

WORSHIP FREELY



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CONTENTS

Introduction – 3

1 – *Look Before You Leap* – 4

2 – *So Here We Are* – 8

3 – *Origin Of Protestant Assembliology* – 11

4 – *From Worship To Concerts* – 16

5 – *Mutual Edification Through Love* – 17

6 – *Life-Style Christianity* – 23

7 – *Continuing The Heritage* – 26

8 – *Known By Our Assemblies* – 30

Closing Suggestions – 37



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WORSHIP FREELY

One of the most difficult changes to make in one's life is his change in worship after realizing that he has created a religiosity after his own desires, and especially, traditions. In the restoration of simple Christianity, the call for a return to the word of God will challenge the most sincere and serious worshiper of God. But if one is sincere, and seeking to live according to the word of God, then the change is easy. It is easy for the sincere to confess the wrong doing of their past and then to restore themselves to a closer walk with God. The traditionalist, however, finds it very difficult to change, even though he may realize that his present religiosity was the product of his religious heritage. Since the validation of his religiosity is based on the traditions of the fathers, he finds it difficult to make a change to that which he has learned in the word of God. In order not to confront a possible need for change, therefore, many religious people have simply given up a study of the word of God, lest they discover some area where they have gone wrong in their relationship with God. But for the sincere and dedicated, it is the task of their walk with God to challenge continually their thinking and behavior with the word of God. In fact, we discover the disciples of Jesus by their willingness to repent from wayward ways of the past in order to comply with the wishes of their Master. In order to guard ourselves from apostasy, we are students of the apostasy of Israel in the Old Testament. Their examples of apostasy are a warning to all who would seek to create religiosity after their own desires.

INTRODUCTION

*I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies.
Though you offer Me burnt offerings
and your grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.
Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.*
(Amos 5:21-23)

The above proclamation from God concerning the spiritual and moral state of the Israelites in apostasy is the motivation for the writing of this book. Is-

rael was obediently and legally keeping the feast days according to the law. But God despised them. They continued in their sacred assemblies. But God did not

savor them. They continued in the rituals of their sacrifices according to the law that was given by God. But God would not accept them. They had no law for the stringed instruments. That was David's invention (Am 6:5). Nevertheless, God turned away from their songs for the same reason He despised, did not savor, and rejected all their other religious ceremonies. They conducted legal religiosity with unrighteous hearts. They needed to stop seeking evil and start seeking good (Am 5:14,15).

Amos' message is relevant today. A form of "Christianity" has evolved throughout the years that in many ways is spiritually void of righteous hearts. We legally perform the rites of religiosity, but often we are as the Jewish religious leaders whom Jesus indicted, "*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs that in-*

**Institutional
worship
with an
unrighteous
heart is
despised
by God.**

deed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Mt 23:27,28).

It is not that the subject of this book is new. Throughout history there have always been those who institutionally performed the form of religiosity, but inwardly were filled with the bones of mediocrity, laziness, indifference and a host of other adjectives that are typical of those whom preachers have rebuked for centuries. Sometimes the problem is the preachers themselves, as it was in the days of our Lord. But we are as Amos. There is a problem in Christendom and we seek to alert the worldwide body of believers that we should stand up and repent. We should repent if we find within ourselves any of the unrighteousness that Amos spoke against or any of the "whitewashed tombs" Jesus condemned during His ministry.

Chapter 1

Look Before You Leap

Paul wrote, "*... the doers of the law will be justified*" (Rm 2:13). James added, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*" (Js 1:22). We live in a time wherein many of Christendom are not known for being doers of the word of God. There are many who claim to believe the Bible, want to do what it says, but the norm or heritage of their religiosity is too strong

for them to turn to simple obedience of what God directs through His word. We have had studies with hundreds of people who say they believe the Bible, but when it comes to doing what it says, the intimidation of their peers and past are often too strong for them to initiate obedience to what they learn in the Bible. This is a problem of Christendom in these times, and thus, the nature of those who

have turned away from a Bible-directed way of life to a religion they have constructed after their own desires.

When men turn from daily obedience to the word of God, their religiosity usually turns to religious behavior that is orchestrated in a manner by which their assemblies are used to either identify or validate their religiosity, or both. This is the problem that is being challenged in this book. The challenge involves those who are just short of cutting their wrists in religious assemblies as the religious leaders during Elisha's contest with them on Mount Carmel (See 1 Kg 18:17-46). Assemblies have gone from small and solemn home fellowships in the 1st century to hysterical chaos that is patterned after the worshipers of Diana who cried out in hysteria for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (At 19:34). Somewhere between the quiet and ordered house meetings in the 1st century to assemblies structured around disorder, chaos and madness everyone must confess that some who claim to be Christian have simply gone astray in following their uncontrollable emotions.

The Corinthians had digressed to a point of madness in their assemblies. They had digressed into confusion to the point that Paul stated that if the unbelievers came into their assemblies, they would consider those who were assembled together to be mad (1 Co 14:23). Every Christian must confess, however, that the assemblies of Christians must

reflect the sobriety and self-control that is befitting of those who are directed by the word of God.

In the latter part of the 20th century there arose out of society a generation of young people whose culture could be identified by the word "whatever." Because of their resistance to a previous confrontational generation, this "whatever" generation just concluded that whatever was right for you is fine. This thinking is changing the course of Christendom as a whole. The "whatever" generation now leads the vast majority of the "modern-church generation," and thus whatever goes is done. Though there are some great aspects about this generation in helping us to avoid nonsense debates over things that are just not necessary to argue, the world view of the "whatever" generation is in some ways directly opposed to a Bible-obedient relationship between God and man. There are aspects of the world view that actually hinder this relationship.

The "whatever" generation has now produced "whatever" churches that seem to identify Christendom as people who are spiritual, but are not motivated and directed because of their understanding of the word of God. The "w h a t e v e r" churches are stirred into action, not because they are moved by their knowledge of the Jesus of the Bible, but because of their "spiritual humanism" to simply do good to their fellow man in a religious

Assemblies must reflect sobriety and self-control.

Man does not have the right to worship God in whatever manner he so desires.

context.

The preceding is stated because the nature of this book may trouble some. If you are not a thorough student of the sober and self-controlled nature of Christianity as it is defined in the pages of the New Testament, then what will be said in the following pages will probably be somewhat irritating. It will be so because of the subject, as well as the challenge we make to what many believe and do in their religious behavior, particularly when they come together in assembly.

But all of us must be challenged concerning our religiosity. We must be challenged concerning our beliefs, and then, we must be challenged concerning how we carry out those beliefs in our behavior. And this book is meant to be very challenging. It is meant to be challenging in order to stir readers into thoroughly investigating the word of God in reference to why Christians assemble, and how they should behave when they assemble.

We also want to challenge those who are descendants of traditional religions. The problem with traditional religions is that the heritage of such religions is overbearing on the minds of the adherents. What father and mother believed and taught often becomes greater than what our heavenly Father teaches and has revealed through Jesus, which knowledge comes only through the word of God. Most heritage-driven people, therefore, are afraid to study their Bibles simply because they might discover that the spiritual heritage that was handed down to them by their forefathers erred

in some form or fashion. The desire to honor their forefathers is often much greater than their desire to search the word of God for truth.

When any believer is studying the subject of restoring New Testament Christianity, one's spiritual heritage should always be set aside. Our heritage will not allow us to be objective in our

**Heritage must
always give
way to truth.**

search of the Scriptures for simple Christianity. Whenever there is a conflict between Scripture and heritage, heri-

itage must give way to truth. If we are not willing to sacrifice our heritage for truth, then we are hopeless in our quest to discover the simplicity of New Testament Christianity.

When our eternal destiny is at stake, nothing should sway us from investigating the word of the One before whom all of us must eventually stand in judgment. It is imperative, therefore, that we allow ourselves to be continually challenged by others concerning our beliefs and our religious heritages. But above all, we must be obsessed with our study of the Bible in order to stay as close as possible to the One with whom we seek to spend eternity. The purpose of this book, therefore, is to alert the readers concerning those who have strayed from the nature of true Christianity as a whole, and how wayward religiosity is played out in the assemblies of those who have strayed. If the thoughts of this book touch a nerve, therefore, please delve into the word of God to check your thoughts before throwing away the book. We write in order to

awaken those who sincerely seek to be obedient to the will of God, but have traditionally been led astray to an institutional Christianity that is foreign to the pages of the word of God.

Now one final word before we delve into a very sensitive area of religious culture. The assembly of the saints is a privilege. It is an opportunity for worshipful people to come together in order to direct their attention to God in worship, and not to them-

selves. It is the natural result of the disciples of Jesus who love one another, and

thus, out of their love, fall down in worship of the One who first loved them. Forsaking the opportunity to come together with other disciples in assemblies manifests a lack of love for others and for God. By forsaking the assembly, one cheats himself of an opportunity to worship God with others. If one would claim to be a Christian, therefore, he or she will seek out other Christians with whom to meet for mutual encouragement and worship.

