

423 Assembling ourselves together

One of the effects of this Covid pandemic is the prevention of people from meeting up together, in which of course Christians are caught up too. Online gatherings and worship services play a useful role during lockdowns but inevitably fall short of “the real thing” – the ability for human beings simply to be together, including – the focus of this Reflection - for Christians to assemble themselves together as Christians, regularly and physically.

Scripturally, the “fear of the Lord” has always been a corporate attitude as well as an individual attitude. The children of Israel, God’s covenant people, were just that – His children, His family, His people, His nation, in which each individual was to play his or her part within the greater whole. Later on during the years of Jesus’ physical presence on the earth, corporate gatherings in homes, synagogues and the temple remained at the heart of Jewish life.

Under the new covenant of grace embodied in Jesus’ Person and ministry, the need for individual faith in the Lordship of Christ became pivotal, as it still is (egs., Matthew 11.25-30 / John 3.14-18,35-36). Even so, we see that Jesus’ emphasis with the Twelve and His many other followers continued as before, being always on the corporate Us just as much as on the individual Me. The same Us-ness has always lain at the heart of the Church’s nature and ministry, built on the assumption, and the necessity, that each individual member of the fellowship, the local “body of Christ”, holds a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord for himself or herself.

As an example of this important truth about the linking of “fear of the Lord” with our “fellowship IN the Lord”, we read in Malachi 3.16-17 – “Then they that feared the Lord spake often to one another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard [it], and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. ‘And they shall be mine’, saith the Lord of hosts, ‘in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him’” (KJV).

In such Christian gatherings of “God-fearers-through-Jesus”, be these more formal or less formal occasions, we know that the Lord Jesus Himself is in our midst by the Holy Spirit (egs., Matthew 18.20 / John 14.25-27; 15.26; 6.7 / Romans 8.26-27). In those wonderful times recorded in early Acts we read, “And they continued stedfastly in the

apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles ... And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one mind ..." (from Acts 2.42-43 & 4.31-32a). What a picture we are given in such words as to how things were, and by the grace of God, how they could be once again!

It can be easy at times to neglect this "assembling of ourselves together". But instead, "... let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works ..." (from Hebrews 10.24-25, KJV), doing our best to follow the further ample instructions we are given about getting on properly together, such as in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4-5, Philippians 4 and Colossians 3 for instance: a good dose of love, respect, humility, thoughtfulness, generosity, forbearance, forgiveness, support, kindness, peace, cheerfulness, honesty, encouragement, compassion, obedience and joy will keep us all on the right track! - even in these times when togetherness is confined largely to telephones and computers.

So we carry on in good heart, as individual God-fearers-in-Christ within the wider gathering of our fellow Christ-believers. If my Christian faith is only ever about "me-ness" with no corporate involvement, it will remain impoverished; and if it is only ever about "us-ness", with no personal allegiance to Christ at its heart, it will remain ill-founded.

We see from the Malachi 3 passage quoted earlier how those faithful, God-fearing people "spake often together". As we do the same today, as much as we are able, and now in the full revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure that the Lord still hearkens and hears; He still has our names recorded in that "book of remembrance"; we shall still belong to Him in that day when He "makes up His jewels"; and He will surely spare us as His own children when the time comes (from verses 16-17).

Truly, for those in Christ, singly and together, all is well, and all shall always be well: "... thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (from I Corinthians 15.57).

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