

What I Have Found

My Introduction to the “brethren” Assemblies

By: Mark Frees

It is my privilege in this little booklet to introduce the reader to the assemblies of Christian believers sometimes referred to as “Plymouth Brethren.” I write with some hesitation, for my last desire is to exalt man or any group of men. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to share with others the blessing I myself have received from fellow-ship with this dear company of God’s people.

For six years I pastored churches in a major denomination, having also been born, brought to Christ, and reared in that denomination, by and large a gospel-preaching, Bible-believing denomination. However, personal study of the New Testament teaching concerning the church and the ministry led me to question deeply whether many of the traditions and methods of our churches were Scriptural. At the same time I was gaining an increasing awareness of these simple assemblies of believers, whose beliefs and practices matched to a surprising degree the convictions I was developing through searching the Scriptures. After much prayer and agonizing, I felt led of the Spirit-much to the dismay of some-to resign my position as pastor, leave my denomination, and begin to meet with a small group of these brothers and sisters. I have not once regretted this step, nor can I adequately express how greatly I and my family have been blessed by it. I feel it would be both ungrateful and selfish to keep this discovery to myself, particularly since many Christians, though sensing something amiss in their own church traditions, are wholly unaware of even the existence of these assemblies meeting in Scriptural fashion.

“Plymouth Brethren” is a name given by others to the assemblies, not one adopted or recognized by themselves. For they consider themselves simply believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, gathered without denominational titles in His name alone. If the use of a label is necessary, the simple term “brethren” is preferred, since this is not an exclusive name, but one that can be applied equally to all true believers. For sake of convenience we will refer to them as “brethren” assemblies. The quotation marks and the absence of a capital “B” are meant to emphasize that this is not a denomination, nor is it to be mistaken for any denomination (such as the Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ, United Brethren, etc.). The “brethren” to which we refer are Christians meeting in New Testament simplicity, recognizing their essential unity with all others in the Body of Christ, regardless of denominational or local church affiliation.

The movement began in Great Britain in the early 1800’s (Plymouth, England being one of the first and largest centers of the work) as a withdrawal from the denominational structures and man-made traditions that dominated Christendom. Despite their beginnings as a somewhat despised little flock, the “brethren” quickly made an indelible mark upon evangelical Christianity. Many of the themes common place to Bible-believing Christians today, such as the blessed hope of Christ’s imminent return, the clear distinction between law and grace, the unique position of the Church in God’s purposes, the future blessing of Israel, etc., are truths that were largely recovered from obscurity and popularized by “brethren” writers and Bible teachers: J.N. Darby, F.W. Grant, H.A. Ironside, William Kelly, C.H. Mackintosh, Samuel Ridout, W.E. Vine, and many others. It is impossible to overestimate the impact these godly and gifted men have had on evangelical beliefs through the years. I mention this, not to exalt these men or the “brethren” movement, but because one hearing for the first time about these assemblies might mistakenly think they are another extreme sect, or even a cult, to be avoided. Not so; rather they have played a key role in the history of Bible-believing Christianity over the past two centuries, and they continue to hold without question to the fundamental doctrines of the faith: the deity of Christ, His sacrificial death, bodily resurrection and literal return, salvation through faith alone, the verbal inspiration of Scripture, etc.

The assemblies are by no means perfect representations of New Testament Christianity, nor is their history without the imprint of human foibles and weakness, for the local gatherings, after all, are composed of imperfect saints, and the movement as a whole has had its share of unfortunate quarrels and division. No one is more keenly aware of this than the “brethren” themselves. Many of the statements I make about them in this booklet

are things they themselves would be very hesitant to claim. This is as it should be, for our Lord said, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory." But as a relative newcomer to the assemblies, I feel I am in a position to speak freely about what I have found without danger of self-aggrandizement. Since I write by way of personal testimony, I do not feel compelled to deal in a systematic way with the beliefs and practices of the assemblies. Rather, I want to comment on four specific characteristics that I have found particularly noteworthy and refreshing.