As you read through the following pages, therefore, do not get the impression that we are against assemblies of the disciples for mutual encouragement and worship. What we are discussing is the digression in assemblies of some religious groups to the point that the assembly is used to validate them as a part of Christendom. In a pretense for worship, the assembly is actually entertainment or personal aggrandizement on the part of

the main participants. Supposed worship assemblies have often become rock concerts and “healing” sessions, void of worship and with little concern for one’s

**Assemblies
for worship
must not be
hijacked
for oneself.**

fellow brother or sister. Religious assemblies have often become social gatherings where attendees come to see what they can get, not what they can give in worship to God. To a great extent, therefore, many religious assemblies that are considered worship assemblies are actually weekly events in the lives of those who are looking for an escape from the reality of their own difficult lives.

One can never be against the assemblies of Christians for worship. What Christians should stand against are assemblies of religious people who have strayed from the word of God, and yet, they profess to be an assembly of Christians. We are responsible to awaken readers who have been hijacked by a wayward and false identity of Christianity. It is an awakening that restoration be accomplished in worship of God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).

We must keep in mind that every assembly of Christians does not have to be an assembly for worship. Christians assemble to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). They assemble to discuss doctrinal problems (At 15). They assemble to discuss the needs of widows (At 6:1-7). Sometimes Christians assemble to be exhorted by the teaching of others through song (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). Not every assembly of Christians, there-

fore, is an assembly for worship. However, when Christians designate an assembly specifically to bring individual worshippers together for worship, the as-

sembly must be for worship, and not for emotional or personal aggrandizement of any one or two individuals.

Chapter 2

So Here We Are

Many years ago we showed up at a small assembly of disciples in order to begin a week-long series of studies. Before starting the meeting, some of the members approached us with an issue that was causing some problems. The discord that was prevailing among the small group was that one elderly brother contended that a prayer should be said after the contribution was taken on

Sunday morning.
Others disagreed.
Some discord ensued
and we came in at the

**Ritualism
necessitates
revival.**

frontlines. The problem was not the issue. At the time, we dealt only with the issue, reassuring everyone that since the Bible spoke nothing of the proposed ritual, we should not bind it on the church. But this answer did not focus on the root of the issue. The real problem was the continuation of a particular ritual that the elderly brother strongly believed should continue as a part of a unique Lord's Supper ritual that they had maintained throughout the years. At the time, no one was really concerned about the contentious spirit of the cantankerous brother.

In another assembly a good brother prayed over the Lord's Supper, and then served the fruit of the vine first. Before the tray of cups reached the people, he

realized his supposed mistake. He then recalled the trays, and then "properly" served the bread first. Little did he know that Jesus at least one time before He dedicated the bread with the disciples, He dedicated and served the cup. After the bread, He again offered and served the cup (Lk 22:17,19,20).

Have you ever wondered why almost all the arguments and divisions in churches center around things that take place during the assemblies, specifically during our observance of the Lord's Supper? And when some work up enough courage to initiate some "changes in the church," the changes center around things that are done on Sunday morning in the assembly. But at the same time, there is little serious discussion over change in the life-style of the attendees.

"The preacher ran off with the secretary!" So we were informed by a distraught member.

"We had to entrust the women of the church with all the contributions because the preacher kept stealing the money," so said another.

You have heard a host of similar problems among those who profess to be leaders, but carry on with unchanged behavior. We wonder why those who have been entrusted with such leadership

“positions” would betray us. Why was there little change of behavior in the lives of those who were supposed to lead us down the narrow road of spiritual growth. While understanding that there will always be those who yield to the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life, the answer to why we have not affected life change in many is because of the nature of the Christianity that we have constructed.

Let’s get specific. We were recently emailed an advertisement, or promotion, for a lectureship that was to take place in the near future. The theme of the lectureship was on how to enhance our assemblies of the church in order that they be more appealing to the attendees. In view of John 13:34,35, that struck us as odd. Have we developed an assembly-oriented religion that focuses more on our performances on Sunday morning, than on our behavior in relating with our fellow man the rest of the week? Some have turned the “corporate worship”—wherever that is in the New Testament—into a theatrical performance that appeals to the lusts of the eyes and ears. Our assemblies have gone from worship to WOW! Those

who favor mechanical instruments have hijacked the assemblies of Christians in order to conduct Sunday morning concerts. The once peaceful background music has now come on stage with a full orchestra of musicians. We know of one church that has even added smoke to the performance

Love for one another is the true signal of discipleship.

in order to enhance the theatrical atmosphere of the Sunday rock concert. It is an assembly that has truly gone up in smoke. All this is done with focus on the Sunday morning assembly. Our obsession with the Sunday morning ritual has redefined Christianity. Instead of focusing on life changes, we focus on Sunday morning service changes. But where is this Sunday morning obsession in the New Testament?

Rock concert assemblies are now the identity of many churches. When we moved to a particular part of Cape Town several years ago, and subsequently talked to the neighbors about our move into their community, their immediate response, because we were evangelists, was, “You are not going to play loud music here, are you?” Some churches that were meeting in houses in a city of the capital of Namibia moved the city to speak out against instrumental music in houses for

Some are known for noise, others for love.

church assemblies simply because of the noise. Sunday morning noise is how some have started to identify themselves as Christians in their neighborhoods. We are known for our noise, not for our love of one another, and especially, our love of our neighbors as ourselves. So we are reminded of two scriptural thoughts: “*But we urge you, brethren, ... that you make it your ambition to lead a quiet life ...*” (1 Th 4:10,11). “*The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him*” (Hk 2:20).

So here we are, living in a world

where the assemblies of the saints have been hijacked by theatrical performers and controlled by assembly teams. We are wondering if there is not something

**Faithfulness
is not determined
by perfect
attendance.**

empty, void and useless about our assemblies where we walk away every Sunday with ringing ears and exhausted emotions. Have we constructed a religion that is foreign to the assemblies of the 1st century? In our efforts to establish a weekly emotional experience to generate worship in the hearts of those who are not worshipping in their hearts, have we forgotten that the Lord is in His holy temple, so let all the earth keep silence before Him?

Throughout the centuries, Christendom has developed an assembly-oriented identity. And subsequently, we seek to validate our existence as Christians by our assemblies. Since we have validated our existence by either performance of “acts of worship”—again, wherever that is in the New Testament—or, by “concertists” who seek to deafen us by turning up their amplifiers, we have become a religion of “assemblologists.”

Of course there is no such word as “assembliology” in our English dictionaries. But we have a tendency to allow the times to invent new words that explain current phenomenon in the behavior of the religious world. (Our dictionaries would be very small if we did not allow change into new social paradigms to stir the invention of new words that define new social orders.) And so it has been in

the religious world. Assembliology may not be something new in the realm of religion because this phenomenon of Christendom developed before and out of the Reformation Movement centuries ago. But because we cannot go back two thousand years to the days of the early church in order to identify the assembly ritual we conduct today, then a study of the assemblies of the modern church is a very interesting phenomenon to consider.

Our religious history in the last few centuries has encouraged an interesting obsession in religious behavior that is used to define one’s faithfulness to God. Though in the Protestant world assembliology was born out of the Reformation Movement, it has intensified in the last half of the last century. It has intensified to the point that it has given birth to an assembly-oriented Christianity that is somewhat void of personal relationships that would enhance one’s relationship with others and God. Those of this new doctrine obsess over the assembly of the saints as the sole identity of the existence of a local church and the faithfulness of the individual believer in his relationship with God and other Christians.

Assembliology would be the study of our obsessive focus on the assembly of the saints as the identity of the church. The assemblologist seeks to validate his Christianity by his performance during an appointed “hour of worship.” In his theology, true assemblies can be deter-

**ASSEMBLIOLOGY:
Identity of
Christianity by
a Sunday morning
ritual.**

mined by rituals of behavior or orders of worship, depending on the assembly of each particular religious group. Assemblologists seek to perfect their assemblies, either for “evangelistic” purposes, or to be in competition with the assemblies of other groups. The departmentalization of their Christianity to the “worship hour” has moved them to perfect the identity of their churchianity by the vibrancy of the assemblies that are locked in between an opening and closing prayer. All is done in order to win or retain the “faithful” in order that one’s church (assembly) grows. The success of the assemblologist, therefore, is measured by the size of his assembly. We thus judge the success of a particular pas-

tor/preacher by his ability to assemble and retain a great number of spectators who would sit before him and be entertained by the orchestra and lecture.

Before we venture too far into this new identity of church, we would do well to investigate the refinement of the assembly of Christians that has developed over the last fifty or more years. A brief review of the evolution of this religious phenomenon will lay the foundation for our discussions later. We must understand why the identity of Christianity in these times has strayed from the behavioral life-style and participatory fellowship that Jesus mandated in John 13:34,35 that would identify His people.

Chapter 3

Origin Of Protestant Assembliology

We need to go back about 450 years in order to understand where we are today. We must take this painful journey into our past in order to discover where we should go from here. Our infatuation with the Sunday morning ritual is not something that is recent in church history. Its origins in the Protestant world date to the time of the Reformation Movement in the 1500’s, a time when Christendom was groaning in order to deliver itself from centuries of religious oppression under the dominance of Roman Catholicism.

