the end of the wicked, then I am no longer envious of the wicked. How could I be envious of the wicked who are cast into hell? "Surely you have set them in slippery places," the psalmist said. "They shall go down in a moment" (Psalm 73:18). So I can't be envious of them any longer when I see the end result.

Now this is what coming into the sanctuary of the God should always be, a broadening experience for you. Because we do get battered about many times in our worldly relationships, on the job, in school and so forth, and we come in dragging Sunday morning, battered and bruised by the contact with that alien world out there, because actually we are strangers and pilgrims here. We are living in an alien world. It's alien to God. Alienated from God. And if you're living a life in fellowship with God, you find yourself in an alien world. And we come into the sanctuary of God, but it should always be a place where God broadens our whole perspective. And I begin to measure things not by, "Oh, what a rough week," but I begin to measure things by eternity. It won't be long. Life is so short. I'll soon be with Him in the glories of His kingdom. Oh, how fortunate I am to know Him. How fortunate I am that He loves me and He has chosen me as His child and I am going to dwell with Him forever and ever. You see, you get the long-term; you get released from this narrow little perspective that so often develops in the world. And the broadened perspective as we come into the sanctuary of God.

So Job now is talking from the narrow perspective. We often do this when we're hurting, when we're suffering. He's looking at the wicked like the psalmist did and he sees their prosperity and it's completely putting down the arguments of his friends. He is putting them down. They are not true. The things that they are saying are not true. The hypocrite isn't cut off; the wicked aren't cast aside.

They often times are very prosperous indeed and seem to have no problem at all. And this is what Job is pointing out as he shows the fallacy of the arguments that these men are giving to him.

Now Job begins to look down the road, verse 17: How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, as chaff that the storm carries away (Job 21:17-18). I wonder if, when David wrote the first Psalm, he was not acquainted with the book of Job. Do you remember what he said concerning the wicked? "Are not so, but as the chaff which the wind driveth away" (Psalm 1:4). And here he's borrowing actually this phrase out of Job. David was probably very familiar with this book. God lays up his iniquity for his children: he rewards him, and he shall know it. His eyes shall see his destruction, he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty (Job 21:19-20).

Now Job said,

Are you going to teach God knowledge? seeing he judges those that are high. One dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, his bones are moistened with marrow. Another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eats with pleasure (Job 21:22-25). Now why the difference? We don't know. Why is it that some men die in fullness and some die in poverty? Some die in pain and sorrow. Some are cut off quickly. Why does that happen?

They shall lie down alike in the dust, the worms shall cover them. Behold, I know your thoughts, and devices which you wrongfully imagine against me. For you say, Where is the house of the prince? And where are the dwelling places of the wicked? Have you not asked them that go by the way? and do you not know their tokens (Job 21:26-29),

He said, "You learned your philosophy from wayfarers, from strangers, from people in the streets." That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath (Job 21:30). In other words, God will judge them. That is true. But not necessarily in this life.

Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him for what he has done? Yet shall he be brought to the grave, he shall remain in his tomb. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him. How then do you comfort me in vain, seeing in your answers there's an inconsistency? (Job 21:31-34) How can you comfort me with these kinds of arguments when they're not really consistent? When they're not really logical? When they don't stand up to reality? (Through The Bible c 2000 Series; Chuck Smith; Bible commentaries, 1979-1986)

The Assembly of God; or, The All-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus; C. H. Mackintosh – Index

In a day like the present, when almost every new idea becomes the centre or gathering-point of some new association, we cannot but feel the value of having divinely formed convictions as to what the assembly of God really is. We live in a time of unusual mental activity, and hence there is the more urgent need of calm and prayerful study of the word of God. That word, blessed be its Author, is like a rock amid the ocean of human thought. — There it stands unmoved, notwithstanding the raging of the storm and the ceaseless lashing of the waves. And not only does it thus stand unmoved itself, but it imparts its own stability to all who simply take their stand upon it. What a mercy to make one's escape from the heavings and tossings of the stormy ocean, and find a calm resting place on that everlasting Rock.

This, truly, is a mercy, Were it not that we have "the law and the testimony," where should we be? Whither should we go? What should we do? What darkness! What confusion! What perplexity! Ten thousand jarring voices fall, at times, upon the ear, and each voice seems to speak with such authority, that if one is not well taught and grounded in the word, there is great danger of being drawn away, or, at least, sadly unhinged. One man will tell you that this is right; another will tell that is right; a third will tell you that everything is right; and a fourth will tell you that nothing is right. With reference to the question of church position, you will meet with some who go here; some who go there; some who go everywhere; and some who go nowhere.

Now, under such circumstances, what is one to do? All cannot possibly be right. And yet, surely, there is something right. It cannot be that we are compelled to live in error, in darkness, or uncertainty. "There is a path," blessed be God, though "no fowl knoweth it, and the vulture's eye hath not seen it. The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it." Where is this safe and blessed path? Hear the divine reply: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom: and to depart from evil is understanding." (Job 28)

Let us, therefore, in the fear of the Lord, in the light of His infallible truth, and in humble dependence upon the teaching of His Holy Spirit, proceed to the examination of the subject which stands at the head of this paper; and may we have grace to abandon all confidence in our own thoughts, and the thoughts of others, that so we may heartily and honestly yield ourselves up to be taught only of God.

Now, in order to get fairly into the grand and all-important subject of the assembly of God, we have first to state a fact; and, secondly, to ask a question. The fact is this, There is an assembly of God on the earth. The question is, What is that assembly?

I. And, first then, as to our fact. There is such a thing as the assembly of God on the earth. This is a most important fact, surely. God has an assembly on the earth. I do not refer to any merely human organisation, such as the Greek Church; the Church of Rome; the Church of England; the Church of Scotland; or to any of the various systems which have sprung from these, framed and fashioned by man's hand, and carried on by man's resources. I refer simply to that assembly which is gathered by God the Holy Ghost, round the Person of God the Son, to worship, and hold fellowship with, God the Father.

If we set forth upon our search for the assembly of God, or for any expression thereof, with our minds full of prejudice, preconceived

thoughts, and personal predilections; or if, in our searchings, we seek the aid of the flickering light of the dogmas, opinions, and traditions of men, nothing is more certain than that we shall fail to reach the truth. To recognize God's assembly, we must be exclusively taught by God's word, and led by God's Spirit; for, of God's assembly, as well as of the sons of God, it may be said, "the world knoweth it not."

Hence, then, if we are, in any wise, governed by the spirit of the world; if we desire to exalt man; if we seek to commend ourselves to the thoughts of men; if our object be to gain the attractive ends of a plausible and soul-ensnaring expediency, we may as well, forthwith, abandon our search for any true expression of the assembly of God, and take refuge in that form of human organisation which most fully commends itself to our thinkings or our conscientious convictions.

Further, if our object be to find a religious community in which the word of God is read, or in which the people of God are found, we may speedily satisfy ourselves, for it would be hard indeed to find a section of the professing body in which either or both of these objects might not be fully realized.

Finally, if we merely aim at doing all the good we can, without any question as to how we do it; if *Per fas aut nefas*, "right or wrong," be our motto, in whatever we undertake; if we are prepared to reverse those weighty words of Samuel, and say that, "To sacrifice is better than to obey, and the fat of rams better than to hearken;" then is it worse than vain for us to pursue our search for the assembly of God, inasmuch as that assembly can only be discovered and approved by one who has been taught to flee from the ten thousand flowery pathways of human expediency, and to submit his conscience, his heart, his understanding, his whole moral being to the supreme authority of "Thus saith the Lord."