1. Elimination of the "clergy" as a separate class of believers.

In the simplicity of the early Church, as any honest reader of the New Testament will affirm, there was no such thing as a professional "clergy." The thought of an assembly of believers being led by one man, with ministerial "credentials" and professional training, serving for a stipulated salary--all this is utterly foreign to the New Testament. Rather, the New Testament pattern is that the church is to be led, from the human standpoint, not by a solitary pastor, but by a group of men, normally designated "elders" or "overseers" in the New Testament. Furthermore, the clear implication is that these elders generally are to be raised up by God within the local bodies, not hired or imported by the churches from without.

This pattern the assemblies attempt to uphold, and it was this primarily that first attracted me to them. While serving in the traditional role of "pastor" of a denominational church, my study of the New Testament led me to believe that I was occupying essentially a non-Scriptural position. With the New Testament pattern in front of me, I began to see with new eyes some of the tragic results that have come as a result of churches embracing whole-sale a non-Scriptural pattern of church leadership. Many local church pastors are godly and dedicated men, but the clerical system--this deplorable division of the saints into "clergy" and "laity"--has wreaked untold havoc on the Church of God.

One famous coach defined the game of football as, "22 men on the field in desperate need of rest, surrounded by 50,000 spectators in desperate need of exercise." A similar state of affairs exists in most churches today, because of the notion that one must have professional credentials to publicly preach and teach the Word of God or to shepherd the flock of God. Thus the potentially mighty army of God is neatly subdivided into a handful of active duty soldiers and a vast company of spectators, "lay people," who cheer the soldiers on with their attendance at meetings and their financial support.

Now in all fairness I should say that many pastors deplore this state of affairs as much as anybody. They see their role, not as monopolizing the work of the ministry, but as equipping the saints to share in the ministry. This desired result, however, rarely comes to pass, the reason being that the clergy-laity distinction is the great demobilizer of the saints. The perception is simply too deeply ingrained that certain elements of Christian work are reserved for a special "called" few. On one occasion, as I began to see the New Testament truth concerning these things, I shared *my* burden with some of the men of the church, suggesting that others besides the "pastor" should be involved, for instance, in preaching and teaching the Word in the public meetings of the church. One of the dear men, in all sincerity, replied, "But Pastor, we haven't studied like you have." My first reaction was to ask, "Why not?" For I can say without hesitation that 99 per cent of what I know of the Bible (and pitifully little it is), I have learned, not from theological seminary, but from personal study of the Scriptures and from the writings of godly men, the same resources every saint of God ought to be taking advantage of on a regular basis. In fact, many theologically-trained men would add their voice to mine in admitting that their seminary training, far from qualifying them to expound the riches of the Word of God, was a soul-withering experience from which they had to recover spiritually before being effective in ministering the Word.

In the assemblies, the spiritual oversight of the flock is exercised by a group of mature, responsible brothers, and public ministry of the Word is shared among various gifted brethren. In addition, there is opportunity at the weekly breaking of bread meeting, as we will see, for any brother, including those who do not regularly minister in public, to share a thought from Scripture. While there are full-time workers among the assemblies--

missionaries, evangelists, Bible teachers-the lion's share of the over-sight of the assemblies and the public ministry each Lord's Day is in the hands of men who spend their weeks in secular vocations.