If we dare to make this journey, we will discover why the Sunday morning assembly ritual characterizes almost all Protestant churches throughout the world

today. To begin, we must confess that we have revealed our theology by our speech. We talk of the “opening prayer,” “hour of worship” and “closing prayer.” After the opening prayer comes singing, sermon, Supper, singing, and then, the closing prayer. With a few variations, you can step inside almost any Protestant church throughout the world today and find a similar ritual of assembly. Some assemblies will be more reserved, others more lively, but all with basically the same ritual. It is a Sunday morning ritual that defines Christendom to the non-Christian world.

Now the problem is that we cannot find in the New Testament this common Sunday morning ritual that is hailed to

be the existing identity of Christianity today. Some groups of Christendom have sought to piece together with proof texts a codified system of assembly by which they separate themselves from other churches. Basically, however, Protestantism is defined by a common Sunday assembly among all religious groups that fall under the label of the Protestant world. But nowhere in the New Testament do we find the system of assembly that is characteristic with most Protestant churches today. In fact, it is impossible to identify any ritual of assembly that was common of all churches in the New Testament.

So where did the Sunday morning ritual originate? If it is not New Testament, then its origins must be discovered somewhere in the history of Protestant Christendom between the establishment of the church in the 1st century and today. In reference to the assembly structure of Protestant churches, we must go back at least 450 years, to the days when men were struggling out of the clutches of the Dark Ages and the dominance of the Roman Catholic church.

In his book, *How to Meet in Homes*, Gene Edwards wrote,

But herein is the greatest tragedy for *all* of us . . . domestic or foreign: That pitiful, dead ritual, which supplanted the ekklesia, is *not* an organic expression of the Christian faith. Read that again!

That ritual was invented in Geneva,

and even *in* Geneva that ritual was not an organic expression of the faith in that city. It moved from Geneva to Scotland. When it got to Scotland . . . it was foreign to the Scots. When it spread to the English, it did not match the English. When that awful ritual got on a boat and came to America, landed and began cursing us here, it did not fit the American disposition or mentality. This pitiful ritual is not Albanian and does not fit Albanians! Nor any other ethos on earth. Yet in every nation on earth this very life-killing ritual *defines* our faith. That pernicious ritual is proclaiming to the world: "*This is Christianity.*"^{pp 12,13}

In order to understand the reinvention of the Sunday morning ritual by the Protestant reformers, we must go back another one thousand years to a second major player in the Sunday ritual. This would be Pope Gregory the Great. This pope of the Catholic Church, around A.D. 540, prescribed in a written decree how Catholics should conduct themselves during their Sunday assemblies. Basing his instructions on the pagan rituals of the times, Gregory outlined how assembly adherents should conduct themselves when they came together into the basilicas for worship. Gregory's mandate in reference to how Catholics should meet identifies the origin of the ritual. The assembly ritual was invented by man—the pope. It was slightly modified by Protestant reformers as John Calvin, and subsequently became the pattern by which churches of Christendom conducted their assemblies for centuries to

come, even to this day.

Throughout the centuries slight variations of the Sunday morning ritual differentiated religious groups, but in general, one can go from one assembly to another in Christendom and expect to experience the same general ritual. Some have added unique practices to their assemblies. The Eastern Orthodox Church, for example, imposed on attendees the posture of standing for two hours in the assembly. There are no seats in their assembly halls. Some groups identify themselves by the hysterical nature of their assemblies. Some emotionally lose control, rolling on the ground and crying out in gibberish. Others have invented orchestras or healing services, and a host of other inventions that are carried out during the assembly in order to encourage the adherents to return. Regardless of either silence or commotion during the assembly, there is always a primary speaker, congregational singing, spectators during speaking, and often, a dominant band playing instruments. And of course, we must not forget the collection plate. Every ceremony is interrupted with prayers, and sometimes chants. Since Christendom is identified by this assembly ritual that may vary in some aspects, it is helpful to understand how it was entrenched as the mark of identity of Christianity and made the signal by which churches presently validate themselves as “Christian churches.”

John Calvin was a religious leader of Geneva, Switzerland during the 16th century. He was an extensive student of the Bible, and subsequently, he mar-

shalled people into strict assembly adherence in order to proclaim his studies. Geneva was controlled by what was called the Consistory Committee. All citizens had to conform to the rules of the city, which rules were maintained by this committee of seventeen men (Will Durant, *The Reformation*; Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 1957; pp. 472-484). Five of these men were preachers and twelve were elders. Calvin was over the seventeen. Essentially, Geneva was a religious police state ruled by religious despots. Calvin was at the top of a controlled religious “military” that subjugated all citizens to the mandates of his assembliology.

The religious leaders of Geneva ruled by lordship and fear. For example, adultery was punished by burning at the stake. Witchcraft was punished by burning at the stake. And pity the poor soul who missed the assembly. If one missed too many assemblies, he or she was also burned alive. A heretic was anyone who disagreed with Calvin, and thus, heretics were also burned alive. However, there was some mercy. You could get off with the first offense. But if you were caught and tried for the third time, it was death.

Since Calvin believed in predestination, his conscience was soothed by the thought that harsh judgments were inflicted on those who had already been predestined by God to eternal hell. He simply began the burning of those who had themselves revealed that they were predestined to burn in hell anyway. During this religious reign of terror, fourteen women were accused of witchcraft by his

seventeen enforcers, and subsequently, all fourteen were consigned to begin their burning in hell in life.

Calvin was a religious tyrant who could not cope with disagreement. The environment of religious behavior in Geneva, therefore, was molded around one who enforced his beliefs and practices on the people. Calvin was a great thinker and writer, and thus corralled people into assembly on Sunday in order to impart his dictates. Assembly, therefore, became the occasion where he could expound his studies to an audience. He thus judged faithful those who would not forsake the assembly. His seventeen enforcers made sure that everyone showed up at the assembly. The speaker-audience assembly thus became a system of assembly that has identified Protestant Christianity ever since. Out of Geneva, Switzerland, therefore, the Sunday ritual was given birth in Protestantism and entrenched in those churches that followed the system of assembly that was imposed on the residents of Geneva.

Because of his enforced system of assembly, Calvin enthroned the position of the clergy. He marshaled the assembly into a silent stupor, and subsequently, under the control of the clergy he drained the organic life out of the adherents. With the heritage of the Catholic Church that prevailed during his time, and the dominant control of Calvin and other reformers, the Protestant world today continues with the Sunday ritual.

**Individuals
should never
use assemblies
of the disciples
to promote power.**

Though the ritualistic assemblies continue, the number of attendees is shrinking in many areas of the world.

We must keep in mind that the Sunday ritual was created by man. It is man perpetuated. It is neither 1st century nor New Testament, simply because the 1st century disciples met in homes throughout their communities (Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15; Pl 2). We would add that it is not natural when considering of the one-another relationships between Christians that is defined by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. And because such is not characteristic of our desires to connect with one another, a wave of change has come among those who seek to restore the organic nature of simple New Testament faith. This cultural paradigm shift has already started in the religious world. The ekklesia (church) is arising out of dead ritualism in order to regain its organic life. Even in America the latest statistics show that over nine percent of the attending Protestant membership meet in small fellowships in the homes of the members (*NBC Night News*, November, 2010).

As we venture into this controversial area of religious behavior in Christendom, we must keep in mind that the Sunday ritual is not wrong in and of itself. It is not wrong for Christians to come together in assembly, even if those assemblies are in the thousands and follow a prescribed order of assembly. However, a consistent diet of single-as-

sembly attendance on Sunday morning week after week, without small group fellowships of the attendees sometime during the week, is a detriment to the relational growth of the individual adherents. A large single-assembly church has proved one thing in this postmodern world. Meeting exclusively on a weekly basis in large assemblies does not produce the desired numerical and spiritual growth that perpetuates the church. The stalemate and shrinking numbers of adherents of the traditional church in the last fifty years proves this point. What has happened in areas where the church is growing *en masse* is where small assemblies of 25-50 members come together in a small fellowship where there is personal interactivity. When a group grows above this number, the level of personal interactivity decreases. The larger the assembly, the less the personal relationship the members have with one another.

Because members have decided that they want friends and fellowship on a personal basis, a shift in focus has come. However, this paradigm shift is not without criticism from those who have promoted and perpetuated the means by which power, purse and pomp can be protected and preserved in exclusively single-assembly churches. Nevertheless, there is a revival, a restoration that is arising out of the ashes of institutional churchianity that gives us hope for the future. People are weary of sitting in idleness on pews and staring with boredom while listening to the humdrum of professional lecturers. A movement of seekers has

arisen who seek relationships. It is a religious culture of people who want to connect, to love and be loved. There is a revisiting of the organic ekklesia of the 1st century. People are discovering that there is a vast difference between assembly-oriented churchianity and one-another relationships. They are discovering that assemblies in the New Testament sprang out of one-another relationships. Contact is made in assemblies, but relationships are developed in personal encounters.

