

Bible Basics Conference 2007: Things God has prepared for us

Part 9

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[00:00:00] Good evening. That was good tea, wasn't it? I certainly enjoyed it.

I hope you did too.

The subject of assembly authority and its limits sounds a bit technical to me. Perhaps it does to you. Maybe we think this sounds a bit like a Brethren mantra. Is this something that the Brethren have thought up and blown out of all perspective, made far more important than perhaps it really is? Well, I don't think so. I think as we go through the scriptures we're going to find that it's a Bible basic and that's why we've got it at the Bible basic conference. I just want though to read these verses from Matthew chapter 18 verses [00:01:01] 15 to 20.

Suffering from this parallax.

Right, 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 has 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 church but if he neglect to hear the church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you [00:02:06] 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 or to my name there am I in the midst of them.

A picture on this slide is of a group of Bhutanese believers who live in a refugee camp in eastern Nepal.

They're believers on the Lord Jesus. Now the question is [00:03:03] can they exercise assembly authority? Can we here in Catford exercise assembly responsibility? Or wherever you're from can assembly authority be exercised? Well perhaps first of all we should ask the question what is assembly authority? Authority is the right or responsibility and the power to do something. The right or responsibility and the power to do something. I think most of us would know what the word authority means but it's just there to make it clear.

We've already heard what the assembly is we've seen the assembly from the point of view of what it is universally all believers on the Lord Jesus Christ and we've also thought of the assembly as it is locally. The representation of that assembly in a particular place a town a village [00:04:07] a city. The assembly has authority from the Lord Jesus to bind or loose.

We've just read that in these verses from Matthew chapter 18.

And to bind or loose really means to discipline.

To bind is to discipline and to loose is to release from discipline.

And also we saw in verse 19 that the Lord Jesus says that if two of you shall agree on earth on touching anything that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven. So it's not simply a matter that's limited to discipline. There might need to be agreement with regard to something else that should happen in a particular locality for the glory of the Lord Jesus and for the blessing of his people. [00:05:03] And the assembly has this authority from the Lord Jesus on the principle that where two or three are gathered in my name or to my name there am I in the midst of them. It's a very important principle indeed and just one thing to be said in connection with what Andrew was saying to us a bit earlier on this afternoon we're going to see that assembly authority is something that is essentially exercised in localities by local assemblies.

Let's move on then.

Why is assembly authority important? And I'm particularly going to look at the matter of this question of discipline which Rusty touched on as well when he was speaking. This matter of binding and loosening which has a particular relevance [00:06:01] to matters of discipline.

And it's important because it enables the assembly to deal with sin and disorder so that these things sin and disorder do not first of all dishonor God. Now we've already had quite a few references to 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and you'll see that I've referred to some verses from 1 Corinthians chapter 5 on this slide.

God must come first.

We already mentioned the verse and we're going to mention it again in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15 that the assembly universally is the house of God upon earth and so the local assembly should be representative of that particular truth.

So when it says in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 1 it is reported [00:07:01] commonly that there is fornication among you and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles that one should have his father's wife. Do you not think that what was happening in Corinth in the local

assembly in Corinth was a dishonor to God? Of course it was.

I'm being checked for viruses.

The second point here it spoils the assembly's witness. Just that one verse at the beginning of chapter 5 would surely bring that home to us. It is reported commonly it was known to be the case in this local assembly this assembly at Corinth that this sin was occurring among them and was carrying on and nothing was being done about it. [00:08:04] It must have spoiled their witness. I've mentioned also verse 8 where the apostle Paul says therefore let us keep the feast. Now that's not the breaking of bread that's the feast of Christianity if you like. Not with old leaven. The old way of living. Neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness because malice and wickedness can come into relationships between believers on the Lord Jesus. But with the unleavened bread just in case anybody's unsure about this because we've mentioned this word leaven a couple of times already today. Leaven in the scriptures is always connected with what is bad, what is evil. Sin. So here in this verse we're told but with the unleavened bread without any of that leaven of sincerity and truth. Now that's good for us as believers but [00:09:04] it's also important for our witness that believers should see these characteristics among us. Sincerity and truth.