In one word, then, the obedient disciple knows that there is such a thing as God's assembly: and he it is, too, that will be enabled, through grace, to understand what is a true expression of it. The intelligent student of scripture knows, full well, the difference between that which is founded, formed, and governed by the wisdom and the will of man, and that which is gathered round and governed by, Christ the Lord. How vast is the difference! It is just the difference between God and man.

But we may here be asked for the scripture proofs of our fact that there is such a thing on the earth as the assembly of God, and we shall, at once, proceed to furnish these; for we may be permitted to say that, without the authority of the word, all statements are utterly valueless. What, therefore, saith the scripture?

Our first question shall be that famous passage, in Matthew 16, When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my assembly [The words "church" and "assembly" are both from the same Greek word.] (ekklesia); and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Vers. 13-18)

Here our blessed Lord intimates His purpose to build an assembly, and sets forth the true foundation of that assembly, namely, "Christ the Son of the living God." This is an all-important point in our subject. The building is founded on the Rock, and that Rock is not the poor failing, stumbling, erring Peter, but Christ, the eternal Son of the living God; and every stone in that building partakes of the Rock-life which, as being victorious over all the power of the enemy, is indestructible.

{It is of the utmost importance to distinguish between what Christ builds, and what man builds. "The gates of hell" shall assuredly prevail against all that is merely of man; and hence it would be a fatal mistake to apply to man's building words which only apply to Christ's. Man may build with "wood, hay, stubble," alas! he does — but all that our Lord Christ builds shall stand for ever. The stamp of eternity is upon every work of His hand. All praise to His glorious name.}

Again, passing over a section of Matthew's Gospel, we come to an equally familiar passage: "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the assembly; but if he neglect to hear the assembly, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18: 15-20)

We shall have occasion to refer to this passage again, under the second division of our subject. It is here introduced merely as a link in the chain of scripture evidence of the fact that there is such a thing as the assembly of God on the earth. This assembly is not a name, a form, a pretence, an assumption. It is a divine reality — an institution of God, possessing His seal and sanction. It is a something to be appealed to in all cases of personal trespass and dispute which cannot be settled by the parties involved. This assembly may consist of only "two or three" in any particular place — the smallest plurality, if you please; but there it is, owned of God, and its decisions ratified in heaven.

Now, we are not to be scared away from the truth on this subject, by the fact that the Church of Rome has attempted to base her monstrous pretensions on the two passages which we have just quoted. That church is not God's assembly, built on the Rock Christ, and gathered in the name of Jesus; but a human apostasy, founded on a failing mortal, and governed by the traditions and doctrines of men. We must not, therefore suffer ourselves to be deprived of God's reality by reason of Satan's counterfeit. God has His assembly

on the earth, and we are responsible to confess the truth of it, and be a practical expression of it. This may be difficult, in a day of confusion, like the present. It will demand a single eye — a subject will — a mortified mind. But let the reader be assured of this, that it is his privilege to possess as divine certainty as to what is a true expression of the assembly of God as in reference to the truth of his own salvation through the blood of the Lamb; nor should he be satisfied without this. I should not be content to go on for an hour without the assurance that I am, in spirit and principle, associated with those who gather on the ground of the assembly of God. I say, in spirit and principle; because I may happen to be in a place where there is no local expression of the assembly, in which case I must be satisfied to hold fellowship, in spirit, with all those on the ground of the assembly of God, and wait on Him so to order my way that I may enjoy the real privilege of being present in person with His people, to taste the blessings as well as to share in the holy responsibilities of His assembly. This simplifies the matter amazingly. If I cannot have a true expression of God's assembly, I shall have nothing. It will not do to point me to a religious community, with some Christians therein, the gospel preached, and the ordinances administered. I must be convinced, by the authority of the word and Spirit of God, that it is, in very truth, gathered on the ground and marked by the characteristics of God's assembly, else I cannot own it. I can own the children of God therein, if they will permit me to do so, outside the bounds of their religious system; but their system I cannot own or sanction in any one way whatever. Were I to do so, it would just be tantamount to the assertion that it makes not a whit of difference whether I maintain the principles of the assembly of God, or take up with the systems of man — whether I acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, or the authority of man — whether I bow to the word of God, or the opinions of man.

No doubt, this will give offence to many. It will be pronounced bigotry, prejudice, narrow-mindedness, intolerance, and the like. But this need not discourage us. All we have to do is to ascertain the truth as to God's assembly, and cleave to it, heartily and energetically, at all cost. If God has an assembly — and scripture says He has — then let me be with those who maintain its principles, and nowhere else. It must be obvious that where there are several conflicting systems, they cannot all be divine. What am I to do? Am I to be satisfied to take the less of two evils? Surely not. What then? The answer is plain, pointed, and direct — the principles of God's assembly or nothing. If there be a local expression of that assembly, well; be there in person. If not, be content to hold spiritual communion with all who humbly and faithfully own and occupy that holy ground. It may sound and seem like liberality to be ready to sanction and go with everything and everybody. It may appear very easy and very pleasant to be in a place "where everybody's will is indulged, and nobody's conscience is exercised" — where we may hold what we like, and say what we like, and do what we like, and go where we like. All this may seem very delightful — very plausible — very popular — very attractive; but oh! it will be barrenness and bitterness in the end; and, in the day of the Lord, it will assuredly be burnt up as so much wood, hay, and stubble, that cannot stand the action of His judgement.

But let us proceed with our scripture proofs. In the Acts of the Apostles, or rather, the Acts of the Holy Ghost, we find the assembly formally set up. A passage or two will suffice: "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the assembly, daily, such as should be saved." (Acts 2: 47) Such was the original, simple apostolic order. When a person was converted, he took his place in the assembly: there was no difficulty in the matter, there were no sects or parties, each claiming to be considered a church, a cause, or an interest. There was just the one thing, and that was the assembly of God, where He dwelt, acted, and ruled. It was not a system formed according to the will, the judgement, or even the conscience of man. Man had not, as yet, entered upon the business of church-making. This was God's work. It was just as exclusively God's province and prerogative to gather the saved, as to save the scattered.

{There is no such thing in scripture as being a member of a church. Every true believer is a member of the church of God — the body of Christ, and can therefore no more be, properly, a member of anything else than my arm can be a member of any other body. The only true ground on which believers can gather is set forth in that grand statement, "There is one body, and one Spirit." And, again, "We being many are one loaf and one body." (Eph. 4. 4; 1 Cor. 10: 17) If God declares that there is but one body," it must be contrary to His mind to have many bodies, sects, or denominations. Now, while it is quite true that no given number of believers in any given place can be called "the body of Christ," or "the assembly of God;" — yet they should be gathered on the ground of that body and that assembly, and on no other ground. We call the reader's special attention to this principle. It holds good at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. The fact of the ruin of the professing church does not touch it. It has been true since the day of Pentecost; is true at this moment; and shall be true until the church is taken to meet her Head and Lord in the clouds, that "there is one body." All believers belong to that body; and they should meet on that ground, and on no other.} Why, we may justly inquire, should it be different now? Why should the regenerated seek any ground beyond, or different to, that of the assembly of God? Is not that sufficient? Assuredly. Should they rest satisfied with aught else? Assuredly not. We repeat, with emphasis, "Either that or nothing." True it is, alas! that failure, and ruin, and apostasy have come in. Man's wisdom, and his will; or, if you please, his reason, his judgement, and his conscience have wrought, in matters ecclesiastical, and the result appears before us in the almost numberless and nameless sects and parties of the present moment. Still, we are bold to say, that the original ground of the assembly is the ground of the assembly still, notwithstanding all the failure, the error, and the confusion, consequent thereon. The difficulty in reaching it practically may be great, but its reality, when reached, is unaltered and unalterable. In apostolic times the assembly stood out, in bold relief, from the dark background of Judaism on the one hand, and Paganism on the other. It was impossible to mistake it; there it stood, a grand reality! a company of living men, gathered, indwelt, ruled and regulated by God the Holy Ghost, so that the unlearned or unbelieving coming in, were convinced of all, and constrained to acknowledge that God was there. (See carefully, 1 Cor. 12, 14 throughout.) Thus, in the gospel, our blessed Lord intimates His purpose of building an assembly. This assembly is historically presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles. Then, when we turn to the Epistles of Paul, we find him addressing the assembly, in seven distinct places, namely, Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica; and finally, in the opening of the book of Revelation, we have addresses to seven distinct assemblies. Now, in all these places, the assembly of God was a plain, palpable, real thing, established and maintained by God Himself. It was not a human organisation, but a divine institution testimony — a light bearer for God, in each place.