The ritualistic assemblies of the institutional church are lacking in that they seek to produce relationships through large assemblies, dynamic speakers and

**Small assemblies
are the
spontaneous result
of our search for
fellowship.**

inspiring singing or bands. The New Testament teaches a one-another context of believers, from which assemblies of various flavors will originate. There is a vast difference between “one another” Christianity and assembly-oriented churchianity. One focuses on bringing individuals together into an atmosphere of love and good works while the other simply focuses on the performance of a few and the attendance of the many.

Those large single-assembly churches that are surviving have organized into small house fellowships throughout their communities. They are able to continue with the large Sunday assembly simply because they have taken their focus off the Sunday morning ritual

and turned it to evangelistic house fellowships that meet throughout the week. They are becoming known for their house

fellowships, not a Sunday morning performance.

Chapter 4

From Worship To Concerts

While living in Brazil in the early 70s we experienced an interesting religious phenomenon that began in the 50s in Latin America. The traditional mass of the Catholic Church was cold, quiet and centered around one man, the priest. However, Pentecostalism captured the imagination of the people. Assemblies ran through Jerusalem, and thus, completely changed in nature. The Pentecostal/charismatic assembly was loud, centered around all the participants, and often resulted in chaotic episodes of frenzied hysteria. The assemblies became opportunities for adherents to find an emotional release from the poverty-stricken lives they had to endure in the midst of economic deprivation. One no longer went to an assembly of “Christians” in order to worship, but to find release. The purpose of the assemblies, therefore, began to change. They changed from worship to an opportunity for escape.

Such was the general trend among those of the charismatic movement that swept across Latin America, and was often characteristic of the Pentecostal movement in the Americas during the latter part of the 20th century. The assemblies changed the nature of Christendom as assemblies began to compete with one another for adherents. And thus, the

amplifiers were brought in for the purpose of stirring up the session with sound that reverberated in church buildings and school halls around the world.

What developed in the latter part of the 20th century was the production in the secular music world of the rock concert. Rock concerts were opportunities for young people to swarm together in order to lose themselves in the music of the artists and the environment of thousands of spectators. Before this generation of music lovers arrived, music was broadcast through radio, TV and bands that toured the country and played before small groups of people in town halls. But the rock concert was bigger and better. It produced an atmosphere of musical and emotional ecstasy. Woodstock became a culture that was only refined by rock concerts that followed.

The religious world could not be left behind in a rock concert culture. After two generations of rock concerts, the rock concert participants began to determine the nature of the assemblies of Christendom. The behavior of church adherents in assembly changed. Assemblies changed from opportunities

**Rock concerts
focus on people.
Worship focuses
on God.**

to worship with one's fellow man, to something that emulated the environment of a rock concert. In order for the preacher to grow his assembly, he had to buy larger speakers and turn up the amplifier. The electronic industry followed suit by producing amplifier/speaker systems that were built specifically for the world of Christendom.

And thus, cold Calvinist and Catholic assemblies have now given way to rock concert events every Sunday morning to which attendees often go to focus on themselves and instrumental music with sound that comes forth from an array of electronic machinery. Assemblies drifted away from opportunities to worship God. People fall on the ground, foam at the mouth, and writhed in emotional hysteria because the fervor of the event appeals to the emotional appetites of the participants. As the unbelieving world looked on such assemblies in Christendom, their only conclusion was that there is madness among them.

Now somewhere between the cold, ritualistic formalism that was void of worship, and was born out of the Refor-

mation Movement, to the emotionally chaotic assemblies of the charismatic movement—also void of worship—many lost their way. Many lost sight of the purpose for which God exhorted His people to come together in assembly.

We would recognize that not everyone expresses his worship of God in the same way. Our worship of God stirs our emotions. But emotions have been used to stir worship. And in our efforts to become emo-

Worship should stir our emotions.

tional in response to cold assemblies, we have allowed the stirring of our emotions to be the objective of our assemblies. In doing so, we have lost sight of God by focusing on ourselves. Many assemblies, therefore, have developed into sessions of focusing on the lusts of the ears in order to stir emotions of the heart which we have passed off as worship. We must never forget that in true worship one never becomes emotionally exhausted. But in subjective emotionalism, in a short time one eventually falls to the ground without any energy to continue.

Chapter 5

Mutual Edification Through Love

For purposes of mutual edification and encouragement, Jesus taught that His disciples love one another as He had loved them (Jn 13:34,35). This mandate of Jesus must always be the focus of the Christian's behavioral standard by which His disciples are identified as a Chris-

tian. If we stray from our identity of loving one another as He loved us, then we

Jesus did not go about Palestine establishing assemblies.

will become ships without anchors on a religious sea where we

will wander aimlessly among other misguided vessels with the same problem. It is an axiomatic truth in reference to all that Jesus lived and taught that His church is to be identified by mutual love, not by a codified ritual of assembly on Sunday. Since many churches have degressed to be identified simply by an assembly ritual, then we must pursue this matter with great diligence. There is certainly a difference between being validated as God's people by a relational love of one another and an assembly ritual.

Suppose we asked if the church existed in Timbuktu, Algeria—there is such a city. If there were a church there, how would we identify its existence. Most people identify its existence by what took place on Sunday morning.

We might respond that the assembled adherents performed a system of acts of worship, and thus, because they successfully performed these acts, or ritual, they existed as a church. The group might be at war in biting and devouring one another in disputes and arguments over endless genealogies (2 Tm 2:24; Ti 3:9-11), but we would answer the inquiry by stating that a church existed in Timbuktu because of an assembly ritual that was regularly performed on Sunday morning. Now is this the manner by which Jesus stated that His disciples would be identified? Is this the standard of identity by which Jesus identified the seven churches of Asia (Rv 2 & 3). Seriously!

The existence of a church in a city is not identified by an assembly ritual.

One must find in the New Testament where the existence of a church is identified in any particular city by a ritual it may have performed on Sunday morning.

Jesus wanted His disciples to be identified by the love that He manifested toward them, not by their assemblies. We must not forget this point. It would be by their love for one another that the world would believe, not by either dynamic assemblies or a ritualistic system of assembly. The early Christians responded to their love of Jesus and one another's company. It was in one another's company that they stirred themselves to greater love of one another (1 Th 3:12). In their assemblies they planned and encouraged one another to maintain good works (Hb 10:24,25). The purpose of the assembly, therefore, was to encourage their love for one another and to motivate good works in their communities and among themselves (Gl 6:1-10). Their assemblies were the result of their "one another" relationships. And this could be accomplished even if only two or three were gathered together.

Christian assemblies are identified by how Christians manifest their love for one another because of their love for God. "*We love because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). Assemblies of Christians, therefore, must be

occasions wherein love is manifested (Hb

10:24,25). For this reason, they must be participatory, not spectator oriented. Loveless people can assemble as specta-

Sunday ceremonies do not identify the existence of the church.

tors, but loving people are never spectators. Loving people participate in one another's lives, and thus, the participation of the disciples in assembly is never confined to only a few on Sunday. Neither is their contact with one another confined to Sunday.

In the 1st century there were assemblies where only two or three were gathered together in His name. On other occasions, there were larger assemblies, assuming that the Christians showed up for evangelistic reasons among the unbelievers who were in the temple courtyard (At 5:42). But when the disciples came together on a regular basis for mutual edification, and to stir up good works, it was in small house

fellowships. There is no evidence in the New Testament where

The early church met in small fellowships in the homes of the members.

assemblies are defined as the large corporate and concert assemblies that we experience today. This does not mean that large assemblies of the disciples are wrong. What is questionable is our obsession with large assemblies to the exclusion of one-another assemblies wherein there is mutual participation by all individuals who are present, in order that everyone might have an opportunity to express love for one another. Unfortunately, our obsession to "build a large church" (assembly), has marginalized, if not excluded, small assemblies wherein disciples have the opportunity to manifest their love for one another.

One might argue that the early

Christians did not have the finances or opportunity to regularly have large corporate assemblies that are typical of many churches today. Fair enough. However, there is absolutely no evidence that the modern mega assemblies that are conducted today existed in the 1st century church. As previously stated, this does not mean that the mega super Sundays of today are wrong. However, we should

Fellowship is not assembly attendance, but attendance to one another's needs.

be cautioned about reading the envi-

ronment of the mega assemblies that occur today into the assemblies of the early church. This is very important because the assemblologists of today want to read their emphasis on assembly-oriented Christianity into the pages of the New Testament. We must always keep in mind that the assemblies of the disciples are an opportunity to participate lovingly in one another's lives, not to attend a performance of the few.

We must also keep in mind that the early church assembled in the homes of the members. The early church continued in the members' homes for over three hundred years after the establishment of the church.

The church grows in numbers when members grow in fellowship with one another.