Furthermore when these things come in they defile the fellowship. This has already been mentioned in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 6 we're told know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lamb. Yes this particular believer was sinning in a particular way but the fact that he was with the other believers in close fellowship surely is always the case in a local assembly meant that they would be affected defiled dirtied by his sin.

And we've already seen haven't we from what we've heard already this afternoon that this question of leaven [00:10:05] is not just a moral matter it's a doctrinal matter as well and in Galatians chapter 5 verse 9 you'll find in connection with the doctrinal error that was creeping in among the assemblies in Galatia that the apostle Paul uses the same verse or the same words know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lamb.

But there's a fourth reason why we need to exercise assembly authority in matters like this that's because not to do so leaves those who have gone wrong in spiritual danger. 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 5 says that the apostle Paul had decided that action should be taken in this matter remember he did that in his apostolic his apostolic capacity and we've already heard that apostles we no longer have apostles with us but [00:11:01] because of the inaction of the believers in Corinth the apostle Paul took the lead but he didn't take over from them he took the lead to encourage them to take up their responsibility and he said to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus it had in view the blessing ultimately of this particular person let's just cover a couple of those four points that I put up on the earlier slide the honor of God and the assembly's witness and it's good perhaps to remember what the apostle Paul says about the assembly in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15 I've already mentioned it he says that the assembly is the house of God and in my house there's a particular order a particular [00:12:04] way we do things generally speaking anyway now when you come to my house I hope that you will you'll fit in with our order however disorderly you may feel it to be but you know what I'm saying I hope when I go to your house that I won't say no that's not the way you should lay the table you should lay the table this way it's not my house there's a particular order to be followed the assembly is God's house and there's a particular order to be followed and furthermore it's called the pillar and ground of the truth and here we've got a light house and the reason why I've used that because that brings out the thought I think

a bit of a pillar we're not used so much to having pillars today as they did at the time the apostle Paul wrote but one thing about pillars then was that on the top of a pillar was often [00:13:05] an inscription there was a display of a statement something perhaps in tribute to an emperor or a great man here we've got a light so the assembly should be a display of God's truth and it should also be the stay the support the maintainer of God's truth we've got that as the base of the lighthouse in this picture when we see things from that point of view we see that the assembly has a very important part to play for God's glory in this world in fact I would say to you that it's the only place where God's will is going to be done in this world who else apart from Christians who else apart from those who love the Lord Jesus can be expected to be the pillar and [00:14:02] ground of the truth and I think this brings before us our responsibility to maintain things for God in this world if we don't who will if we don't who will no one else will and going back to our earlier verses from Matthew 18 I think this will start to make us realize more and more the responsibility of practicing things according to God's word in our local assemblies if we in our local gatherings are representations of what the assembly is as a whole then don't we see our need to practice what God says in his word this has already been said quite a lot today that we're here to do what God says God speaks to us in his words we may be affected by the fashions and ideas of those around us [00:15:04] and sadly very often we are in our minds in the background of our minds we're affected by the ideas that are all around us but really we should base everything on God's word and it's not negotiable there's not one bit we can say well that's true I believe it that's something that I'm going to do that's important but this bit well no I'm not it's all God's word so it's important we practice it where we are and that brings before us a certain dignity that we have in the local gathering where we are if you remember when Hugh spoke earlier he spoke about the Lord's words in Matthew chapter 16 there we see power there we see greatness there we see no failure the Lord Jesus says on this rock I will build my assembly he goes on to say the gates of Hades shall not prevail [00:16:06] against it there's no failure there but in the second mention because that's the first mention as Hugh said of the assembly in the second mention of the assembly which is in Matthew chapter 18 the verses we read we see weakness we see sin we see smallness and yet the Lord Jesus still refers to it by that word assembly there may just be two or three gathered together under the name of the Lord Jesus but they have a dignity because they're gathered together by him to his name to represent him in this world where they are to be the sample to be the representation of the assembly in their place where he has arranged for them to live and furthermore there's another beautiful touch following this verse in [00:17:04] 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15 that is the Lord Jesus is set before us by the apostle in verse 16 of that chapter in all the perfection of his life here in this world and sometimes we forget that the Lord Jesus has gone back on high and we are here in his place to represent God here in this world as he so perfectly represented God when he was here it's called the mystery of godliness or the mystery of piety it was seen in perfection in him when he was here in this world and now we are as it were to fill out the place which he filled where we are in our localities there are other verses here which I haven't got enough time to refer to but 1 Corinthians 14 40 is that verse [00:18:04] which we've had before let everything be done decently and in order 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 17 refers to the assembly as the house of God again 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 5 tells us that we are a holy priesthood we're here to give praise and glory to God and 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9 tells us we're a royal priesthood to show the excellences of our God and of our Savior to those around us yes we're here to be for the honor of God in this world and we're to be a witness to those around us but we also thought about discipline assembly authority is preserving the fellowship and restoring those who go wrong if binding does not take place if we do not exercise authority the sin or disorder will defile the fellowship and those who go wrong will not realize the seriousness of what they have [00:19:03] done and those two references refer again to the need of that man in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and again certain people in Thessalonica who needed discipline in order to bring home to them the seriousness of what they had done and if loosing does not take place releasing from discipline when