What, then, is the *qualify* of the public ministry in the assemblies, if handled primarily by men who have never had any formal training in theology or homiletics, and who have never been ordained by any church or denomination? I will give my opinion, and it is that the Bible teaching among the assemblies, while often lacking the polished style and spectator appeal (blessed lack!) of the professional, salaried ministry, is on the whole decidedly superior in content. After all, as another has put it, there is a vast difference between being "learned in the Scriptures" and being clever with the Bible. It is to be feared that the latter is the emphasis in many seminary classrooms and at the desks of many pastors, who are faced with preparing two or three "sermons" a week for audiences basically disinterested in the deep truths of the Word of God. In contrast, the average speaker in a "brethren" assembly may not know that the points in his outline should all begin with the same letter of the alphabet, or even that he is supposed to have an outline at all. He has never been taught that he must have a catchy title, enticing introduction, and forceful conclusion. Being pitifully informed about all this, he knows no better than to simply stand and unfold the Word of God, verse by verse, line by line. His poor listeners, being used to no better, do not seem to realize they have been deprived, perhaps because their ears have been trained by long practice to delight in the truth of Scripture, not the packaging in which it is presented.

Before we leave this topic (about which I have written in more depth in the booklet, *Is the One-Pastor System Scriptural?*), I must mention a most precious spin-off effect I have witnessed from this practice of sharing the public ministry among the men, and that is its effect on the families of the assembly. Who can measure the profound impression made upon a child, week after week, to see his father-not "the preacher," "the pastor," "the minister," but his father-standing and expounding the Word of God, or rising at the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share a simple thought on the glories of Christ at the Lord's table. And is the blessing of it any less profound for the godly wife and mother sitting next to the child? Oh, is not the heart-cry of so many wives today, "If only my husband were more interested in spiritual things"? Is not the overriding need of the family today that of fathers and husbands who are willing and able to grasp the reins of spiritual leadership? Is not this need mirrored in the churches as well?

The distressing thing about us as men is that, while we were created for spiritual leadership, we are by nature lax about assuming it. If women will take the spiritual lead, most men will be content to let them. If a professional pastor is available to do the preaching, teaching, witnessing, counseling, etc., most men will very comfortably slip into the spectator role. In the "brethren" assemblies, though, the men are encouraged, expected, and given the opportunity to exercise their gifts-there is no one else to do it! And they see this modeled before them by other men, whom they know to be neither seminary-trained, ordained, nor paid, ministering the Word, shepherding the flock, and doing other ministry work. It is beautiful to see how under these circumstances men rise to the occasion, with untold benefits accruing to the church and spilling over into the home.

2. Obedience to the teaching of Scripture concerning the role of women in the assembly.

This leads us to another characteristic of the assemblies, one that many find particularly objectionable, and that is their literal obedience to the instructions of Scripture concerning the role of women in the assembly. These instructions are found in such passages as 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, and 1 Timothy 2. They are completely opposite to the spirit of the age; perhaps this is why they are so attacked, ignored, or compromised, even by professed lovers of the Word of God.

The discovery that the wearing of head coverings during meetings is prevalent among the women in the assemblies is a shock and offense to many. It places the assemblies a small step above snake-handling cultists in the minds of some! For our part, my wife and I found in this the final confirmation, as I shall explain, that we should begin to meet with these brothers and sisters. For years we had heard various explanations of the New

Testament teaching on the role of women. Typically, these explanations focused on the local cultural situations that supposedly gave rise to the teaching, such as the alleged prominence of temple harlots in Corinth accounting for Paul's insistence on head coverings and the silence of women in the meetings. These explanations never quite rang true with us. For one thing, it never seemed right that a knowledge of ancient Greco-Roman social history should be prerequisite to a proper interpretation of Scripture, particularly where a culturally-based interpretation appeared to set aside the plain teaching of the passage. At any rate, whenever one of the sisters would rise to address the church in some way, and when, on one occasion, our Sunday School selected a woman to teach a mixed class of men and women, we had a gnawing feeling that all was not as it should be.