During the early persecution of the church, some disciples went into "seclusion assemblies" when the Roman Empire unleashed its fury on those they considered to be insurrection-

ists against the Empire. No historian rejects the fact that the early church met in the homes of the members. Why the early Christians met in small fellowships in their homes had more to do with maintaining loving participation in one another's lives, than conducting a supposedly institutional ritual that identified them as a church.

This brings us to a very important point. **If the assembly of the disciples were to be the focal point of faithfulness and identity of the church, then we wonder why there is no emphasis in the New Testament placed on the disciples' ritualistic performance in assemblies.** Other than a few passages, there is little discussion in the New Testament letters concerning what the early Christians did in their assemblies. Anyone who has a minimal knowledge of the epistles that were written to the early church by the inspired writers understands that the focus of every epistle is on the behavioral life-style of the saints, not on how they might have ritualistically performed acts of worship during their assemblies. But it seems that some have reversed this focus. Assemblologists today stir up contention over what might be erroneously conducted in the assem-

Because the church is not identified by a ceremonial assembly, there is no emphasis in the New Testament on what Christians should do in assembly.

bly, but remain mute concerning the conduct of the members after the closing prayer. The fact that this is true is evidence to the fact that we have developed a theology of assembliology that is foreign to the Scriptures. Our obsession with the function of our structured assemblies lends us to going to war with one another over any changes in the assembly structure.

Our obsession with our assembly rituals has become the occasion where we manifest our unloving attitudes toward one another. In other

Contention among members concerning assembly rituals denies the very signal by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified.

words, wrangling by some over changes in the assembly ritual has actually manifested that disciples are not identified by that which Jesus said they should be identified, that is, by their love for one another.

The epistles are saturated with "one another" statements. But these statements are always in the context of the mutual interactivity of the disciples, and not sitting beside one another in an assembly in order to perform according to a structured ritual by which we seek to identify ourselves as the church. The Corinthians were exhorted to correct some key dysfunctions of their assembly when they came together (See 1 Co 11,12,14). And, Paul gave some instructions concerning structure that would prevent chaos during their assemblies (1 Co

14:26-40). However, the instructions were given in reference to their consideration of one another, **not in order to solidify a Sunday morning ritual.**

Keep in mind that Paul's exhortation concerning the assembly consumes only three chapters of all the New Testament. When considering 1 Corinthians 13—the chapter on love—that is placed in the context of the problems surrounding the Corinthians' assemblies, we would conclude that their dysfunctional relationships outside their assemblies had spilled over into their assemblies. Their assemblies were only the opportunity for their unloving hearts to be manifested. But if they followed the instructions of chapter 13, then all their assembly problems would be solved. In other words, the Corinthians would have had no need for the instructions concerning the structure of their assemblies as stated in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 if they had not digressed from loving assemblies that were expressions of the loving fellowship that they were to have with one another outside their assemblies.

One should be challenged to read every "one another" passage that is in the New Testament. In every passage, emphasis is not on the assembly, but on the fact that Christians were to maintain a relationship of considering one another's needs. Passages that discuss the assemblies focus on how Christians can en-

Our assembly is to be the result of our love, not the result of obeying a legalistic ritual.

hance their one-another relationships by the opportunity of interactively participating in one another's lives. Hebrews 10:24,25 speaks of exhorting one another to love and good works. A careful reading of Hebrews 10:24,25—the favorite passage of assemblologists—reveals that the assembly of the saints was not for entertainment,

Hebrews 10:24,25 is not a spectator proof text.

nor an opportunity for one person or group of persons to be the sole participants in the assembly. It is not a passage to guarantee that the disciples submit to a legal order of assembly and obedience to codified ceremonies. "One another" in the text does not mean one to the others. No spectator assemblies occurred in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:24,25 is a reference to participatory assemblies wherein adherents have an opportunity to become involved with one another through love and good works. There are no spectators in Hebrews 10:24,25.

We must keep in mind, however, that it is not wrong for Christians to assemble together in large assemblies to enjoy teaching from the word of God or speaking to one another through song. "*I will declare Your name to My brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You*" (Hb 2:12). We would certainly assume that the assemblies of the early saints varied from one group to another. The Jews certainly did not conduct their assemblies as the Gentiles, and we would assume that in some ways the culture of the people was reflected in the behavior of the disciples in their assemblies.

There was also variation in what was accomplished in the different assemblies of the early church. In reference to 1 Corinthians 14:26 there may have been occasions when no one came with a song, or a teaching, or a language, or a revelation, or an interpretation. At least in reference to there being no one present who had the gift of interpretation, the one with the gift of languages had to keep silent. We would conclude, therefore, that each assembly of the Corinthian church may have been different every Sunday, depending on who was present. There was thus no prescribed actions of worship that were to take place that would validate their meeting as an official assembly.

One of the favorite passages that is used by assemblologists actually emphasizes the opposite of what they assert. This is Luke's historical account of Paul's visit to Troas that is recorded in Acts 20:7. In this passage one would think that the type of assemblies that are characteristic with Christendom today would be found in this passage. The occasion was Paul's trip to Jerusalem on his last missionary journey. He passed through Troas. The event was recorded by Luke. "*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them ...*" (KJV). The *American Standard Version* is better. "*And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them*" The *International King James Version* is better. "... Paul **had discussions** with them" The *World English Bible* reads that Paul "**talked** with them."

The Greek word for "preaching" in Acts 20:7 is **not** *karusso* (to preach), but *dialegeto* (dialogue), to have dialog or discussion. One would think that if the type of assemblies we have today in the institutional church were characteristic of the 1st century church, then certainly such an environment of assembly would be found in Acts 20:7 on Paul's last visit to the church in Troas. The fact that such an assembly as we have today is not found on this occasion, and other occasions of assembly in the New Testament, should alert us to the fact that something may be wrong with our understanding of the regular Sunday assemblies of the early church. Has Christendom strayed from the "one another" (interactive) assemblies of the New Testament church? And in our "assembly culture" of today, have we read into the New Testament the performance assemblies that we conduct among ourselves? Because we cannot read of our assembly culture of today in the New Testament does not mean that the way we conduct assemblies today is wrong. However, it does mean that we should be very cautious about emphasizing the manner by which we assemble. If we assemble in a way that hinders the individual worship of the attendees, then it is time for reform. If our assemblies misdirect the attention of the attendees to focus on themselves, and not God, then it is time to repent. If all our assemblies

**Participatory assemblies
focus on people,
not pomp and power.**

are spectator oriented, then we have strayed from the rich relational gatherings that were typical of the early church.

The early church customarily had participatory assemblies. By participatory we mean that in some way almost everyone was involved in the assembly. 1 Corinthians 14:26 still says “every one of you has a song ... teaching ... etc.” The Acts 20:7 assembly was a participatory assembly because of the Holy Spirit’s use of the Greek word *dialegeto* (dialogue). Paul did not endlessly lecture during this particular assembly. We might assume that he would have done so since it was his last visit to Troas. But Paul did not prepare and deliver a sermon. The Troas disciples certainly had a great number of questions that had to be answered. The occasion demanded dialogue, not lecture. If we would refer to the disciples in Troas,

**The “Corinthian Problem”
reveals that assemblies
should never be used
to promote oneself.**

as well as the Corinthian assemblies that Paul corrected with the Corinthian letter, then we could conclude that the early disciples had weekly participatory assemblies, not theatrical performances by a few participants. Some Corinthians tried to be performers with focus on themselves. But Paul said they were puffed up. He subsequently corrected their puffed up performances by writing the greatest chapter on love in human history (1 Co 13).

The “Corinthian problem” of puffed-up performers using their gifts to exalt themselves in competition with one another evidently did not exist among other churches. The assemblies of other churches reflected the one another relationships that prevailed among the disciples, which relationships were generated out of a heart of the disciples’ love for one another. The regular assemblies, therefore, were opportunities for the disciples to manifest their love for one another, not an opportunity for performance.

Chapter 6

Life-Style Christianity

Most people are guilty of reading the nature of our modern assemblies into the “one another” passages of the New Testament. It is a matter of *eisegesis*, that is, reading our definition of works and words into the words of the Bible. Here are two examples. Two favorite passages that are often narrowed in their application to Christian behavior are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. “... *speaking*

to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ep 5:19). “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*” (Cl 3:16).

It is assumed that the singing man-

date of these two passages is primarily to the assembly context of the church, and subsequently, is one act of worship that validates an assembly as worship. In fact, these two passages are often used by some to determine one of the mandates for the codified ritual that must be performed during the Sunday morning assembly in order to determine if a church

**Christians
should sing
anytime
and
anywhere.**

exists at a particular location. There are two reasons why neither passage in its context is teaching this. First, nowhere in the context of either passage is the Sunday assembly mentioned. It is just not there. It is only assumed by those who read their present religious assembly behavior into the biblical context of the passages that the passages are made to refer exclusively to the assembly of the saints.

In the context of both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Paul was discussing the life-style relationships that must be characteristic of every Christian. In the context, exhorting one another through song was one of the manifestations of this relationship. True, the singing can take place during the general assembly of the saints on any occasion, but not exclusively during the assembly. Anytime and anywhere Christians are together with one another they can use song to exhort one another.

