

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 9

Speaker	Bible Basics Conference; Hans Ruedi Graf; Robert Wall; Simon Attwood; Graham Warnes; Michael Hardt; Nick Fleet; Geoff Hawes; Paul Dronsfield; Mark Grasso
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[00:00:01] We have some questions, and I've asked the brothers who took the particular sections to answer the questions which relate to their sections.

Could I please request that brothers are brief. We only have half an hour for this complete session, and I've used up two or three minutes just standing here. So please be brief. Don't try to give your lecture over again, but answer the question in front of you. I'm going to kick the ball off because one question was for Brother Robert Wall, and he has gone home. Robert mentioned the ground of gathering. What is meant by this term?

How long have I got?

Briefly, it is Matthew 18, 20, which we've had brought before us today several times, and it is the whole body of New Testament teaching concerning Christ's assembly.

[00:01:16] There is another question here which I'm not going to answer because it's too pointed.

I am anxious that at this conference we stick with what Scripture actually says. We can answer questions about it, but not about peculiar difficult situations. The question is, the two or three gathered according to Matthew 18, 20, can this also be applied to a married couple, brackets husband and wife?

Read Matthew 18, 20 again. That's all I'm going to say. Now I'm going to hand over to, I think, Simon. Simon's here. He has a question.

[00:02:17] I'll just read out the question. Simon mentioned that the whole assembly shall be involved or should be involved in assembly decisions, but does not Acts 15, 6 indicate that the elders should first gather together to discuss or consider the matter? I think what I said was that spiritual brothers should take the lead in addressing issues upon which an assembly decision may need to be made. It is true that in Acts 15, which is the account of the council in Jerusalem, and that was brought before

us by Robert, actually, as a model of how gatherings should seek to resolve difficulties in a united way. [00:03:04] And it's a very, very important chapter from that point of view. It does say in verse six, and the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter. And that's what I would base my thoughts on, that spiritual brothers should take a lead in these matters. Brothers do have a particular responsibility, particularly those who are mature and experienced in the things of the Lord. And it's their responsibility to give a certain amount of direction.

And in fact, in Galatians chapter two, we're told that when Paul went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, that he went into the other apostles to confer with them.

I think there was a concern on his part to be sure that he and the other apostles were in agreement about the matters that were going to come up. [00:04:10] And it's always very good for brothers to be together as brothers, to take responsibility together as brothers. Sometimes we play this down and we talk about the assembly a little bit as if it's a democracy. But, you know, it is a very responsible matter to give direction to the Lord's people. And we're told in Hebrews to respect our leaders, those the Lord has given a certain spiritual responsibility to, for the welfare of each and every brother and sister. This is not to be taken lightly. And brothers should not be marked by dissension over matters like this. They should be able to do that. But none of this takes away from the central point that when a decision has to be taken, it must be taken by the assembly. [00:05:06] Even though sisters won't take audible part, they should be present because they are members of the assembly. And unless they are present, then I don't see how it can possibly be an assembly decision. And in that passage from Acts chapter 15, it goes on to say, not very long after verse 6, in verse 12, then all the multitude kept silence. Now I don't think anybody's going to argue with me that multitude goes beyond apostles and elders. So it seems to me it's quite possible that the elders and apostles discussed the matter in front of all the brethren. I'm not saying definitely, dogmatically that was the case. I can't be sure. Maybe it was important that they had a little meeting together first of all. But ultimately the meat of the question, the principles, were talked about before the whole multitude. [00:06:04] So that later on in the chapter it says, and it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch and so on. The matter was resolved. It is most important that we realize that assembly decision making is not for just a few brothers to do in a back room. That's just not right. And we must be true to what scripture teaches us about this. That's all I need to say. Sorry.

Michael, do you want to take your questions?

I've got three questions and I just got a fourth one. [00:07:01] So very briefly.

First one is, given the broken down state of things, is it right to refer to our meetings as assemblies or local assemblies?

Did everybody get that? Given the broken state, can we refer to our meetings as assemblies or local assemblies? Well, we should not say that those gathered together are the assembly in that place.

I think that was explained today.