those people repent then the assembly will lose the benefit of their fellowship they will be discouraged and there will be no testimony to the restoring grace of God we had a question earlier on from a brother concerned that we were mentioning discipline and not restoration discipline is always in view of restoration and you'll see that Paul was concerned that that man who had committed that sin in Corinth now that he had repented he would be swallowed up by his grief if he was not restored to the fellowship of the saints so we see that loosing [00:20:02] is as important as binding well we read these verses the assembly has the authority to bind and loose and agree what should happen on other issues even when it numbers only two or three believers in a place this is the dignity we have as those who are gathered by the Lord Jesus to his name and to exercise it we must be gathered together to his name why do i emphasize this it's easy perhaps for some of us sometimes who've been brought up in in meetings which have treasured verse 20 to say oh i gather with with believers to the name of the Lord Jesus but do we really think about what those words mean to be gathered together to his name that means to speak in complete submission to his will [00:21:04] to be ready to hear his voice to us and to be ready to do his will yes to be living my life in accordance with his will yes it's not just a formula it's not just an outward thing it's an inner thing it's a moral thing it affects me in myself am i really when i meet with my saints gathering to the Lord Jesus with my brethren gathering to the Lord Jesus submitting to him if we are then he can be in the midst he can be in the midst he can presence himself amongst us and that's what makes it a meeting and assembly he's in the midst he's directed and as a result we can hear his voice and we can carry out his will and this is what gives it all [00:22:04] the dignity that we've been speaking about because the Lord Jesus says that when we're like that and we take decisions then the decisions we take are recognized by heaven itself you might think boy that's a lot of authority you've got then just two or three of you can get together and make decisions and heaven recognizes them boy that's powerful it is it is powerful that shows the dignity of being gathered in this way being gathered by the Lord Jesus to his name to his name and to have him in the midst and yes it has this implication as well if the action of an assembly [00:23:02] is recognized in heaven all local assemblies should be united in recognizing it as well if it's recognized by heaven how could any other gathering of God's people say no I'm ignoring that I'm going to look into it myself first of all no we can't possibly say that and I've given you some examples there of cases where assemblies made decisions and they were recognized by other assemblies we've already quoted the example of Phoebe she was commended to the saints in Rome they didn't have to look into her life and say now can we really receive this sister is she really serving the Lord no on the basis of what the brethren could say from centuria from the words of the apostle Paul they could receive her because they could have confidence in their brethren elsewhere another important thing about local assemblies is that they all call upon the name of the Lord [00:24:01] you know that's a defining fact about a a local assembly it's marked by this calling upon the name of the Lord dependence on the Lord if we truly believe that we're dependent on the Lord where we gather together to his name surely we will recognize decisions that we take as led by him 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 10 the apostle Paul could say he had confidence he would go along with what the brethren decided in Corinth that meeting where there'd been so much disorder in the first letter the apostle Paul is saying I've got confidence now in what you're going to do I will accept the decision you make and in Galatians chapter 1 the apostle Paul looks back to his life and he says you know the meetings in Judea that I who have been an enemy of the church I was now a believer they didn't try and work out that for themselves they accepted what the [00:25:03] brethren had had witnessed themselves further up the coast in Damascus and elsewhere where he had been received among the brethren so actions of an assembly should be recognized by other local assemblies because they are recognized in heaven now why have I got this strange picture here well it's really to emphasize this second point the assembly exercises authority within take that little house as a picture of the house of God if you like we're responsible for exercising authority within the