Second, the singing that is mentioned in these two passages does not demand that singing take place during every encounter that Christians have with one another. This would include the gen-

eral assembly of Christians on the first day of the week, as well as times when two or three Christians might encounter one another anytime during the week. All that is said in the passages is that Christians exhort one another in singing. Neither the occasion nor the context of the singing is mentioned in reference to when the saints might carry out the command to encourage one another through song.

Now this brings up a very interesting point in reference to assemblies and singing. Is the mandate of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to be carried out on every occasion when Christians come together? We would have to answer that Paul did not mean that Christians **must** sing to one another every time they encountered one another. If they encountered one another on the street, they would not have to break out in song. If they encountered one another in a corporate business meeting, they would not have to start singing in the presence of the unbelievers who were present. What if Christians encountered one another at 10:00^{AM} on a Sunday morning? Would they be under a mandate to sing to one another? If Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to the daily living of the Christian—and they do—then we must assume that two or three Christians do not have to break out in singing when they meet one another on Monday morning at 10:00^{AM}. Now if they encounter one another on Sunday morning, the exhortation of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 does not change in meaning or application. The point is that Christians can meet together and not sing, as they

can meet together and not study the Bible or pray or take up a contribution. There is thus no mandate in the Scriptures that assumes that worship takes place when certain performances are acted out. An assembly of the disciples is thus not validated as such when a particular ritual is performed.

It is natural for Christians to sing when they are together. When they come together on any occasion for worship it is only natural for them to speak to one another in song as they sing praises to God. While in prison, Paul and Silas applied this principle in a Philippian jail (At 16:25). What Paul was discussing in the context of

**Assemblies
of Christians
are not validated
as official
by the performance
of certain
acts of worship.**

Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 was the nature of the behavior of Christians in their relationship with one another and God at all times. He was not giving a mandate that would become a code to determine an official assembly of the saints. Christians must exhort one another through song, but they do not have to do so every time they meet together. Is it natural in their behavior to sing when they come together in assembly? Absolutely! But mutual exhortation through singing was never given in the New Testament as an act by which the assemblies of the saints would be identified or validated. Neither was singing given as a validation that worship takes place. Sing-

ing to one another is the result of worship, not a manifestation that an assembly has been validated. Singing is a means for edification and teaching. It is not a signal for an “official” assembly. It is a signal of the Christian demeanor of life seven days a week.

This is a very important point in reference to our study of assembliology. Assemblologists consider singing on Sunday morning to be one of the key points that identifies the church. Some groups have added instrumental bands and orchestras to the vocal singing, and thus throughout

**The New Testament
does not reveal
all that Christians
did on Sunday.**

Christendom, music, both instrumental and vocal, has become an identity mark of what is considered to be a church and a valid assembly on Sunday. Our point is that in many cases the singing and instrumental performance has taken assemblies beyond worship to rock concert religiosity.

The conclusion to the preceding thoughts is very practical. If a group of Christians are assembled in hiding for purposes of safety, and thus cannot sing lest their presence be discovered, do they sin? Are they conducting “an assembly”? If they do not sing, is their assembly considered “official” in the eyes of God? If a group of Christians know no songs to sing, do they sin when they assemble together if they do not sing? The singing of Christians is the natural result of their worship, but not their identity as saints of God. We must always keep in mind in

this discussion that it is love, not the performance of specific rituals of worship, that defines the disciples of Jesus.

Chapter 7

Continuing The Heritage

Since Luther, Calvin and others ingrained an assembly-oriented religiosity in the minds of people as the identity of their “Christianity,” others have followed their beliefs by also identifying Christianity by an assembly. In the 400 years following the Reformation Movement, the existence of a church has been identified by what takes place in an assembly context on Sunday morning at a particular location. And in order to promote the identity of each particular denomination, each group has often adopted unique rituals by which their existence is preserved. This identity is reflected during the Sunday assembly, not necessarily in their behavioral relationships with one another throughout the week.

When restoration movements came forth out of such assembly-oriented religiosity over the past 400 years, restorationists heralded their adherents around a particular man or particular ritual that was ceremonially performed in their assemblies. Every group identified itself

Assembly rituals should never be used to divide disciples.

with a unique flavor of assembly, and then indoctrinated adherents to preserve the movement by preserving their unique assembly ritual. If no name was attached to a particular

building in which the assembly took place, unique groups could usually be identified by their particular behavior of their assembly ritual. However, regardless of some variations, every Protestant church has basically the same ritual on Sunday morning.

An example of this would be the Restoration Movement that originated out of America in the latter part of the 18th century, which actually had its initial origins in Europe. When the 18th century Restoration Movement occurred, one task of the leaders was to establish an identity of the churches of the movement by a unique assembly. Though not intended in the early part of the movement, identity by assembly ritual eventually became the hallmark of all those assemblies that would be identified with the movement, and thus, considered restored churches. The movement continued in unity until the Sunday ritual was changed by some with the addition of instrumental music. The change in the ritual divided the movement, and subsequently, gave rise to two different groups. This divided mark of identity continues to this day. It has been propagated

Those who codify assembly rituals will alienate Christians from one another.

throughout the world, and now, the two different groups of this movement are identified by what happens on Sunday morning, not necessarily by a love factor that exists in the relationship of the disciples for one another during the week. In fact, the adherents of the two groups manifested a loving relationship during the week, but divided themselves from one another on Sunday morning, meeting in church houses across the street from one another. Assembliology!

A ritual of acts of worship became the focal point of identity of many restoration churches. These acts (Lord's Supper, singing, preaching, praying, giving, and some say teaching, reading Scripture and instrumental music) were enshrined around the assembly to the point that any assembly identified as a true church had to carry on with these ceremonial acts. What subsequently resulted as history played itself out in this moment was that the acts became the identity as to whether one was a member of the universal church. In other words, if one did not assemble with those who were performing the acts, he or she was not a Christian, and thus not saved. The Sunday ritual, therefore, became the validation of one's sonship. If one did not participate in the ritual that was sanctioned as the "true assembly," then he or she could

not be one who was in a covenant relationship with God. Obedience to the gospel by immersion for remission of sins, plus the legal ritual of the Sunday assembly, therefore, determined if one was saved (Consider At 15:1; Gl 1:6-9).

During the latter part of the 19th century and first of the 20th century, a debate raged among restorationists concerning acts or practices that took place during the assembly on Sunday morning. Because of the debate, "acts of worship" were legally enthroned, and eventually became the identity of an "official" Sunday assembly of the true church. After one went through the five steps of conversion (hear, believe, repent, confess, and baptism), his faithfulness was determined by his legal compliance to the acts of worship during the assembly ritual of the saints on Sunday morning. We would not argue with the simplistic nature of this system of religiosity. However, the focus of the five steps was on the legal performance of man in obedience, not on the gospel of Jesus' atoning sacrifice and resurrection. Legal performance of the acts was then translated into legal performances in "worship" on Sunday morning. The extreme focus on the acts of worship elevated the acts to be the legal identity of the church, regardless of whether the ceremonies of worship were a reflection of one's personal worship. Churches were subsequently identified by their legal obedience to the acts, and thus, laid bare for Satan to divide the disciples over trivial matters that took place in reference to the acts during the Sunday assembly.

**The more emphasis
that is placed
on acts of assembly,
the less emphasis
we place on moral acts
of obedience.**

One can now determine if he is an assemblologist simply by determining if he believes that legal compliance to defined performances during the “hour of worship” determines the faithfulness of the believer. Because assemblologists obsessed over rituals of worship, they could never understand why the one who took up the collection on Sunday morning would later steal it from the church. They could

**Assemblologies
define faithfulness
by attendance.**

never understand why the preacher committed adultery. In their obsession with a codified ritual on Sunday morning as their identity, they had a difficult time understanding why those who legally kept the codes so precisely would behave so imperfectly. The error of the theology was in thinking that a legalistically performed ritual of “worship” was the manifestation of a changed life which sought to worship. They missed the point that worshipful saints manifest their worship through singing, prayer, offerings, good works and partaking of the Lord’s Supper. [Leave out the preaching, for preaching could never be one of the “acts of worship” for the assembled for preaching is carried out by one person, and that person preached the gospel to unbelievers, not believers. According to the use of the word *kerusso* (preach) in the New

**Preachers preach
the gospel to the lost.
Teachers teach
the word to the saved.**

Testament, preaching took place in reference to preaching the gospel to the lost. With the disciples, it was teachers teaching. Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that one *kerusso* (preached) to the disciples. Yes, look in a Bible concordance and read every context where the Greek word *kerusso* is used. The church is to send out her preachers (Rm 10:14,15). It retains only her teachers.]

Legal adherence to codified worship worked well until the latter part of the 20th century. As a baby-boomer generation grew older, those of this generation began to perceive that ritualistic assemblies became spiritually dead. The baby-boomer generation enjoyed the sages from the stages. Charismatic movements that began in the early 1900’s produced exciting assemblies that appealed to two or three generations of worshippers. And traditional adherents flocked to such exciting assemblies *en masse* because they had grown weary of the stiffness of traditional assemblies. However, as with both ritualistic and traditional assemblies, exhausted adherents in charismatic assemblies began to wander away from these assemblies in search of relationships with fellow believers. After a colorful assembly, even the exhausted charismatic remained lonely because he had no relationship with his fellow cheerleaders.

