

STILL STRUGGLING WITH “THE ASSEMBLY”

I recently read another article on the “dangers” of taking the Lord’s Supper outside of “the assembly.” I know my brethren mean well, but they have not thought this issue out. I do not question whether local saints should assemble (Hb.10:25). Nor do I question whether they should assemble to commune (Ac.20:7; 1Cor.11:17-34). ***What I question is their phony, concocted definition of “the assembly.”*** It goes something like this: If “the whole church” has gathered “in one place” to eat the Lord’s Supper, then THAT, AND THAT ALONE, is “the assembly.” But if less than the whole gathers, it’s not “the assembly.” This inevitably leads to having local “assemblies” that are not really “the assembly.” For instance, they would say a “Bible class” is not “the assembly” – ***even though a class, by definition, IS an assembly!*** Such confused, misguided logic just raises all kinds of questions...

First of all, please define "the assembly." Who and how many must be present? If less than "the whole church" shows up, can we still partake of the Lord's Supper? Is there a "quorum" (minimum number) that must be present before a gathering of local saints can be called "the assembly?" What must be done in "the assembly?" Must it include all "five acts" of worship? Or can "the assembly" only be for one purpose (e.g. a singing)? Where must "the assembly" meet? Must local saints meet in a church building, or could they meet in a home? And if their meeting place is too small, could half of a congregation meet in the morning, and the other half in the evening? If not, why not?

I say all of this to show what some have done. ***"The assembly" has become an artificially defined entity by which worship is "validated."*** In other words, "If it is not done in 'the assembly' then it cannot be right." If we are going to say this, then we must define – ***with Scripture*** – when a gathering of local saints is, or is not, "the assembly." Is a Bible class "the assembly?" If not, why not? Is a gospel meeting "the assembly?" Must "the assembly" meet on Sunday only, or can "the assembly" meet on Friday?

Once again, I do not question whether local saints should assemble; but I do question this artificial definition of "the assembly." Because once this artificial definition is created, we artificially restrict some things to this "assembly." ***And for many, the Lord's Supper seems to be the ONLY item that gets relegated to this artificial definition of "the assembly!"*** We seem to have no difficulty with some local saints gathering to sing, pray, or teach outside of our artificially defined "assembly" (e.g. a singing in someone’s home). But for some local saints to gather to eat the Supper in a home, at a campsite, in a hotel room, or a classroom at the church building – that’s heresy! Consistency, thou art a rare jewel!

Let us realize that “the assembly” is NOT a “place” – it is a “circumstance.” More specifically, it is a circumstance in which local saints gather to do what God has told the them to do. It does not require “the whole” to be present; nor does it require all “five items” of worship (Ac.12:5,12,17; 20:17ff; 1Cor.14:23 – note the “if”). ***If the elders of a local church determine that they will send someone to meet (i.e. assemble) with some brethren who are unable to come to the building, and provide them the elements for communion, what on earth could be wrong with that?*** Was it wrong because it was not “the whole church?” And if the answer to that is “yes,” then was it wrong for the rest of the congregation to eat the Supper at the building, since “the whole” wasn’t there, either? Was it wrong because it was not at the building? Was it wrong because they did not do all “five items” of worship? Until we can conclusively answer such questions ***with Scripture***, I would say that we ought not trouble the church over it!

In all honesty, I think we have better things to do than argue with one another about whether we should take the Lord’s Supper to brethren who are sick and shut in! God must be shaking His head at our foolishness.

--Lanny Smith