assembly Acts chapter 6 where there was a problem between the Grecian and the Hebrew widows was dealt with by the assembly probably there were other kinds of problems going on among believers in among people in Jerusalem the assembly wasn't responsible for sorting those out [00:26:04] and the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 that you're responsible for dealing with those who are within not those who are without we've already had that point emphasized by Andrew yes people in our community may say they're Christians but we're not responsible for ordering their lives reminds me a bit of what the servants said when they discovered that tares have been so within the field of their master they wanted to pull them up but we can't put the world to right we're responsible for those who are within the assembly not for those without that's a limit on our responsibility and sadly a limit that has not been recognized down the history of the church and that's why the church has got itself involved in all sorts of things it's amazing sometimes when you hear those in organized churches spouting at great length about environmental matters and economic matters [00:27:04] political matters and yet seemingly at a loss to be able to say anything certain about things to do with the word of god the assembly should not try to control the exercise of spiritual gifts we've already seen earlier on that the lord Jesus gives the gifts he's the head of the assembly the holy spirit apportions gifts according to the direction that we might say of the lord that's in those two scripture references they're given to the whole assembly however there should be a readiness to have fellowship in service and to give and take counsel in acts chapter 13 you'll remember that there were several ministering in the assembly and the holy spirit said separate unto me Paul and Barnabas for the work yes that shows the lord directed by his holy spirit but it shows that the people there the [00:28:04] brethren there they had fellowship with Paul and Barnabas in laying the right hand of fellowship upon them before they went out on Paul's so-called first missionary journey what happened at the end of that journey the apostle Paul and Barnabas came back reported to the brethren all the things that the lord had enabled them to do so we must be careful to keep these things in balance the servant is responsible to the lord but he or she should serve the lord in fellowship with their brethren but the assembly should discipline those who exercise gifts and those who exercise oversight Nick was speaking to us about uh such uh brethren if they go wrong you'll find that in one Timothy chapter 5 verses 19 to 20 and in Galatians chapter 2 verse 11 the apostle Paul censured Peter didn't he when Peter went wrong withstood him to the face [00:29:04] Peter was a gift he was an apostle but he had to be put right when we go wrong it doesn't matter if we're gifted or not we need to be put right we don't read of assemblies exercise and authority over other assemblies if there's an issue between assemblies they should seek the lord's mind together Andrew spoke of the fact that he didn't think what happened between Antioch and Jerusalem can be taken as a model for today they all went up to Jerusalem that's true but I think it does illustrate to us that when uh two uh two assemblies have a difficulty they should try and remedy matters together in that particular case teachers have come from Jerusalem to Antioch they've been teaching that the gentile converts had to keep the law [00:30:01] what did the believers in um Antioch do they didn't split away from the brethren at Jerusalem they sent Paul and they sent Paul and Barnabas to um seek to um sort sort the matter out am I right or is it Paul and Silas Silas sorry if a problem in an assembly persists it may not be possible for other assemblies to continue to have fellowship with the believers there but it would be wise for two or three assemblies that are able to take responsibility for trying to resolve the issue to do so before deciding and announcing this is the case this is the way in which matters should be dealt with things to bear in mind we need to be prayerful careful and humble when we exercise assembly authority why because we're doing it in the name of the lord Jesus we cannot claim today even to be the local assembly we've already had this [00:31:01] laid before us here in Catford there are many groups of Christians it's the same in Ipswich it's the same in Nepal believers are divided into different groups that's one of the reasons why Christians haven't got the same power today they had before but we can act on the basis of God's word and for the whole of his assembly act in the interests of the whole assembly and