Thus much as to our scripture proofs of the fact that God has an assembly on the earth, gathered, indwelt, and governed by the Holy Ghost who is the true and only Vicar of Christ upon earth. The Gospel prophetically intimates the assembly; the Acts historically presents the assembly; and the Epistles formally address the assembly. All this is plain. And if it be broken into fragments now, it is for us to be gathered on the ground of the one assembly of God, and to be a true expression of it.

And let it be carefully noted that we will listen to nothing on this subject but the voice of holy scripture. Let not reason speak, for we own it not. Let not tradition lift her voice, for we wholly disregard her. Let not expediency thrust itself upon us, for we shall give it no place whatever. We believe in the all-sufficiency of holy scripture — that it is sufficient to furnish the man of God thoroughly — to equip him perfectly for all good works. (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17.) The word of God is either sufficient or it is not. We believe it to be amply sufficient for every exigency of God's assembly. It could not be otherwise if God be its author. We must either deny the divinity or admit the sufficiency of the Bible. There is not a single hair's breadth of middle ground. It is impossible that God could have written an imperfect, an insufficient book.

This is a very grave principle in connection with our subject. Many of our Protestant writers have, in assailing popery, maintained the sufficiency and authority of the Bible; but it does seem very plain to us that they are always at fault when their opponents turn sharp round upon them and demand proof from scripture for many things sanctioned and adopted by Protestant communities. There are many things adopted and practised in the National Establishment and other Protestant communities, which have no sanction in the word; and when the shrewd and intelligent defenders of popery have called attention to these things, and demanded authority for them the weakness of mere protestantism has been strikingly apparent. If we admit, for a moment, that, in some things, we must have recourse to tradition and expediency, then who will undertake to fix the boundary line? If it be allowable to depart from scripture at all, how far are we to go? If the authority of tradition be admitted at all, who is to fix its domain? If we leave the narrow and well defined pathway of divine revelation, and enter upon the wide and bewildering field of human tradition, has not one man as much right as another to make a choice? In short, it is obviously impossible to meet the adherents of Roman Catholicism on any other ground than that on which the assembly of God takes its stand, namely, the all-sufficiency of the word of God, the name of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Ghost. Such, blessed be God, is the impregnable position occupied by His assembly; and however weak and contemptible any expression of that assembly may be in the eye of the world, we know, for Christ has told us, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Those gates shall assuredly prevail against every human system — against all those corporations and associations which men have set on foot. And in no case has that triumph been, even already, made more awfully manifest than in that of the Church of Rome itself, although it has arrogantly laid claim to this very declaration of our Lord as the bulwark of its strength. Nothing can withstand the power of the gates of hell, but that assembly which is built upon "the living Stone;" and the local expression of that assembly may be "two or three gathered in the name of Jesus;" a poor, feeble, contemptible handful — the filth of the earth, and the off-scouring of all things.

It is well to be clear and decided as to this. Christ's promise can never fail. He has, blessed be His name, come down to the lowest possible point to which an assembly can be reduced, even "two." How gracious! How tender! How considerate! How like Himself! He attaches all the dignity — all the value — all the efficacy of His own divine and deathless name to an obscure handful gathered round Himself. It must be very evident to the spiritual mind that the Lord Jesus, in speaking of the "two or three" thought not of those vast systems which have sprung up in ancient, medieval, and modern times, throughout the eastern and western world, numbering their adherents and votaries, not by "twos or threes," but by kingdoms, provinces, and parishes. It is very plain that a baptised kingdom, and "two or three" living souls, gathered in the name of Jesus, do not and cannot mean the same thing. Baptised Christendom is one thing, and an assembly of God is another. What this latter is, we have yet to unfold; we are here asserting that they are not, and cannot be, the same thing. They are constantly confounded, though no two things can be more distinct.

{The reader will need to ponder the distinction between the church viewed as the body of Christ," and as "the house of God" He may study Ephesians 1: 22, 1 Corinthians 12 for the former, Ephesians 2: 21; 1 Corinthians 3; 1 Timothy 3 for the latter. The distinction is as interesting as it is important}

If we would know under what figure Christ presents the baptised world, we have only to look at the "leaven" and the "mustard tree" of Matthew 13. The former gives us the internal, and the latter the external character of "the kingdom of heaven" — of that which was originally set up in truth and simplicity — a real thing, though small, but which, through Satan's crafty working, has become inwardly a corrupt mass, though outwardly a far-spreading, showy, popular thing in the earth, gathering all sorts beneath the shadow of its patronage. Such is the lesson — the simple but deeply solemn lesson to be learnt by the spiritual mind from the "leaven" and the "mustard tree" of Matthew 13. And we may add, one result of learning this lesson would be an ability to distinguish between "the kingdom of heaven" and "the assembly of God." The former may be compared to a wide morass, the latter to a running stream passing through it, and in constant danger of losing its distinctive character, as well as its proper direction, by intermingling with the surrounding waters. To confound the two things is to deal a death-blow to all godly discipline and consequent purity in the assembly of God. If the kingdom and the assembly mean one and the same thing, then how should we act in the case of "that wicked person" in 1 Corinthians 5? The apostle tells us "to put him away." Where are we to put him? Our Lord Himself tells us distinctly that "the field is the world;" and again, in John 17, He says that His people are not of the world. This makes all plain enough. But men tell us, in the very face of our Lord's statement, that the field is the assembly, and the tares and wheat, ungodly and godly, are to grow together, that they are on no account to be separated. Thus the plain and positive teaching of the Holy Ghost in 1 Corinthians 5 is set in open opposition to the equally plain and positive teaching of our Lord in Matthew 13; and all this flows from the effort to confound two distinct things, namely, "the kingdom of heaven" and "the assembly of God."

It would not by any means comport with the object of this paper to enter farther upon the interesting subject of "the kingdom." Enough has been said, if the reader has thereby been convinced of the immense importance of duly distinguishing that kingdom from the assembly. What this latter is we shall now proceed to inquire; and may God the Holy Ghost be our Teacher!

II. In handling our question as to the assembly of God, it will give clearness and precision to our thoughts to consider the four following points, namely: —

First, what is the material of which the assembly is composed?

Secondly, what is the centre round which the assembly is gathered?

Thirdly, what is the power by which the assembly is gathered?

Fourthly, what is the authority on which the assembly is gathered?