Those assemblologists who had a list of scriptures below every “act of worship” also began to wander. This migration from legalistic “worship” struck fear in the hearts of a generation of leaders who were nurtured on a legal-

istic performance of acts in order to identify their Christianity as being “biblical.” As the X-generation, postmodern generation, and the 9-11 generation began a search for a relational Christianity, they fled from the boredom of ritualistic assemblies in order to find something that was more exciting and fulfilling.

The migration away from assembly-oriented churchianity gave further rise to the intensity of our focus on our assemblies. Assemblologists stepped up their assemblies in order to diminish the fallout. Many went into a competitive mode in order to attract adherents from competing assemblies. This gave rise to pulpit professionals, assembly leaders, digitally organized and electronic assemblies, and instrumentalists who could complete with any rock concert. Even electronic engineers were hired to perfect the worship presentation in order to develop a Hollywood production on Sunday morning. All such developments revealed the last groans of an assembly-oriented churchianity with which millions had become disenchanted. The failure of assembly-oriented churchianity to produce the love by which Jesus’ disciples were to be known started to make itself very evident as history turned a new page into the 21st century.

What is natural about the human being is that we seek to be loved and to love. The human spirit seeks love far more than hysterical, or dynamically

well-performed and engineered concert assemblies. In fact, 450 years of assembliology in the Protestant world has proved one thing. Codified and ritualistic assemblies do not develop loving relationships between the saints. As assemblologists

Large assemblies alienate.

Small assemblies bond people.

sought to preserve their identity, and hang on to their adherents

by orchestrating dynamic assemblies, love-starved people continued to walk out the back door. Where they had formerly gone to escape loneliness—the assembly of the saints—was where they were the most lonely, that is, in the large church assembly participating only as a spectator. No matter how well the pulpit professional performed, the exodus continued from the lonely assemblies. Widows still went home alone. No matter how intricately the worship leader perfected the mood of the assembly, love-famished people headed out in search of a well of love from which they could satisfy their thirst for someone who cared for them.

In order to stop this exodus, many churches have brought in “vocal puppeteers.” These are those who seize a microphone, and through the aid of amplifiers and speakers, seek to chant the attendees into a state of emotional euphoria by pulling on their heart strings. The assembly thus becomes a place for emotional release from a desperate world in which attendees live, not a place where worship is poured out from hearts that seek to worship God. Vocal puppeteers

The decline in assemblies has led to competition of assemblies.

can cheerlead the people into emotional expressions of hysteria, but after the emotional exhaustion, the attendees will leave to return to lonely homes.

Then came the instrumental concert that hijacked the assembly of worshipers in order to at least present an ear-splitting performance before religionists who were muted in their efforts to speak understandably to one another in song. The attendees could no longer speak to one another because their speaking was drowned out by the decibels of instrumentalists whose playing was amplified many times over by gigantic speakers. But regardless of all the clanging and plucking, attendees still

Assemblies should reflect the sober-minded demeanor of Christians.

left with ringing ears in order to discover a quiet relational worship of their Father with others of a kindred spirit. Turning up the amplifiers turned them away.

At the end of the 20th century, the handwriting was on the wall for assembly-oriented churchianity. When the statistics began to manifest the diminishing attendance of ritualistic Sunday assemblies, assemblologists did their best to preserve their churches. But no professional pulpiteer could perform in a way that satisfied the basic need for love in a lonely human individual. No assembly environment of the masses could bring individuality to those who sincerely sought to work and worship with a few worshipful people with whom they could confess their faults and establish lifelong relationships.

Chapter 8

Known By Our Assemblies

There is almost an irony in history in reference to the institutional church assembly. In order to preserve the structure of the institution, professionals were hired for every department of ministry in order to perfect the institutionalization of the ceremonies. The more prominent

It is a deception to believe that well-performed large assemblies develop loving fellowship among the attendees.

the professionals, the more anonymous the individual attendee became. This was especially true in reference to the

professional who regularly delivered a well prepared lecture on Sunday morning to an assembly of anonymous adherents. Unfortunately, the more ceremonial the assembly became, the more frustrated the individuals of the assembly became. Assemblies thus became impersonal meetings of the anonymous, and subsequently, the podium professionals of the large assemblies were usually beyond personal touch of the people, specifically, the pulpit professionals. The larger the assembly became, the more distant the individuals of the audience became from the conductors of the per-

formance. The adherent's identity with the pulpit personality was always restricted by the availability of the professional lecturer. If he were to do his job well, he had little time for people relationships with those before whom he stood every week. This scenario of assembly developed a "Christianity" of people who were content to have only a "worship hour" experience with others on Sunday morning. After the worship hour, they willingly signed off their brothers until next Sunday.

The institutional church has approached the inherent problem of churchianity from every angle. Every program, every professional, and every penny has been spent in order to revive diminishing attendance figures. But the exodus from assembly-oriented churchianity in Western churches reveals that the Sunday morning ritual has run its course. Will the large and dynamic assemblies cease to exist that were promoted throughout the last 450 years of the Reformation Movement? In view of the history of empty European church buildings, they will certainly diminish in number. Statistics now prove that the downward trend of large single-assembly churches will continue. The assemblies will continue, though they will be greatly diminished in the decades to come. No longer do we see so many

**Large assemblies
of the modern church
are diminishing
simply because
they do not fill
the emotional needs
of the attendees.**

books written on how to build the large single-assembly church. Those large-assembly churches that do continue have all established cell or house fellowships to bring personal relationships among the members. This is a welcome change. But large single-assembly churches that are built solely around a dynamic personality will not be the future of Christendom. We are ending a 400 year period of history and things are changing. Only those who are aloof to the present paradigm shift that is permeating Christendom will cling to the sinking ship of man-made rituals of the past, and subsequently, go down with a dying generation of churchianists.

Does all this sound negative? If it does, then you may be clinging to the ship. But the present institutional and legally bound churchianity in chaos is a sign that the people are marching in the streets and struggling for release. As has been the case with many dictatorial countries in the past, the country of Tunisia in North Africa was under the bondage of a leadership that suppressed the citizenship and rigidly controlled all policies for over twenty-five years. But in 2011 the populace had enough. They took to the streets, sent the ruling party members into exile, and formed a new government. Social chaos in the streets resulted in the peoples' release from the bondage of a dictatorial and unjust government. So it happens with the church. The present struggle away from complexity and control has given rise to a positive restoration of simple New Testament Christianity. As individuals shrug off the bond-

**The road to fellowship
is not through complexity,
but through simplicity.**

age of ritualistic churchianity, a whole new era of people is being “born again.”

The masses have simply discovered an old biblical truth. The road to a personal relationship with God and others is not through complexity, but simplicity. We did not grow more spiritual through the complexity of our institutional religiosity and organized rituals. Through such we become more estranged, both from God and from one another. Only when we take the risk of marching in the streets in protest against the bondage of ritualistic churchianity will we enjoy the freedom that was promised by Jesus. *“If the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed”* (Jn 8:36). Have we constructed a churchianity that is contrary to the very promise that Jesus made concerning freedom?

In the latter part of the last century, “church goers” began to speak by their actions. And their actions were not to show up on Sunday morning. They began to speak by their exodus from the professionally driven and organizationally complex church that was focused on professionally orchestrated assemblies and personalities. By meeting in small

**The secret to spiritual
growth is not to bring
the people to assembly,
but to take the assembly
to the people.**

groups, wherever and whenever, a new movement has begun to speak with a reverberating voice throughout Christendom. Those of this paradigm shift have given birth to cell or house fellowships wherein they can find one another. This restorational wave permeates almost every religious group of Christendom. While professional assemblologists carry on with diminishing assemblies in half-empty buildings, relational Christians continue to seek love for one another in the simplicity of small groups throughout the world. We are at the very beginning of a turning point in the history of Christendom that will play itself out in the next one hundred years. These are exciting times in the rebirth of simple Christianity.

The intensity, or extremity, to which assemblologists led the church into a complex ritualistic religiosity is measured by the intensity of their wail against those who seek love in small relational fellowships. This wail is primarily from the professionals of the assembly-oriented churchianists because they envision several things. They see the loss of contributors with the loss of attendance. (The nightly news in America recently reported that one of the famous mega churches in California had to declare bankruptcy because there was such a great exodus from their assemblies.) Assemblologists see the loss of adherents before whom they can perform their speeches. Some see the loss of people over whom they can exercise their narcissistic desire to control. And then some see the loss of those they have stolen from

the lordship of Jesus. We can well understand this dismay if Christianity is an assembly-oriented religion that is defined by the modern assemblologist. If the church is defined by its assemblies in an assembly-oriented Christendom, then statistically the church is dying. But we would encourage another investigation of the Scriptures concerning the one-another, love-oriented Christianity we discover in the New Testament. This is the church from which the assemblologist led us astray. This Christianity is not dying. It is vibrant, exciting and permeating the lives of millions of people throughout the world.