This came to a head when one of the precious ladies of the church came to me, disturbed because she had been reading some of the Scriptural teachings in this area. She wanted to know if they meant what they said, and if so, why we were not obeying them! I told her this bothered me too, and that, although I wasn't sure about the proper interpretation of those passages, I would study the matter further and try to arrive at a conclusion. This was during the same period I mentioned earlier, during which I was wrestling with the other facets of the New Testament pattern for the church. My ultimate conclusion was that, yes, all of these Scriptures meant what they said, and only an approach to the Word polluted by tradition and the spirit of the age has kept the Church from taking them at face value. When someone suggests taking literally Scriptures relating to women in the churches, suggests that women are, in fact, to "remain silent" in the meetings and are not permitted to teach, they are likely to hear the rejoinder: "Well then, I suppose you believe women should wear head coverings, too!"-as if, of course, this were a ludicrous thought and the mere mention of it should send one scurrying apologetically for a more enlightened interpretation. In a sense, there is truth to that rejoinder, for to take one clear instruction to the Church literally and not another is patent inconsistency. But is the proper solution to take neither seriously? Is it not rather to submit to both-to all? Now, perhaps, you will understand why we rejoiced to hear of the wearing of head-coverings by the women of the assemblies. It evidenced to us that here at last were believers attempting to conform to the whole of the New Testament pattern for the church, not playing pick and choose. Here were assemblies not frightened off from obeying the Word of God by the fact that their obedience would place them squarely at odds with the prevailing views of worldlings and Christendom alike.

The wearing of head coverings is not something that is rigidly imposed in a legalistic spirit. In most of the assemblies it is done in a sweet, voluntary spirit by the women, who are its strongest proponents. Nor are visitors to the meetings made to feel uncomfortable or compelled to conform in this area. There is no yoke of bondage here. Most of the sisters delight in being allowed in this way to model before the whole church their submission to their "head," and thus the proper submission of the Church to Christ. And by their obedience in this small way, Christ is honored, families are strengthened, young girls are taught the beauty of womanhood, and men are challenged to spiritual headship.

If anyone feels this to be oppressive, let him take the trouble to ask the sisters if they feel oppressed. Let him note their countenances as they explain the beautiful spiritual reality behind this outward expression. Let him observe the behavior of the daughters, and soberly compare their character, maturity, and spirituality with that of their peers. Let him trace in the home life, the marriage life, and the demeanor of the children the influence, not of the wearing of the head-covering itself, but of the dual spirit of joyful submission by the wife and active leadership by the husband which is taught, nurtured, and sustained by this outward symbol. Then let him ask his own heart if these are the fruits one would expect to blossom from an oppressive legalism.

Let him conclude by inquiring of those who nicely set aside the commandment of God by the traditions of men: If the New Testament instructions to women in the churches applied only, in their literal sense, to the specific addressees, in view of certain cultural exigencies, where can the sisters today find authoritative instruction in light of our own cultural emergency? Was the need in first-century Corinth greater than today, with gender roles so hopelessly confused and godly womanhood under concerted and vicious attack such as the world has never seen? If a clear word from the Lord was necessary then, is it not more so now? Indeed it is. And those who are joyfully submitting to the teaching of Scripture in this area are shining like lights in the world in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

3. Exaltation of the Person and Work of Christ

I can say with gratitude that, even before I left the denominational church, it was the brethren writers who taught me to glory in the Person and work of Christ Jesus. Books like *Notes on Leviticus*, by C.H. Mackintosh, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews* and *Lectures on the Tabernacle* by Samuel Ridout, began to foster in me a deep attraction to His Person and a solid doctrinal, rather than sentimental, appreciation of His work; in short, an appetite for Christ in His manifold loveliness that I had never before known. Since casting my lot with the "brethren" I have often had cause to give thanks to God for the constant upholding of the glories of Christ in these humble assemblies of the Lord's people, and to wonder that I was so long content with a shallow, insipid, and sentimental appreciation of Him.

