

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 2

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[00:00:01] We have been occupied with the overview that Brother Hans Rudi has brought before us.

We are now going to consider what is a local expression of the assembly.

And I thought we'd begin with this picture on the screen, which is a well-posed photograph of the invisible church.

And this isn't at all what God desires. He wants there to be a local manifestation of the assembly, and for that manifestation to be in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament on this subject.

[00:01:09] And it is this teaching with which we are going to be occupied in this session and in the sessions that follow, if the Lord will.

Brother Rudi has already touched on the global aspect of the assembly, and this is aspect two, which is the church looked at as composed of all real believers who are alive on earth in any one point in time.

[00:02:01] The assembly, the company of the called-out ones, is really a generic thought, in that the assembly is also the body and bride of Christ and the house of God, as we've emphasized and I hope we'll continue to emphasize throughout our time together, composed of every believer on the planet. Now these three aspects of the global assembly also have a bearing locally.

First of all, we read in 1 Corinthians 12 that they were body of Christ, in 1 Corinthians 3 that they were temple of God, [00:03:03] and in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 that Paul had espoused them as a chaste virgin to Christ. And it's very important when looking at these three scriptures on the right hand of the screen to notice the absence of the definite article. They are not said to be the body of Christ, they're not said to be the temple of God, and they're not said to be the bride.

And this is really, really important. From this we are to understand that the local assembly is always viewed in scripture as a part of the greater whole.

[00:04:09] It is never looked at as being an autonomous self-contained unit.

And just as it is a part of the greater whole, so also the local assembly is to bear the character of the whole. And these things should be maintained in teaching and practice amongst believers. They have a very definite practical bent so far as the way that we conduct ourselves when we come together is concerned, and particularly in our relations with other believers who are gathered on the same scriptural ground. [00:05:11] Really, really important. And if we were to turn this round and state the same thing in a negative way, we would say that scripture gives no sanction for local bodies of Christ.

Brother Hans Rudy has already emphasized this point and very necessary it is to do so. And as already has been touched upon, there is no support in scripture for the idea of independent autonomous assemblies. The first assembly that we read of in the New Testament was formed in Jerusalem.

[00:06:09] We've been reminded of this already. Those that believe the gospel were baptized. And then together they continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine, in the Apostles teaching, and that teaching formed the Christian fellowship. The Christian company was governed in its meeting together by the teaching of the Apostles. That fellowship was expressed in the breaking of bread together, and again as Hans Rudy has most helpfully pointed out, when we do break bread together we have all believers, not only in our minds but in our hearts, [00:07:08] most important for us in days of brokenness that we don't abandon this view of things that is laid out for us in the word of God and prayers.

And just to emphasize again, this was something that they did together. It's not something that any one of them could do on their own at home, week after week after week. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together and there is every encouragement in scripture for us indeed to be faithful to the Lord. In gathering to his name. Other local assemblies were formed as the book of Acts shows us.

[00:08:13] There was an assembly formed in Antioch in Syria. There was the persecution that arose upon the stoning of Stephen and believers were scattered and there were those that went to Antioch and they preached to the Gentiles and they received the word of God gladly and we know that this company, this assembly at Antioch became a very significant assembly. Other assemblies were formed in Syria and Cilicia and other assemblies were formed elsewhere and the map actually shows us the route that Paul took in the course of his first missionary journey which is described in Acts chapters 13 and 14. [00:09:22] We come then to this question of how practical unity is maintained between assemblies that meet on the same scriptural ground and this is of great importance.

We know that God took care in the beginning that when there was a work in Samaria where Philip the evangelist preached it was not until Peter and John went down and prayed for the converts that they received the Holy Spirit. [00:10:19] In other words there was that vital connection between the already existing assembly in Jerusalem and now the company that was being formed in Samaria and we see exactly the same care taken by God in relation to the conversion of Cornelius and his household in that Peter once again was the one who brought the gospel to them and God gave them the Holy Spirit.

He did not wait for Peter to ask him to give them his spirit because by giving Cornelius and those that

believed there the spirit he was showing that it was in his heart to bless the Gentiles on exactly the same basis that he was blessing the Jews. [00:11:29] Secondly relief was sent this was a very practical way of maintaining a healthy and happy relationship between assemblies and certainly there is enormous scope for believers today also to express the unity of the body and care for brethren that we may never have seen or met by showing this practical care.

[00:12:15] And then thirdly the third example is the council of which we read in Acts chapter 15 here was an issue that arose a problem that was not restricted to a particular local meeting and could therefore be addressed by that particular local meeting. Here was a problem that arose that affected assemblies everywhere and the brethren came together to address this issue. This was very very very important you know one meeting didn't make one decision in Pisidia the place where the other Antioch is found.

[00:13:19] They didn't make one decision and the brethren in Jerusalem make another decision they took care to maintain the unity that God had formed and that existed between them by coming together to address the problem. And we know that a conclusion was reached and that conclusion was communicated to all the assemblies.