However, in Matthew 18, where it speaks of the two or three, if you go back a little bit, it says, speak unto the assembly.

So in one sense, those who are gathered are an expression or a representation of the assembly.

[00:08:10] I think it's not that difficult in this country.

We have a parliament and sometimes most of the parliamentarians are away. But it's still the parliament. Those who are there, they can pass a law. So those who are there, are they the whole parliament? No. Many members of parliament are missing. But it's still the parliament. It's still that which has the authority of which Matthew 18, verse 20 speaks. And in that sense, I'd be very happy to speak of assemblies or testimonies of the assembly. And we know that we mean that which gives character and that which we trust is recognized by the Lord. Can we experience a proper assembly life in a very large local assembly?

[00:09:07] Well, I wish we had that problem more often. But actually, as it happens, last Lord's Day, I was privileged to break bread in an assembly where on Lord's Day morning there were perhaps 350 or 400.

Now, there were many prayers, many hymns, a number of passages were read. And when a brother gave thanks for the bread, it was someone, I think, out of the fifth row. It wasn't confined in any way to two or three people sitting in the front. There was liberty.

Now, am I saying there's no problem if meetings are that big? I'm not saying that. I'm probably saying it's a nice problem to have. [00:10:01] When a meeting gets too big, especially when brethren travel far, perhaps there's a possibility of starting as a gathering in another place. But in principle, I think scripture gives us a lower limit, not an upper limit. What place have children, converted or unconverted, in a local meeting?

Should they participate in normal meetings or have separate children's meetings? What about them adding in the collection? Three questions in itself.

I'd just like to read a verse from Exodus 12 where it says, in verse 26, And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? [00:11:04] That you shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, etc. The assumption is that the children observe because that's why they ask, What does it mean? Now, nothing against children's meetings in their place. Nothing against order, everything be done decently and in order. And when small children sometimes make noise, that's no problem. We can take them out. The meeting can continue. But the principle I see in scripture is that children observe and then children ask. And then we can try to answer from scripture.

Now, there's a reference to my slides where it says they talked about being gathered on the grounds of the one body. [00:12:04] What does the word grounds mean? Grounds means principle.

It's actually interesting in scripture, often the places have a meaning.

Bethel is the house of God and Babylon is confusion and Jerusalem is the place God has chosen. So being in a place basically means being associated with a certain set of principles. And that's what we mean. Being gathered on the grounds of the one body means when we eat the bread, we eat as members of the body of Christ, not of a church. And in the bread we see all believers. That's the shortest I can do. Nick, did you have a question? [00:13:04] Yes. My questioner has asked, can a sister in her place be a teacher, for example Sunday school, or a shepherdess, brackets visit to elderly, etc. Are we to understand that gifts are given only in brothers? Well, obviously the answer really is in the

question. And they've supplied their own answers. Are we to understand that gifts are given only to brothers? Very definitely no.

I'm quite certain that sisters can indeed have a pastoral role and can teach.

But the use of the questioner's phrase in her place is very important.

[00:14:06] And what we've presented today is the public side, the side which carries with it the authority of the Lord.

And very clearly in scripture, this place is given to the brothers only. It's the brothers as representing Christ himself.

And there's a very clear distinction in practice between brothers and sisters in this sense.

In another sense, of course, we're always very clear to say that in Christ there is no male or female. It's not a question of inferiority or of having a lesser place.

We're all one in Christ. But when it comes to the order, when we come together, then the scripture is very clear. [00:15:05] There is a distinct and different role for brothers and sisters. And we've already said that when a single brother prays, he's not doing it for himself, but he's giving expression to the whole company. And so we all say, Amen.

And so whatever a brother does in that sense is not only representative of Christ, but is representative of the whole assembly. So we're not making anything of the individual brother as such, but we're not making anything of brothers over and above sisters. But in scripture, it's very clear there is this distinct role. And there's a distinction in the brothers don't cover their heads. The sisters do.

The brothers take an audible part and the sisters don't. Brothers can teach in the assembly and sisters are not permitted to teach. [00:16:03] And there's a difference in regard to subjection and submission.