And can it be denied that this accurately describes the view of Christ usually presented in current evangelical preaching, teaching, and literature? Is it not rarely that the presentation of the Cross goes beyond the physical sufferings of Christ and the assertion that "He died for our sins"? The latter is a glorious truth, no question, and perhaps the extent to which sinners can comprehend the work of Christ, but it hardly exhausts the glory of the Cross for the saints. To borrow the imagery of the Levitical offerings, ought we to stop with the trespass offering-though it be a true and blessed aspect of Christ's work-and neglect those aspects of His mighty sacrifice unfolded in the sin-offering, the peace offering, and the burnt-offering? Ah, the burnt offering-highest and most beautiful of all the typical sacrifices! Christ's work presented, not as it affects man, but as it is viewed by God; Christ pictured, not as our sin-bearer, but as the devoted One who delighted to do the will of God, even unto death, and who in turn was the delight of the Father's heart even-yes, especially-in His death. It is Christ through the eternal Spirit offering Himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:14) . Who can fathom the sweetness of that offering's aroma to God! Yet - let the reader be the judge - how often do most believers hear of these things?

If current teaching on Christ's work is shallow and unsatisfying, teaching on His glorious Person is practically non-existent. While most-though by no means all-evangelical believers could, upon questioning, produce the orthodox answer that Christ is both God and Man, I fear that any deeper probing would most certainly produce embarrassing and disturbing results. What of the impeccability of Christ? Could He have sinned? Did His humanity struggle against temptation as we do? Did He lay aside certain attributes of His deity when He "became flesh? " What about His incorruptible manhood? Was it subject to sickness and death? How is His wondrous Person illustrated in the Tabernacle, the offerings of Leviticus, and other Old Testament types? Why are there four Gospels? Which aspect of Christ is particularly presented in each? Even where such questions can be answered with theological correctness, is there a real heart for Christ, a constant gazing upon Him, a deep and daily feeding upon this One who is the "Bread come down from Heaven "?

I desire to tread carefully here, for generalities are always dangerous, and nothing could be more incongruous than boasting about one's apprehension of Christ, whether as an individual or as a group of churches . So I hope the reader will understand the spirit in which I write, and will forgive me if, as one who has been immeasurably blessed, I desire to share that blessing with others. For my personal observation is that, whatever weaknesses may certainly be noted in "brethren " assemblies, there is by and large a keener delight in and apprehension of the Person and work of Christ than can normally be found elsewhere. I understand if the reader should take issue with this statement, and I have never heard any in the assemblies claim this for themselves, but I cannot but speak what I have seen and heard.

One of my first surprises after I began to meet with the small assembly of "brethren " was the arrival of a series of special meetings with a visiting speaker. My background had taught me to expect such events to be preceded by plenty of build-up and promotion, crowned by the arrival of the travelling star preacher, who, if he were not a former professional athlete or an ex-convict, would at least be a riveting speaker, primed to deliver an arsenal of dynamic, well-rehearsed sermons on a variety of topics. If such I expected, I was disappointed, for what I saw was an eager group of believers gathering, uncoaxed and unprodged, to hear an unpretentious servant of Christ give a few warm-hearted messages on the life of our Lord from the book of Mark.

This same spirit I have noted since then expressing itself in many ways. For instance, in a day when Christian bookstores are filled with trendy topical studies, Christian fiction, and secular self-help psychology coated with a thin Christian lacquer, among what other circle of believers could a book written a century and a half ago and entitled, *Short Meditations on the Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ*, still have wide circulation? This simple fascination with Christ has much to do, I believe, with what we will mention next, the breaking of bread as practiced weekly by the assemblies. It is this practice of gathering weekly, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit alone, for the purpose of remembering the Lord in the way He requested that more than anything else, I believe, has given rise to this “brethren” heritage of exaltation of the Person and work of Christ. As we sometimes sing around the Lord’s table:

*Our song then forever shall be
Of the Shepherd who gave Himself thus;
No subject’s so glorious as He,
No theme so affecting to us.*

I say to my brothers and sisters in the assemblies, let us beware lest we be moved away from the simplicity of devotion to Christ. And, while we in one breath give thanks to God for our rich heritage in this, let us in the next confess that we, too, have drunk far too timidly of this vast reservoir. There are whole regions of Christ’s glory that lie unexplored and unappreciated because of our laxity and dullness of spirit. How little we really know of Him! Let us confess our lack, and then let us “follow on to know the Lord!”