1. And, first, then, as to the material of which God's assembly is composed; it is, in one word, those possessing salvation, or eternal life. We do not enter the assembly in order to be saved, but as those who are saved. The word is, "On this rock I will build my church." He does not say, "On my church I will build the salvation of souls." One of Rome's boasted dogmas is this — "There is no salvation out of the true church." Yes, but we can go deeper still, and say, "Off the true Rock there is no church." Take away the Rock, and you have nothing but a baseless fabric of error and corruption. What a miserable delusion, to think of being saved by that! Thank God, it is not so. We do not get to Christ through the church, but to the church through Christ. — To reverse this order is to displace Christ altogether, and thus have neither Rock, nor church, nor salvation. We meet Christ as a life-giving Saviour, before we have anything to say to the assembly at all; and hence we could possess eternal life, and enjoy full salvation, though there were no such thing as an assembly of God on the earth. [The reader will do well to note the fact that, in Matthew 16 we have the very earliest allusion to the church. and there our Lord speaks of it as a future thing, He says, "On this Rock I will build my church." He does not say, "I have been, or I am building." In short, the church had no existence until our Lord Christ was raised from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God. Then. but not until then, the Holy Ghost was sent down to baptize believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, into one body, and unite them to the risen and glorified Head in heaven. This body has been on the earth since the descent of the Holy Ghost; is here still, and shall be until Christ comes to fetch it to Himself. It is a perfectly unique thing. It is not to be found in Old Testament scripture. Paul expressly tells us it was not revealed in other ages; it was hid in God, and never made known until it was committed to him. (See carefully, Rom. 16: 25, 26; Eph. 3: 3-11; Col. 1: 24-27) True it is — most blessedly true — that God had a people in Old Testament times. Not merely the nation of Israel, but a quickened. saved. spiritual people, who lived by faith, went to heaven. and are there "the spirits of just men made perfect But the church is never spoken of until Matthew 16, and there only as a future thing. As to the expression used by Stephen, "The church in the wilderness" (Acts 7: 38). it is pretty generally known that it simply refers to the congregation of Israel. The termini of the church's earthly history are Pentecost (Acts 2), and the rapture. (1 Thess, 4: 16, 17)]

We cannot be too simple in grasping this truth, at a time like the present, when ecclesiastical pretension is rising to such a height. The church, falsely so called, is opening her bosom with delusive tenderness, and inviting poor sin-burdened, world-sick, and heavy-laden souls to take refuge therein. She with crafty liberality, throws open her treasury door, and places her resources at the disposal of needy, craving, yearning souls. And truly those resources have powerful attractions for those who are not on "The Rock." There is an ordained priesthood, professing to stand in an unbroken line with the apostles. — Alas! how different the two ends of the line! — There is a continual sacrifice. Alas! a blood-less one, and therefore a worthless one. (Heb. 9: 22) — There is a splendid ritual. Alas! it seeks its origin amid the shadows of a by-gone age — shadows which have been for ever displaced by the Person, the work, and the offices of the eternal Son of God. For ever be His peerless name adored.

The believer has a very conclusive answer to all the pretensions and promises of the Romish system. He can say he has found his all in a crucified and risen Saviour. What does He want with the sacrifice of the mass? He is washed in the blood of Christ. What does he want with a poor, sinful, dying priest, who cannot save himself? He has the Son of God as his priest. What does he want with a pompous ritual, with all its imposing adjuncts? He worships in spirit and in truth, within the holiest of all, whither he enters with boldness, through the blood of Jesus.

Nor is it merely with Roman Catholicism we have to do in the establishment of our first point. We fear there are thousands besides Roman Catholics who, in heart, look to the church, if not for salvation, at least to be a stepping-stone thereto. Hence the importance of seeing clearly that the materials of which God's assembly is composed are those possessing salvation or eternal life; so that whatever be the object of that assembly, it most certainly is not to provide salvation for its members. seeing that all its members are saved ere they enter its precincts at all. God's assembly is a houseful of salvation from one end to the other. Blessed fact! It is not an institution set on foot for the purpose of providing salvation for sinners, nor yet for providing for their religious wants. It is a saved, living body formed and gathered by the Holy Ghost, to make known to "Principalities and powers in the heavenlies, the manifold wisdom of God," and to declare to the whole universe the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus.

Now, the great enemy of Christ and the church is well aware of what a powerful testimony the assembly of God is called and designed to yield on the earth; and therefore he has put forth all his hellish energy to quash that testimony in every possible way. He hates the name of Jesus, and everything tending to glorify that name. Hence his intense opposition to the assembly as a whole, and to each local expression thereof, wherever it may happen to exist. He has no objection to a mere religious establishment set on foot for the purpose of providing for man's religious wants, whether maintained by government or by voluntary effort. You may set up what you please. You may join what you please. You may be what you please; anything and everything for Satan but a practical expression of the assembly of God. That he hates most cordially, and will seek to blacken and blast by every means in his power. But those consolatory accents of the Lord Christ fall with divine power on the ear of faith: "On this Rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

2. This conducts us naturally to our second point, namely, What is the centre round which God's assembly is gathered? The centre is

Christ — the living Stone, as we read in the Epistle of Peter, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priest hood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2: 4, 5) It is around the Person of a living Christ, then, that God's assembly is gathered. It is not round a doctrine, however true; nor round an ordinance, however important; but round a living divine Person. This is a great cardinal and vital point which must be distinctly seized, tenaciously held, and faithfully and constantly avowed and carried out. "To whom coming." It is not said "To which coming." We do not come to a thing, but to a Person; "Let us go forth therefore unto him." (Heb. 13) The Holy Ghost leads us only to Jesus. Nothing short of this will avail. We may speak of joining a church, becoming a member of a congregation, attaching ourselves to a party, a cause, or an interest. All these expressions tend to darken and confuse the mind, and hide from our view the divine idea of the assembly of God. It is not our business to join anything. When God converted us, He joined us by His Spirit to Christ, and that should be enough for us. Christ is the only centre of God's assembly.

And, we may ask, is not He sufficient? Is it not quite enough for us to be "joined to the Lord?" Why add aught thereto? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18: 20) What more can we possibly need? If Jesus is in our midst, why should we think of setting up a human president? Why not unanimously and heartily allow Him to take the president's seat, and bow to Him in all things? Why set up human authority, in any shape or form, in the house of God? But this is done, and it is well to speak plainly about it. Man is set up in that which professes to be an assembly of God. We see human authority exercised in that sphere in which divine authority alone should be acknowledged. It matters not, so far as the foundation principle is concerned, whether it be pope, parson, priest, or president. It is man set up in Christ's place. It may be the pope appointing a cardinal, a legate, or a bishop to his sphere of work; or it may be a president appointing a man to exhort or to "pray for ten minutes. The principle is one and the same. It is human authority acting in that sphere where only God's authority should be owned. If Christ be in our midst, we can count on Him for every thing. Now, in saying this, we anticipate a very probable objection. It may be said by the advocates of human authority, "How could an assembly ever get on without some human presidency? Would it not lead to all sorts of confusion? Would it not open the door for everyone to intrude himself upon the assembly, quite irrespective of gift or qualification? Should we not have men popping up on all occasions, and worrying us with their empty twaddle and tiresome rodomontade?"

Our answer is a very simple one. Jesus is all-sufficient. We can trust Him to keep order in His house. We feel ourselves far safer in His gracious and powerful hand than in the hands of the most attractive human president. We have all spiritual gifts treasured up in Jesus. He is the fountain head of all ministerial authority. "He hath the seven stars." Let us only confide in Him, and the order of our assembly will be as perfectly provided for as the salvation of our souls. This is just the reason of our connecting, in the title of this pamphlet, "The all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus" with the "Assembly of God." We believe that the name of Jesus is, in very truth, all-sufficient, not only for personal salvation, but for all the exigencies of the assembly — for worship, communion, ministry, discipline, government, everything. Having Him, we have all and abound. This is the real marrow and substance of our subject. Our one aim and object is to exalt the name of Jesus; and we believe He has been dishonoured in that which calls itself His house. He has been dethroned, and man's authority has been set up. In vain does He bestow a ministerial gift; the possessor of that gift dare not exercise it without the seal, the sanction, and the authority of man. And not only is this so, but if man thinks proper to give his seal, his sanction and authority, to one possessing not a particle of spiritual gift — yea, it may be, not a particle of spiritual life — he is nevertheless a recognized minister. In short, man's authority without Christ's gift makes a man a minister; whereas Christ's gift without man's authority does not. If this be not a dishonour done to the Lord Christ, what is?