So from the public side, and this is what we've presented, especially in Ephesians, the gift as a person are clearly limited to brothers. But the principle, especially what our brother Paul brought out in regard to Corinthians, the list of gifts there is a very much longer list. And includes all sorts of different services and works. And quite clearly, if you look at them in detail, the sister's work is included. But the important thing is this phrase, in her place. And I would emphasize that what we've said perhaps gave the impression that we've emphasized the gifts that the brothers have and the place they have. And perhaps we haven't sufficiently mentioned that the sisters have a vital role. [00:17:06] But it's because it's more behind the scenes. It's not in a prominent or public place. But that doesn't mean it's any less important. Indeed, it's just as important. And today, we could not have had this conference without the service of the sisters. Behind the scenes, and we've seen some of them at work, and their part is vital. And the part that they have in the life of the assembly is vital. But it's not on view. It's not a prominent one. It's not one where they take an outward and visible lead. But teaching children, helping others behind the scenes, visiting people in their homes, coming alongside them and speaking to them is absolutely yes. Pastoral care and the place of sisters is a very vital one.

[00:18:03] Brother Jeff?

I'll read the question twice. If not limited to the local assembly, how can the gift of shepherds and teachers function practically? If not limited to the local assembly, how can the gift of shepherds and teachers function practically? I think the question here is emphasizing the point that those gifts would be given for the benefit of the whole body. But there clearly can be a problem. We can have a problem individually. That we might feel that somebody in the local assembly, that there's nobody there who is able to help, who hasn't got that gift. [00:19:07] And sometimes we might have a problem that's personal in some way that we would rather not speak to somebody locally about it. We would far rather speak to somebody who's away from the situation, somebody who's not personally involved. I think it's one of these things that we rarely can say that we're fortunate to live in the present day. If we do find ourselves wanting to speak to a pastor, a shepherd, or a teacher to get help, then we can pick up the telephone.

We can speak to them through an email.

There are other electronic ways that we can get into contact with people to help us in that situation. Also, clearly, if you think about this country, there are visits from such people. [00:20:04] We can go, and I know many people have done it, we can get into the car and we can go and speak to somebody else. And that has proved helpful in many situations. So I think here that we can access people. I know that there's people who've spoken to brothers in Germany and elsewhere to help with a difficulty or a problem. And that is feasible today.

Let's read out the question.

Can we speak of spiritual poverty if we claim the sufficiency of Christ to give gift? We heard this afternoon the Lord will supply a gift by his Spirit. [00:21:04] Well, first of all, there's no want, obviously, with the Lord. There can be no insufficiency with him.

So there's no want with the giver.

And we read of the Corinthians in the first epistle, chapter 1. I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God, which is given to you by Jesus Christ, that in everything you are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge and in the testimony of Christ, and even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord. So there was no want of gift amongst the Corinthian believers. But the question seems to assume that spiritual wealth is the possession of gift.

[00:22:01] But Paul has to write to this very gifted company.

He has to write to them, chapter 3, verse 1, And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able, for ye are yet carnal. For whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men? So they had lots of gift. The Lord had given them lots of gift, but they were not spiritual. They were carnal.

Gift in itself does not make a company spiritual, but it is what the gift is for.

[00:23:01] And if it is rightly used before the Lord in subjection to Him, in submission to Him, following Him as He leads by the Spirit, then that gift will bring about wealth in the company, the true riches in the company.

And Paul speaks of spirituality at the end of 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, verse 37, If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. So spirituality displays itself not in the possession of gift, but rather in the walk of obedience before the Lord, submitting to His Word. And in Ephesians we read of the true riches.

[00:24:03] In chapter 3, verse 8, Paul says that it was given to him, who was the least of all saints, that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. And so gift, as has been said, is not the end, but rather a means to the end.

And the correct use of gift is in fact the operation of the Spirit in the assembly, bringing out in the people of God the features of Christ.

And that is the true riches, to have the eye upon the Lord and to walk with Him and to know Him and to have Him commune with us the things concerning Himself. Thank you for those questions and thank you to those who have answered them. That's how we learn.