4. Weekly remembrance of the Lord through the breaking of bread.

While Scripture gives no hard and fast requirement concerning the frequency of the Lord’s Supper, it is clear that the practice of the New Testament Church was to observe it each Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17., etc.). Not only so, but it was the central focus of their gathering. This was another area I began to be strongly exercised about in my conscience as I studied the New Testament pattern for the Church. Acts 2:42 lists the breaking of bread as one of four items, along with the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, and prayer, to which the early Church “devoted themselves” (NASB). Of how many churches today can it remotely be said that they devote themselves to the breaking of bread? In the church where I pastored, as well as most other churches I knew, the Scriptural phrase, “as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup,” had been amended, for all practical purposes, to “as *seldom* as ye eat this bread and drink this cup.”

When told that “brethren” assemblies follow the New Testament pattern of observing the Lord’s Supper each Lord’s Day, a common reaction by those who have never witnessed this observance in its Scriptural simplicity and beauty is, “I wouldn’t want to have the Lord’s Supper every *week!*” Nor would I, if it were done in the fashion common to most evangelical churches today. Such a stale and staid ritual, encrusted still with remnants of Roman Catholic superstition (such as the necessity of the elements being “administered” by a “clergyman”), could hardly be expected to command the affections of the heart. Looking back on my years in the pastorate, I remember dreading even the paltry three or four times a year when the Lord’s Supper was scheduled. But now, the breaking of bread has become a keen delight, to the point that I feel greatly deprived if forced by circumstances to miss it.

Let me attempt to describe, for those who have never seen it, the typical breaking of bread meeting among the assemblies. The time varies, with some assemblies having this as their first meeting on Sunday morning, others preferring the evening hour. The saints gather with the Lord’s table before them. In some cases they are seated in circular fashion with the table in the midst; in others the table is at the front of the gathering place. Perhaps the first thing the visitor notices is the simplicity of the meeting hall. The “brethren” are not known for having elaborate worship facilities! But the most striking feature of this gathering to one unaccustomed to such a meeting is that there is no one officiating, presiding, or directing the meeting—no one, that is, other than the Holy spirit.

Soon, one of the brothers, as he feels led, will begin the meeting, perhaps by giving out a hymn. Then another brother may read a brief passage from the Scriptures which is in keeping with the purpose of the gathering. Yet another might lead in prayer. And thus the meeting continues, with different men of the assembly taking part - not professional "ministers," but businessmen, engineers, farmers, carpenters, and others, from every occupation and station in life. One will have a hymn, another a Scripture reading or prayer of thanksgiving, all centered around the Person and redeeming work of the Savior. The sisters play a vital part as they join in singing the hymns and in the silent prayer and worship which so largely sets the spiritual tone of the meeting. None of this is orchestrated or planned in advance, though occasionally visitors have been so impressed with the harmony of the thoughts expressed that they could scarcely believe it was not arranged beforehand. No, the only preparation for this meeting is the heart preparation of the brothers and sisters in self-examination and meditation on the Scriptures.

After a time, one of the brothers will give thanks for the bread. Then he takes it from the table, and the believers pass it one to another. Thanks is then given for the cup, and it is distributed. Again, the men taking the lead in this are not chosen beforehand, nor do they have to be elders or deacons, or members of any other approved class. Truly, here is the priesthood of believers, not in word, but in deed. Shortly after the taking of the bread and cup, the meeting is usually closed, characteristically with a hymn. An offering is generally taken at some time during the meeting. There is a strong feeling among the assemblies that no offering should be taken in a meeting to which the unconverted are invited, not only because it may give offense to some, but because it is deemed improper for God's work to be financed by the gifts of unbelievers. Thus the collection is made during the breaking of bread meeting, for believers only, rather than the public preaching and teaching meetings.