Christian reader, pause here, and deeply ponder this principle of human authority. We confess we are anxious you should get to the root of it, and judge it thoroughly, in the light of holy scripture, and the presence of God. It is, be assured of it, the grand point of distinction between the principles of the assembly of God and every human system of religion under the sun. If you look at all those systems, from Romanism down to the most refined form of religious association, you will find man's authority recognized and demanded. With that you may minister, without it you must not. On the contrary, in the assembly of God, Christ's gift alone makes a man a minister, apart from all human authority. "Not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." (Gal. 1: 1) This is the grand principle of ministry in the assembly of God. Now, in classing Romanism with all the other religious systems of the day, let it, once for all, be distinctly understood that it is only in reference to the principle of ministerial authority. God forbid that we should think of comparing a system which shuts out the word of God, and teaches idolatry, the worship of saints and angels, and a whole mass of gross and abominable error and superstition, with those systems where the word of God is held up, and more or less of scriptural truth promulgated. Nothing can be further from our thoughts. We believe popery to be Satan's master-piece, in the way of a religious system, although "many of the people of God have been, and may yet be, involved therein. Further, let us at this stage most clearly aver that we believe the saints of God are to be found in every Protestant community, both as ministers and members; and that the Lord uses them in many ways — blesses their work, service, and personal testimony. And, finally, we feel it right to declare that we would not move a finger to touch any one of those systems. It is not with the systems we have to do; the Lord " will deal with them. Our business is with the saints in those systems, to seek by every spiritual and scriptural agency to get them to own and act upon the divine principles of the assembly of God.

Having said thus much, in order to prevent misunderstanding, we return with increased power to our point, namely, that the thread of human authority runs through every religious system in Christendom, and that, in good truth, there is not a hair's breadth of consistent standing ground between the church of Rome and a true expression of the assembly of God. We believe that an honest seeker after truth, setting out from amid the dark shadows of popery, cannot possibly halt until he finds himself in the clear and blessed light of that which is a true expression of the assembly of God. He may take years to travel over the intervening space. His steps may be slow and measured; but if only he follows the light, in simplicity and godly sincerity, he will find no rest between those two extremes. The ground of the assembly of God is the true position for all the children of God. Alas! they are not all there; but this is only their loss and their Lord's dishonour. They should be there because not only is God there, but He is allowed to act and rule there.

This latter is of all-importance, inasmuch as it may be truly said, Is not God everywhere? And does He not act in various places? True, He is everywhere, and He works in the midst of palpable error and evil. But He is not allowed to rule in the systems of men, seeing

that man's authority is really supreme, as we have already shown. And in addition to this, if the fact of God's converting and blessing souls in a system be a reason why we should be there, then we ought to be in the church of Rome, for how many have been converted and blessed in that awful system? Even in the recent revival we have heard of persons being stricken in Roman Catholic chapels. What proves too much proves nothing at all, and hence no argument can be based on the fact of God's working in a place. He! is sovereign, and may work where He pleases. We are to be subject to His authority, and work where we are commanded. My Master may go where He pleases, but I must go where I am told. But some may ask, "Is there no danger of incompetent men intruding their ministry upon an assembly of God? And in the event of this, where is the difference between that assembly and the systems of men?" We reply, assuredly there is very great danger. But then such a thing would be despite, not in virtue, of the principle. This makes all the difference. Alas! Alas! we have seen mistakes and failures which are most humiliating. Let no one imagine that, while we contend for the truth concerning the assembly of God, we are at all ignorant or forgetful of the dangers and trials to which any carrying out its principles are exposed. Far from it. No one could be for twenty-eight years on that ground without being painfully conscious of the difficulty of maintaining it. But then the very trials, dangers, and difficulties only prove to be so many proofs — painful if you please, but proofs of the truth of the position; and were there no remedy but an appeal to human authority — a setting up of man in Christ's place — a return to worldly systems, we should without hesitation pronounce the remedy to be far worse than the disease. For were we to adopt the remedy, we should have the very worst symptoms of the disease, not to be mourned over as disease, but gloried in as the fruits of so-called order.

But, blessed be God, there is a remedy. What is it? "There am I in their midst." This is enough. It is not, "There is a pope, a priest, a parson, or a president in their midst, at their head, in the chair, or in the pulpit." No thought of such a thing, from cover to cover of the New Testament. Even in the assembly at Corinth, where there was most grievous confusion and disorder, the inspired apostle never hints at such a thing as a human president, under any name whatsoever. "God is the author of peace in all the assemblies of the saints." (1 Cor. 14: 33) God was there to keep order. They were to look to Him, not to a man, under any name. To set up man to keep order in God's assembly is sheer unbelief, and an open insult to the Divine Presence. Now, we have been often asked to adduce scripture in proof of the idea of divine presidency in an assembly. We at once reply, "There am I;" and "God is the Author." On these two pillars, even had we no more, we can triumphantly build the glorious truth of divine presidency — a truth which must deliver all, who receive and hold it from God, from every system of man, call it by what name you please. It is, in our judgement, impossible to recognize Christ as the centre and sovereign ruler in the assembly, and continue to sanction the setting up of man. When once we have tasted the sweetness of being under Christ, we can never again submit to the servile bondage of being under man. This is not insubordination or impatience of control. It is only the utter refusal to bow to a false authority — to sanction a sinful usurpation. The moment we see man usurping authority in that which calls itself the church, we simply ask, "Who are you?" and retire to a sphere where God alone is acknowledged.

"But, then, there are errors, evils, and abuses even in this very sphere." Doubtless; but if there are, we have God to correct them. And hence, if an assembly should be troubled by the intrusion of ignorant and foolish men — men who have never yet measured themselves in the presence of God — men who boldly overleap the wide domain over which common sense, good taste, and moral propriety preside, and then vainly talk of being led by the Holy Ghost — restless men, who will be at something, and who keep the assembly in a continual state of nervous apprehension, not knowing what is to come next — should any assembly be thus grievously afflicted, what should they do? Abandon the ground in impatience, chagrin, and disappointment? give all up as a myth, a fable, an idle chimera? go back to that from which they once came out? Alas! this is what some have done, thus proving that they never understood what they were doing, or, if they understood it, that they had not faith to pursue it. May the Lord have mercy upon such, and open their eyes that they may see from whence they have fallen, and get a true view of the assembly of God, in contrast with the most attractive of the systems of men. But what is an assembly to do when abuses creep in? Simply look to Christ as the Lord of His house. Own Him in His proper place. Bring the name of Jesus to bear upon the abuse, whatever it be. Will; any say this is not enough? Has it ever been tried and proved ineffectual? We do not, and cannot, believe it. And, most assuredly we can say, if the name of Jesus is not enough, we shall never betake ourselves to man and his miserable order. We shall never, God being our helper, erase that peerless name from the standard round which the Holy Ghost has convened us, to place the perishable name of a mortal in its stead. We are fully aware of the immense difficulties and painful trials connected with any expression of the assembly of God. We believe its difficulties and trials are perfectly characteristic. There is nothing under the canopy of heaven that the devil hates as he hates such an assembly. He will leave no stone unturned to oppose it. We have seen this exemplified again and again. An evangelist may go to a place and preach the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus for the salvation of the soul, and he will have thousands hanging on his lips. Let the same man return, and, while he preaches the same gospel, take another step and proclaim the all-sufficiency of that same Jesus for all the exigencies of an assembly of believers, and he will find himself opposed on all hands. Why is this? Because the devil hates the very feeblest expression of the assembly of God. You may see a town left for ages and generations to its dark and dull routine of religious formalism — a dead people, gathering once a week, to hear a dead man go through a dead service, and all the rest of the week living in sin and folly. There is not a breath of life, not a leaf stirring. The devil likes it well. But let some one come and unfurl the standard of the name of Jesus — Jesus for the soul and Jesus for the assembly — and you will soon see a mighty change. The rage of hell is excited, and the dark and dreadful tide of opposition rises.