[00:14:02] This unity is also seen when we think about these well-known scriptures in 1st Corinthians where the Apostle Paul makes it absolutely clear that what he taught at Corinth he taught everywhere. He didn't drop certain aspects of his teaching when he went to one place because it would make him more acceptable there. He taught the truth of God everywhere the same truth and this truth was to guide and to govern all that in every place.

Call upon the name of the Lord Jesus our Lord. It was what he taught everywhere in every assembly and so on and so forth and in his letter his first letter to the Corinthians only on one occasion [00:15:26] does he express his opinion as a spiritual man and I've given the reference in the last line.

Everything else that he teaches there and that is to govern Christians in their coming together are to be received as the commandments of the Lord. So there's nothing in 1st Corinthians that we can put aside as though it was not relevant to us today. It is all applicable and relevant to us today.

[00:16:22] I asked Mr. Google for a map of the churches in Birmingham and this is what he gave me.

He's a funny man is Mr. Google. If you look closely he's listed some mosques and the most eagle eyed of you will even see that there's a pub on there called the church. [00:17:01] So I don't know whether my local Birmingham brethren want to check that out. You can see it's horrible isn't it? It's so fragmented. It's just what our brother Timothy was mentioning in prayer. Now in view of this fragmentation and in view of the fact that the local assembly is formed by every believer in that locality we might well ask the question.

Is the local expression of the assembly possible today? Well if it isn't I don't know what we're going to talk about for the next 10 sessions. Thankfully it is possible today but only by the grace of God in that provision is made.

[00:18:17] We've already been reminded of this scripture. How many have strayed so very very very far from the truth of the church of God and from those truths that should govern us locally.

But there is still this provision made for us. This is what the Lord Jesus desires of us in our day that we might gather in simplicity to his name. And I won't go down line by line. You can read them off the slide.

[00:19:12] What wonderful provision this is and how eager we should be to take it up. Not to miss meetings that we could attend. To make it our habit in the best sense to attend them each and every one of them. You know not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but encouraging one another. You know how enormously encouraging it is when you go along to a meeting and you find everyone's there. That the meetings are well supported.

[00:20:03] I want just before I go further to speak about some first and important steps.

We've spoken about the fragmentation and perhaps most of us here who are older would have to put our hands up and say I've played a part in that fragmentation. I haven't always been what I ought to have been. I haven't always kept as near to the Lord. I've not always followed him as wholly as I should have done. And so if there is the provision of grace on the one hand we really should be on our knees and on our faces before the Lord owning that we need his help so much. [00:21:13] If there is going to be if there is going to continue to be a local expression of the assembly in its wider context we have not only gathering to his name but also asking and acting in his name. A very great privilege and responsibility also.

Other spiritual hallmarks of a company that is truly gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus are given us in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. [00:22:03] We begin with the centrality of Christ. God is faithful who has called us into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord. And Matthew 18 20 stresses the importance of this that Christ is in the midst. The wisdom of the world is excluded. It's ruinous philosophic speculations have no place at all in the church of God rather there is to be the primacy of the word of God. That's all we've got to guide us. But everything that we need to guide us is there in the word of God. There has to be the maintenance of a scriptural discipline. The acceptance of Paul's apostleship. Many pull Paul down and reject much if not most of what he says. Well that's flying in the face of scripture. We have to accept his teaching. [00:23:14] God's order submitted to by the sisters whether it's God's order in creation in connection with head covering or his order in the assembly in relation to being silent in the assembly. Unity of the body maintained. Our associations governed by our identification with the Lord's table. Remembered on the first day of the week provision made for open ministry. The gospel taken out to the unsaved. Now we've spoken already of the weakness in the UK. And if there is only one brother in a place or there are only two brothers in a place many of these things like an open meeting for example just are not possible. That doesn't mean they're not gathered to the Lord's name. [00:24:10] The Lord takes account of our weakness and the very fact that he has said where two or three are gathered together to his name shows that he has taken account of that weakness. What's being set out is not sectarian but the scriptural ground of gathering. There's no other scriptural ground of gathering. And we're not free to choose how we come together any more than we are free to choose how we're saved. There's only one way. One scriptural way. This is the way. Walk in. We're under obedience. We are to use diligence to keep the unity of the spirit.

[00:25:12] Younger brothers don't be discouraged if you're ticked off now and again. I was severely ticked off a few weeks ago by a brother who wasn't happy that I hadn't quoted Ephesians 4 2 along with Ephesians 4 3 that shows the degree to which we are to exercise patience with one another in order to maintain this unity. National and social divisions, distinctions disappear. Other distinctions

disappear. And this is not what you might think it is. On the right are all the good-looking brothers.
[00:26:02] There is one body, one bride, one house and there is to be an expression of this truth in the local assembly.