The Lord's Supper is often called the "Worship Meeting," and so it is. Some visitors might think the mood rather solemn, for there is little outward demonstration. There are often extended periods of silence, but these are not awkward times of "waiting for someone to say something," but times of rich reflection and meditation. "What a sight!" writes John Ritchie, the dear, old Scottish saint. "Every eye is fixed on Christ; every heart is satisfied." The hymns are sung at a measured pace to enable full appreciation of the words. And such hymns they are! While the Church at large is abandoning the old hymns of the faith for a more trendy musical style and the singing of snappy choruses (many of which are the musical and spiritual equivalent of "junk food"), the assemblies still delight to sing such songs as:

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing,
Nor fear, with God's righteousness on,
My person and offerings to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

Recently, at the invitation of a friend, I spent a Saturday evening at a Christian gathering in the local convention hall. By the time I arrived, the crowd of perhaps four or five hundred was well into the "praise and worship" time of the meeting, swaying to the driving pulse of the music and expressing their praise in very demonstrative, sometimes frantic, ways. The speaker for the evening, a very well known, almost idolized, Christian leader, took the platform to speak. He delivered what amounted to a shallow motivational talk, consisting largely of a string of anecdotes, laced with humor that at times bordered on irreverence. I left with a deep concern about what I had just witnessed.

The next morning, being the Lord's Day, found me with thirty or forty saints humbly gathered around the Lord's table. No dynamic speaker, no trendy music, no ostentatious display. In short, nothing to appeal to the flesh at all. Just the Lord's people humbly remembering Him in the way He requested. I could not help but feel that this, while falling far short of the previous night's gathering in entertainment value, breathed far more the authentic spirit of the New Testament Church.

Yet many of those who had been present on Saturday night would surely look at this little meeting with a mixture of pity and scorn. "How dry! Where's the emotion?" they say. Could it be they don't see the dear saint of God sitting there head in hands, even after several decades of faithful service to Christ, shaking his head in amazement as he contemplates the astounding grace of God and the preciousness of the One who died for him? Do they not notice, over here, a godly father and husband, pausing to wipe the tears from his eyes as the little group sings:

*When we see Thee as the victim,
Nailed to the accursed tree,
For our guilt and folly stricken,
All our judgment borne by Thee,
Lord we own with hearts adoring,
Thou hast loved us unto blood;
Glory, glory everlasting
Be to Thee, Thou Lamb of God!*

Somber? No joy? Who but one who has known it can describe the inestimable sense of satisfaction, the deep welling up of joy within as the heart looks utterly away from itself and fixes its gaze upon Him in whom all Heaven finds its delight, and upon the vast incomprehensible work which He has so perfectly wrought. Here truly is rest for the conscience, fullness for the heart, and joy-not a joy that can be easily expressed, but "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Yes, whether it is the Scriptural pattern for church leadership, the role of women in the churches, the prominence of the Lord's Supper, or any other area of church life, we will invariably find that following the pattern laid down by the Holy Spirit in Scripture produces blessed results. We are fools to think otherwise. The New Testament instructions to the churches are not impractical, outdated things to be swept under the rug by exegetical sleight-of-hand. Rather, they are precious lamps lighting the Church's way through this dark age, and those who can say with the Psalmist, "I turned my feet to Thy testimonies," will surely find them a more trustworthy guide than the opinions and traditions of men.

Some Final Words

I pray that in my desire to share the blessing I have received, I have not unwittingly painted "brethren" assemblies in larger than life strokes. No doubt, a thousand booklets this size and more could be written on their weaknesses, defects, and mistakes. Anyone seeking perfection, or anything near it, among any group of saints this side of glory is bound for disappointment. These few pages are nothing more than the personal testimony of one who, like the lepers in Elisha's day, has found great spoil and cannot in good conscience hold his peace. May God bless and use them for His own glory. If further information is desired, please contact: Published and distributed free of charge by:

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