This, we most fully believe, is the true secret of many of the bitter attacks that have been recently made on those who maintain the principles of the assembly of God. No doubt we have to mourn over many mistakes, errors, and failures. We have given much occasion to the adversary, by our follies and inconsistencies. We have been a poor blotted epistle, a faint and feeble witness, a flickering light. For all this, we have to be deeply humbled before our God. Nothing could be more unbecoming in us than pretension or assumption, or the putting forth of high-sounding ecclesiastical titles or claims. The dust is our place. Yes, beloved brethren, the place of confession and self judgement becomes us, in the presence of our God.

Still, we are not to let slip the glorious principles of the assembly of God because we have so shamefully failed in carrying them out: we are not to judge the truth by our exhibition of it, but to judge our exhibition by the truth. It is one thing to occupy divine ground,

and another thing to carry ourselves properly thereon; and while it is perfectly right to judge our practice by our principles, yet truth is truth for all that, and we may rest assured that the devil hates the truth which characterises the assembly. A mere handful of poor people, gathered in the name of Jesus to break bread, is a thorn in the side of the devil. True it is that such an assembly evokes the wrath of men, inasmuch as it throws their office and authority overboard, and they cannot bear that. Yet we believe the root of the whole matter will be found in Satan's hatred of the special testimony which such an assembly bears to the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus for every possible need of the saints of God.

This is a truly noble testimony, and we earnestly long to see it more faithfully carried out. We may fully count upon intense opposition. It will be with us as it was with the returned captives in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. We may expect to encounter many a Rehun and many a Sanballat. Nehemiah might have gone and built any other wall in the whole world but the wall of Jerusalem, and Sanballat would never have molested him. But to build the wall of Jerusalem was an unpardonable offence. And why? Just because Jerusalem was God's earthly centre, round which He will yet gather the restored tribes of Israel. This was the secret of the enemy's opposition. And mark the affected contempt. "If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." And yet Sanballat and his allies were not able to break it down. They might cause it to cease because of the Jews' lack of faith and energy; but they could not break it down when God would have it up. How like is this to the present moment! Surely there is nothing new under the sun. There is affected contempt, but real alarm. And, oh! if those who are gathered in the name of Jesus were only more true in heart to their blessed centre, what testimony there would be! What power! What victory! How it would tell on all around. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." There is nothing like this under the sun, be it ever so feeble and contemptible. The Lord be praised for raising up such a witness for Himself in these last days. May He greatly increase its effectiveness, by the power of the Holy Ghost!

3. We must now very briefly glance at our third point, namely, what is the power by which the assembly is gathered. Here again man and his doings are set aside. It is not man's will choosing; nor man's reason discovering; nor man's judgement dictating; nor man's conscience demanding: it is the Holy Ghost gathering souls to Jesus. As Jesus is the only centre, so the Holy Ghost is the only gathering power. The one is as independent of man as the other. It is "where two or three are gathered." It does not say "where two or three are met." Persons may meet together round any centre, on any ground, by any influence, and merely form a society, an association, a community. But the Holy Ghost gathers souls to Jesus on the ground of salvation; and this is the principle of the assembly of God.

An assembly may not embrace all the saints of God in a locality, but may yet be really on the ground of the assembly of God, when nothing else is. It may consist of but "two or three," and there may be hundreds of Christians in the various religious systems around; yet the "two or three" would be on the ground of the assembly of God.

This is a very simple truth. A soul led by the Holy Ghost will gather only to the name of Jesus; and if we gather to aught else, be it a point of truth, or some ordinance or another, we are not in that matter led by the Holy Ghost. It is not a question of life or salvation. Thousands are saved by Christ that do not own Him as their Centre. They are gathered to some form of church government, some favourite doctrine, some special ordinance, some gifted man. The Holy Ghost will never gather to any one of these. He gathers only to a risen Christ. This is true of the whole church of God upon earth; and each local assembly, wherever convened, should be the expression of the whole.

Now, the power in an assembly will very much depend upon the measure in which each member thereof is gathered in integrity of heart to the name of Jesus. If I am gathered to a party holding peculiar opinions — if I am attracted by the people, or by the teaching — if, in a word, it be not the power of the Holy Ghost, leading me to the true centre of God's assembly, I shall only prove a hindrance, a weight, a cause of weakness. I shall be to an assembly what a waster is to a candle, and instead of adding to the general light and usefulness, I shall do the very reverse.

All this is deeply practical. It should lead to much exercise of heart and self-judgement as to what has drawn me to an assembly. and as to my ways therein. We are fully persuaded that the tone and testimony of an assembly have been greatly weakened by the presence of persons not understanding their position. Some present themselves there because they get teaching and blessing there which they cannot get anywhere else. some come because they like the simplicity of the worship. Others come looking for love. None of these things are up to the mark. We should be in an assembly simply because the name of Jesus is the only standard set up there, and the Holy Spirit has gathered" us thereto.

No doubt ministry is most precious, and we shall have it, in more or less power, where all is ordered aright. So also as to simplicity of worship, we are sure to be simple, and real, and true, when the Divine Presence is realized, and the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost fully owned and submitted to. And as to love, If we go looking for it we shall surely be thoroughly disappointed; but if we are enabled to cultivate and manifest it, we shall be sure to get a great deal more than we expect or deserve. It will generally be found that those persons who are perpetually complaining of want of love in others are utterly failing in love themselves; and, on the other hand, those who are really walking in love will tell you that they receive ten thousand times more than they deserve. Let us remember that the best way to get water out of a dry pump is to pour a little water in. You may work at the handle until you are tired, and then go away in fretfulness and impatience, complaining of that horrible pump; whereas, if you would just pour in a little water, you would get in return a gushing stream to satisfy your utmost desire.

We have but little conception of what an assembly would be were each one distinctly led by the Holy Ghost, and gathered only to Jesus. We should not then have to complain of dull, heavy, unprofitable, trying meetings. We should have no fear of an unhallowed intrusion of mere nature and its restless doings — no making of prayer — no talking for talking's sake — no hymn-book seized to fill a gap. Each one would know his place in the Lord's immediate presence — each gifted vessel would be filled, fitted, and used by the Master's hand — each eye would be directed to Jesus — each heart occupied with Him. If a chapter were read, it would be the very voice of God. If a word were spoken, it would tell with power upon the heart. If prayer were offered, it would lead the soul

into the very presence of God. If a hymn were sung, it would lift the spirit up to God, and be like sweeping the strings of the heavenly harp. We should have no ready-made sermons — no teaching or preaching prayers, as though we would explain doctrines to God, or tell Him a whole host of things about ourselves — no praying at our neighbours, or asking for all manner of graces for them, in which we ourselves are lamentably deficient — no singing for music's sake, or being disturbed if harmony be interfered with. All these evils would be avoided. We should feel ourselves in the very sanctuary of God, and enjoy a foretaste of that time when we shall worship in the courts above, and go no more out.

We may be asked, "Where will you find all this down here?" Ah! this is the question. It is one thing to present a beau ideal on paper, and another thing to realize it in the midst of error, failure, and infirmity. Through mercy, some of us have tasted, at times, a little of this blessedness. We have occasionally enjoyed moments of heaven upon earth. Oh! for more of it! May the Lord, in His great mercy, raise the tone of the assemblies everywhere! May He greatly enlarge our capacity for more profound communion and spiritual worship! May He enable us so to walk, in private life, from day to day — so as to judge ourselves and our ways in His holy presence, that at least we may not prove a lump of lead or a waster to any of God's assemblies.