we also ought to be prayerful and careful and humble because we can make mistakes and sadly i think all of us in this hall well nearly all of us in this hall would have to say over recent years yes we have made mistakes even though we have the holy spirit in dwellings and even though we have the word of god we have to make sure we keep close to the [00:32:03] lord jesus because it's only as we do that that we know his mind and will this brings us back to the question of being gathered to his name and to having him in the midst of us we also ought to take responsibility for sin and disorder we've already had this chapter mentioned daniel chapter 9 daniel in all respects as far as the biblical record is concerned we don't see any sin in his life he was a sinner of course but we don't see any sin in his life and yet he took responsibility for the sin that occurred and you know in the old testament when the sin offering was offered the priest had to eat the sin offering they had to identify with the sin that had been committed they had to have a sense in their hearts of the failure that had occurred it was a sad thing in Corinth that the believers didn't realize how serious the matter was if they had done perhaps they would [00:33:01] have acted and maybe the situation would not have been as great as it was and in revelation chapter 2 and i've over over over overgone my time so i will be very quick now revelation 2 there's this uh there's this sin in this church here and the apostle the the the john writing on behalf john the lord jesus writing by uh the apostle john says repent put the matter right you're responsible for it we should deal with local issues locally rather than at a distance but we should be willing to seek and submit to inquiry and counsel look at those new testament scriptures and you'll see they were all dealt with locally and in deuteronomy chapter 21 and chapter 13 you'll see a couple of old testament examples first of all of dealing with a matter locally and in chapter 13 of seeking or of [00:34:04] taking counsel together in order to deal with matters we should always seek the witness of two or three before making a deliberation on a particular point where there's any doubt about it and no one should take assembly authority to himself earlier on somebody said there's no case of just one person being responsible for an assembly but there is one case but it's in reverse it's diatrophies and he's censured by the apostle john for taking the preeminent place among the believers in a particular place and uh that's a warning to us and peter says we're not to lord it over god's people we're to be in samples to the flock we're to be marked by humility and not by pride so assembly authority exercised according to god's word [00:35:03] honors god 1 thessalonians chapter 4 verse 1 says we should please god in our local assemblies it promotes the assembly's witness in this world we're to be lights in the midst of a dark generation it preserves the fellowship ephesians chapter 4 verse verses 1 to 3 tell us to endeavor to maintain the unity of the spirit we've heard about the truth of the one body that's god's side god's made us one body but there's our practical responsibility and that's the fellowship putting the truth of the one body into practice is the matter of the fellowship and that involves our responsibility we have to endeavor to maintain that fellowship that unity needs to come out in a practical way we have to endeavor to do it and that may involve assembly authority assembly decisions [00:36:01] it preserves the fellowship and it seeks the restoration of those who go wrong in ephesians in in hebrews chapter 12 verse 11 the writer says that no chastening is anything that we enjoy but when it takes place when we need it and it's exercised he's talking there more about the father exercising this uh this this discipline it yields what does it yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness it blesses us it's for our good it restores us and it strengthens us and it enables us to go on and be more effective for our lord's glory now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous but grievous nevertheless afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby i may have spoken about assembly authority more from a disciplinary point of view but it is quite important i think we have seen earlier on [00:37:03] that the assembly today lacks from the fact that there isn't this discipline exercise today everyone can do what they want but that's not for god's glory or for the blessing of those involved may we be able to put these things into practice