And then, even though we may not be able to reach in experience the true expression of the assembly, yet let us never be satisfied with anything less. Let us honestly aim at the loftiest standard, and earnestly pray to be lifted up thereto. As to the ground of God's assembly, we should hold it with jealous tenacity, and never consent for an hour to occupy any other. As to the tone and character of an assembly, they may and will vary immensely, and will depend upon the faith and spirituality of those gathered. Where the tone of things is felt to be low — when meetings are felt to be unprofitable — where things are said and done repeatedly which are felt by the spiritual to be wholly out of place, let all who feel it wait on God — wait continually — wait believingly — and He will assuredly hear and answer. In this way the very trials and exercises which are peculiar to an assembly will have the happy effect of casting us more immediately upon Him, and thus the eater will yield meat, and the strong sweetness. We must count upon trials and difficulties in any expression of the assembly, just because it is the right and only divine thing on this earth. The devil will put forth every effort to drive us from that true and holy ground. He will try the patience, try the temper, hurt the feelings, cause offence in nameless and numberless ways — anything and everything to make us forsake the true ground of the assembly.

It is well to remember this. We can only hold the divine ground by faith. This marks the assembly of God, and distinguishes it from every human system. You cannot get on there save by faith. And, further, if you want to be somebody, if you are seeking a place, if you want to exalt self, you need not think of any true expression of the assembly. You will soon find your level there, if it be in any measure what it should be. Fleshly or worldly greatness, in any shape, will be of no account in such an assembly. The Divine Presence withers up everything of that kind, and levels all human pretension. Finally, you cannot get on in the assembly if you are living in secret sin. The Divine Presence will not suit you. Have we not often experienced in the assembly a feeling of uneasiness, caused by the recollection of many things which had escaped our notice during the week? Wrong thoughts — foolish words — unspiritual ways — all these things crowd in upon the mind, and exercise the conscience, in the assembly! How is this? Because the atmosphere of the assembly is more intense than that which we have been breathing during the week. We have not been in the presence of God in our private walk. We have not been judging ourselves; and hence, when we take our place in a spiritual assembly, our hearts are detected — our ways are exposed in the light; and that exercise which ought to have gone on in private — even the needed exercise of self judgement, must go on at the table of the Lord. This is poor miserable work for us, but it proves the power of the presence of God in the assembly. Things must be in a miserably low state in any assembly when hearts are not thus detected and exposed. It is a fine evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit in an assembly when careless, carnal, worldly, self-exalting, money-loving, unprincipled persons are compelled to judge themselves in God's presence, or, failing this, are driven away by the spirituality of the atmosphere. Such an assembly is no place for these. They can breathe more freely outside.

Now, we cannot but judge that numbers that have departed from the ground of the assembly have done so because their practical ways did not comport with the purity of the place. No doubt it is easy, in all such cases, to find an excuse in the conduct of those who are left behind. But if the roots of things were in every case laid bare, we should find that many leave an assembly because of inability or reluctance to bear its searching light. "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever." Evil must be judged, for God cannot sanction it. If an assembly can, it is not practically God's assembly at all, though composed of Christians, as we say. To pretend to be an assembly of God, and not judge false doctrine and evil ways, would involve the blasphemy of saying that God and wickedness can dwell together. The assembly of God must keep itself pure, because it is His dwelling-place. Men may sanction evil, and call it liberality and large-heartedness so to do; but the house of God must keep itself pure. Let this great practical truth sink down into our hearts, and produce its sanctifying influence upon our course and character.

4. A very few words will suffice to set forth, in the last place, "the authority" on which the assembly is gathered. It is the word of God alone. The charter of the assembly is the eternal word of the living and true God. It is not the traditions, the doctrines, nor the commandments of men. A passage of scripture, to which we have more than once referred in the progress of this paper, contains at once the standard round which the assembly is gathered, the power by which it is gathered, and the authority by which it is gathered — "the name of Jesus" — "the Holy Ghost" — "the word of God." Now these are the same all over the world. Whether I go to New Zealand, to Australia, to Canada, to London, to Paris, to Edinburgh, or Dublin, the centre, the gathering power, and the authority are one and the same. We can own no other centre but Christ; no gathering energy but the Holy Ghost; no authority but the word of God; no characteristic but holiness of life and soundness in doctrine.

Such is a true expression of the assembly of God, and we cannot acknowledge aught else. Saints of God we can acknowledge, love, and honour as such, wherever we find them; but human systems we look upon as dishonouring to Christ, and hostile to the true interest of the saints of God. We long to see all Christians on the true ground of the assembly. We believe it to be the place of real blessing and effective testimony. We believe there is a character of testimony yielded by carrying out the principles of the assembly which could not be yielded were that assembly broken up, and each member a Whitefield in evangelistic power. We say

this not to lower evangelistic work. God forbid. We would that all were Whitefields. But then we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that many affect to despise the assembly, under the plea of going out as evangelists; and when we trace their path, and examine the results of their work, we find that they have no provision for the souls that have been converted by their means. They seem not to know what to do with them. They quarry the stones, but do not build them together. The consequence is that souls are scattered hither and thither, some pursuing a desultory course, others living in isolation, all at fault as to true church ground. Now, we believe that all these should be gathered on the ground of the assembly of God, to have "fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayer." They should 'come together on the first day of the "week, to break bread," looking to the Lord Christ to edify them by the mouth of whom He will. This is the simple path — the normal, the divine idea, needing, it may be, more faith to realize it, because of the clashing and conflicting sects of the present day, but not the less simple and true on that account. We are aware of course, that all this will be pronounced proselytising, prejudice, and party spirit, by those who seem to regard it as the very beau ideal of Christian liberality and large-heartedness to be able to say, "I belong to nothing." Strange, anomalous position! It just resolves itself in this: it is somebody professing nothingism in order to get rid of all responsibility, and go with all and everything. This is a very easy path for nature, and amiable nature, but we shall see what will come of it in the day of the Lord? Even now we regard it as positive unfaithfulness to Christ, from which may the good Lord deliver His people.

But let none imagine that we want to place the evangelist and the assembly in opposition. Nothing is further from our thoughts. The evangelist should go forth from the bosom of the assembly, in full fellowship therewith; he should work not only to gather souls to Christ, but also bring them to an assembly, where divinely-gifted pastors might watch over them, and divinely-gifted teachers instruct them. We do not want to clip the evangelist's wings, but only to guide his movements. We are unwilling to see real spiritual energy expended in desultory service. No doubt it is a grand result to bring souls to Christ. Every soul linked to Jesus is a work done for ever. But ought not the lambs and sheep to be gathered and cared for? Should anyone be satisfied to purchase sheep, and then leave them to wander whithersoever they list? Surely not. But whither should Christ's sheep be gathered? Is it into the folds of man's erection, or into an assembly gathered on divine ground? Into the latter unquestionably; for that, we may rest assured, how ever feeble, however despised, however blackened and maligned, is the place for all the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ.

Here, however, there will be responsibility, care, anxiety, labour, a constant demand for watchfulness and prayer; all of which flesh and blood would like to avoid, if possible. There is much that is agreeable and attractive in the idea of going through the world as an evangelist, having thousands hanging on one's lips, and hundreds of souls as the seals of one's ministry: but what is to be done with these souls? By all means show them their true place with those gathered on the ground of the assembly of God, where, notwithstanding the ruin and apostasy of the professing body, they can enjoy spiritual communion, worship, and ministry. This will involve much trial and painful exercise. It was so in apostolic times. Those who really cared for the flock of Christ had to shed many a tear, send up many an agonising prayer, spend many a sleepless night. But, then, in all these things, they tasted the sweetness of fellowship with the chief Shepherd; and when He appears, their tears, their prayers, their sleepless nights will be remembered and rewarded; while those who are building up human systems will find them all come to an end, to be heard of no more for ever, and the false shepherds, who ruthlessly seize the pastoral staff only to use it as an instrument of filthy gain to themselves, shall have their faces covered with everlasting confusion.

Here we might close, were it not that we are anxious to answer three queries which may possibly suggest themselves to the reader's mind. And, in the first place, we may be asked, "Where are we to find this thing that you call 'A true expression of the assembly of God,' from the days of the apostles up to the nineteenth century? And where are we to find it now?" Our answer is simply to point to the words of Christ — "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." It matters but little to us if Neander, Mosheim, Milner, and scores of ecclesiastical historians besides have failed, in their interesting researches, in discerning a single trace of the true expression of God's assembly, from the close of the apostolic era to the opening of the current century. It is quite possible there may have been here and there, amid the thick gloom of the middle ages, "two or three" really "gathered in the name of Jesus," or at least those that sighed after the truth of such a thing. But, be this as it may, it leaves that truth wholly untouched. It is not on the records of historians that we build, but on the infallible truth of God's word; and therefore, although it could be proved that for eighteen hundred years there were not even "two or three gathered in the name of Jesus," it would not in the smallest degree affect the question. The word is not, "What saith the ecclesiastical historian?" but "What saith the scripture?"

[The vast gold fields of Australia and California lay concealed from man's view for thousands of years. Does this fact render the gold less precious to those who have now discovered it?] If there be any force in the argument founded on history, it would apply equally to the precious institution of the Lord's supper. For how did it fare with that ordinance for over a thousand years? It was stripped of one of its grand elements, wrapped in a dead language, buried in a sepulchre of superstition, and bore this inscription, "A bloodless sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead." And even when, at the time of the Reformation, the Bible was once more permitted to speak to man's conscience, and pour its living light upon the sepulchre in which the Eucharist lay buried, what was produced? Under what form does the Lord's supper appear before us in the Lutheran church? Under the form of consubstantiation. Luther denied that there was any change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ; but he maintained, and that, too, in fierce and unbending opposition to the Swiss divines, that there was a mysterious presence of Christ with the bread and wine. Well, then, should we not have the Lord's supper celebrated in our midst, according to the order laid down in the New Testament? Ought we to lend our countenance to the sacrifice of the mass, or consubstantiation, because the true idea of the Eucharist seems to have been lost to the professing church for so many ages? Surely not. What are we to do? Take the New Testament and see what it says on the point — bow in reverent submission to its authority — spread the Lord's table in its divine simplicity, and celebrate the feast according to the order laid down by our Lord and Master, who said to His disciples, and therefore to us, "This do in remembrance of me." But, again, we may be asked, "Is it not worse than useless to seek to carry out the principles of the assembly of God, seeing that the professing church is in such complete ruin?" We reply by asking, "Are we to be disobedient because the church is in ruin? Are we to continue in error because the dispensation has failed?" Surely not. We own the ruin, mourn over it, confess it, take our

share in it, and in its sad consequences, seek to walk softly and humbly in the midst of it, confessing ourselves to be most unfaithful and unworthy. But though we have failed, Christ has not failed. He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself. He has promised to be with His people to the end of the age. Matthew 18: 20 holds as good today as it did eighteen hundred years ago. "Let God be true and every man a liar." We utterly repudiate the idea of men setting about church-making, or pretending to ordain ministers. We look upon it as a pure assumption, without a single shadow of scripture authority. It is God's work to gather His church and raise up ministers. We have no business to form ourselves into a church, or to ordain office-bearers. No doubt the Lord is very gracious, tender, and pitiful. He bears with our weakness, and overrules our mistakes, and where the heart is true to Him, even though in ignorance, He will assuredly lead on into higher light.

But we must not use God's grace as a plea for unscriptural acting, any more than we should use the church's ruin as a plea for sanctioning error. We have to confess the ruin, count on the grace, and act in simple obedience to the word of the Lord. Such is the path of blessing at all times. The remnant, in the days of Ezra, did not pretend to the power and splendour of Solomon's days, but they obeyed the word of Solomon's Lord, and they were abundantly blessed in their deed. They did not say, "Things are in ruin, and therefore we had better remain in Babylon, and do nothing." No; they simply confessed their own and their people's sin, and counted on God. This is precisely what we are to do. We are to own the ruin, and count on God.

Finally, if we be asked, "Where is the true expression of this assembly of God now?" We reply, "Where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus." And be it carefully noted, that in order to reach divine results there must be divine conditions. "To lay claim to the latter without the former is only an empty conceit. If we are not really gathered in the name of Jesus, we have no right to expect that He will be in our midst; and if He be not in our midst our assembly will be a poor affair. But it is our happy privilege to be assembled in such wise as to enjoy His blessed presence amongst us; and having Him, we do not need to set up a poor mortal to preside over us. Christ is Lord of His own house; let no mortal dare to usurp His place. When an assembly is convened for worship, God presides in its midst, and if He be fully owned, the current of communion, worship, and edification will flow on without a ripple and without a curve.* All will be in lovely harmony. But if the flesh be suffered to act, it will grieve and quench the Spirit, and spoil everything. Flesh must be judged in the assembly, just as it should be judged in our individual walk from day to day. But we have to remember that errors and failures in the assembly are no more to be used as arguments against the truth of the divine Presence there, than are our individual failures and errors to be used against the admitted truth of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the believer.

{*We must remember there is a very material difference between those occasions on which the assembly is gathered for worship, and other special services. In these latter the evangelist or the teacher, the preacher or the lecturer, serves in his individual capacity, in responsibility to his Lord. Nor does it make any difference whether such services are conducted in the rooms usually occupied by the assembly or elsewhere. Those forming the assembly may be present or not, as they feel disposed. But when the assembly, as such, is gathered for worship, for one man however gifted, to assume a place, would be to quench the Spirit.}

"Are you the people, then?" some one may say. Well, the question is not, Are we the people? but are we on divine ground? If we are not, the sooner we abandon our position the better. That there is a divine ground, notwithstanding all the darkness and confusion, will hardly be denied. God has not left His people under the necessity of abiding in connection with error and evil. And how are we to know whether we are on divine ground or not? Simply by the divine word. Let us honestly and seriously test everything with which we stand connected by the standard of scripture, and if it cannot abide the trial, let us abandon it at once. Yes, at once. If we pause to reason or weigh consequences we shall surely miss our way. Pause, certainly, to make yourself sure of the mind of the Lord; but never pause to reason when once you have ascertained it. The Lord never gives light for two steps at a time. He gives us light, and when we act on that He gives us more. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Precious, soul-stirring motto "More and more." There is no halting — no standing still — no resting in attainment. It is "more and more," until we are ushered into the full-orbed light of the perfect day of glory.

Reader, are you assembled on this divine ground? If so, cling to it with your whole soul. Are you in this path? If so, press on with all the energies of your moral being. Never be content with anything short of His dwelling in you, and your conscious nearness to Him. Let not Satan rob you of your proper portion by leading you to rest in a mere name. Let him not tempt you to mistake your ostensible position. for your real condition. Cultivate secret communion — secret prayer — constant self judgement. Be especially on your guard against every form of spiritual pride. Cultivate lowliness, meekness, and brokenness of spirit tenderness of conscience, in your own private walk Seek to combine the sweetest grace towards others with the boldness of a lion where truth is concerned. Then will you be a blessing in the assembly of God, and an effective witness of the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus.

C. H. M.

(Amplified Bible; Joyce Meyers; 2006; Faith Words; Scripture; Commentaries; pages 782-784)

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