This is not a church that is defined by complex and ordered Sunday assemblies. It is a worldwide body of disciples who seek to encounter one another wherever and whenever, with no particular loca-

tion being the “sanctuary” of their encounter.

**The more localized
an assembly becomes,
the more exclusionary
it becomes to those
who have no transport.**

These are encounters that emphasize what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “... *neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem...*” (Jn 4:21). These disciples seek to encounter one another anywhere and everywhere, in coffee shops, homes, parks, schools, . . . everywhere. They are not defined by formal assemblies. They are defined by their love that leads them to seek out one another, whether in caves or catacombs.

Are we now in a generation of Christianity that is seeking to rediscover

the essence of true Christianity? Are we in a generation that is exhausted with “going to church,” and now just wants to be church in their communities? We think so. At least the inner nature of the human spirit is driving this generation to others of a kindred spirit who also seek the simplicity of Christianity in a relationship with Jesus. What the assemblologists constructed in the last 450 years, and intensified in the latter part of the last century, which system of religiosity continues today, does not seem to be sustaining the organized church. The decline in attendance of assembly-oriented churches is evidence that something in that form of religiosity is lacking. History is now making a very clear statement. The large, single-assembly church will not survive the tidal wave of people who are seeking to bond with others in order to survive the future. And when we refer to survival in matters of the future, we are not thinking about 25 to 50 years. What we are discussing are matters that take one or two centuries to play out in history. It took a hundred years to empty out church buildings in Europe. It may take the same amount of time to do the same with the present assembly oriented churchianity of the West.

Those large assembly churches that will survive will be those who have encouraged their adherents to meet also in

**Single-assembly churches
focus on everyone
at the same assembly.
Multiple-assembly churches
focus on assemblies
close to the people.**

small relational groups in order to establish loving fellowships with one another. The large assemblies will continue only because the members come out of small groups in order to meet with the larger fellowship. It is thus not the time to sell the basilicas to be warehouses as was the case in Europe, but time to change church buildings into work stations. If we do not, then take some time and travel through the empty corridors of former church buildings throughout Europe in order to see the future. Travel around and visit large church buildings in America and be awakened by the vast number of empty pews.

In reference to large assemblies, we are not heading for the best of times. As the world becomes small in a digitally communicative populace, the negative forces of the world will become greater obstacles to Christianity. We speak as world citizens. Being a resident of the world since the early 70's has taught us many things concerning the survival of the Christian in the world. It has also taught us that the world is unveiling a new order that is not friendly to institutional churchianity.

There are religious forces that increasingly challenge the Christian that are associated with the West. In particular, Islam, a theocratic system of religion, has a difficult time separating Western government from Christianity. And thus, the hostility of Western governments toward Islamic countries has developed a fundamental Islamist culture that will not go away. Within the world view of Islam, time is not a factor. The true Mus-

lim believes that the world will eventually become Islam. And when considering the fact that there are now over 1.5 billion Muslims in the world today, he is probably not far from the truth. The mass immigration of Muslims to former colonial countries in the West will eventually change those countries into Islamic countries. Since these western countries are democracies, they will become Muslim led as the majority of the voting population becomes Muslim. Europe will become Muslim. Add to the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, the Buddhists of China, the Hindus of India, and a host of other non-Christian religions, and the religious world that is growing is a world that will be hostile to those who believe that Jesus alone is the only way to the Father.

Historians have correctly concluded that the rise of the Western economy was to a great extent the result of embedded principles of Christianity within the society. The irony of this story is that the more developed an economy becomes, the less it seems to focus on the principles of faith. When does the time come in the development of a society that it turns from the foundation or impetus of its growth to rejecting its foundation? America was founded on principles that came straight from the Bible. But now, as Europe, to a great extent America rejects those principles. With development came materialism, and with materialism came secularism, and with secularism came humanism. And thus the Western resident now lives in an era of the demise of its roots.

It must be said that Christianity in many ways has failed the West because the Western “Christian” shut up his Christianity in a church house on Fifth and Main. Have you ever wondered why a Muslim remains a Muslim? Or a Jew a Jew? We have discovered that it is very difficult for Western Christians to understand Muslims, Hindus, Jews and many other non-Christian religions throughout the world. The Western Christian has wondered why the adherents to such faiths can be so faithful. The answer is in the fact that a Muslim does not confine his religion to an assembly in a Mosque. He does not define his faith by an assembly. He is a Muslim by culture, faith and life, not by some performance in a ritualistic assembly as does the Christian. Assemblologists can never understand this. A Jew is a Jew, not because of any synagogue assemblies. He is a Jew by culture, faith and life. Now think of the difficulty of trying to “convert” a Muslim or a Jew to our assembly-defined religiosity.

Though the demise of Christianity is often reserved for those in Western urban areas, the same pattern prevails in developing countries. We would challenge you to investigate any megacity of the world. The number of disciples in these cities are few. Establishing fellowships among disciples in urban cities of the world is very difficult. Africa and India

Christians must be known for their beliefs and behavior, not by their performance in assemblies.

are known for great church growth. But this growth is not in the urban centers. It is among the rural people.

Mix development and urbanization together and you come up with a society that makes it very difficult for the survival of the Christian. It is axiomatic that the more the urbanization in a developing country, the less the church growth.

Ironically, China might be the last bastion of Christianity in the centuries to come. The present policies of the China government are conducive to church growth. As with Rome two thousand years ago, Christians in China are forced to remain disorganized and in small groups, often meeting in secret in their homes. The restrictions on Christianity that were carried out by the Roman government in the last half of the 1st century and throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries are being carried out by the government of China today. Christianity grew during those oppressive Roman years, and so the same is occurring today in China.

If the existence of Christianity in the context of the suppression of the Roman government teaches us anything, it teaches us that Christianity grows under suppression. When Constantine hijacked Christianity for his own political objectives in the 4th century, all that changed. When the church was at ease under Constantine, Christians, to a great extent, lost much of their survival instinct.

But for now, China is stirring a massive underground church movement. This movement will result in the preservation of Christianity in the midst of a

rising Islamist movement worldwide that will not tolerate Christianity when it has the majority vote. We can thank the China government for not allowing Christianity to digress into an assembly-oriented organized institution.

Will the church ever go out of existence? To that question we would have to answer absolutely not. As long as there is one soul on earth who loves and obeys the Bible, the church will exist on earth. The sole purpose of the existence of the church is to populate and prepare people for heaven. The eternity of the righteous in the presence of God teaches this profound truth.

This world is not our home. It is only the

The church exists wherever there is just one Christian.

opportunity to populate heaven. As long as there is receptivity for populating heaven, then God will allow this world to continue. But when the receptivity of the world diminishes to the point where the church cannot carry out its mission of populating heaven, then there is no longer a purpose for the existence of the world. We would assume that God would leave at least “five faithful” for whom Abraham would plead. But we would not assume that God will allow the world to exist beyond the opportunity of the church to bring souls into eternity. When the hostility of the world, or the indifference of Christians, makes it useless for the church to carry out her mission, then we would assume that the end is upon us. Why would God allow a world to continue to produce souls who would only end up in hell? And what good for

God is an indifferent and “whatever” church that will not accomplish His work of populating heaven?

We do not assume to be a prophet. But we would assume that the end of the world is much closer now with an urbanized society of people that is steeped in materialism, and a religious environment that is hostile to Christianity. As the institutional church becomes more indifferent to her calling to evangelize the world, then why would God still need the world if the church no longer sees the world as an opportunity to populate heaven? We would ask Jesus to hold off His coming destruction only in view of the fact that there are still some sincere souls out there who want to hear the gospel. There are still some who want to preach the gospel to them. But when there is no one who will hear or preach, then we can only say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Bring this thing to an end.

The church in Sardis gave the appearance that she was alive. Jesus said, “*I know your works*” (Rv 3:1). The Sardis disciples were active. Their “works” gave them a name that they were alive as a church (Rv 3:1). This was the church, therefore, to which people gravitated because they were active in works and appeared to be alive before the community. They were doing things, and assuredly, they were a vibrant church who had vibrant assemblies. However, Jesus’ judgment of this church was, “*You are dead*” (Rv 3:1). For some reason their “*works were not perfected before God*” (Rv 3:2). Jesus’ exhortation was that they

remember and repent (Rv 3:3). They were exhorted to remember how they had received the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1,2). They must remember the word of God they had been taught. The lesson is that active churches are dead if they forget the word of God by which they were begotten (1 Pt 1:23). If the Sardis church did not repent, then Jesus' coming upon them in judgment would be as a thief. Thieves are not expected. Indifferent churches become unconcerned about the coming of Jesus, and thus, His coming in time in judgment on them is as a thief. The light of the Sardis church would go out long before they would realize that they ceased being a church for Christ. Simply because a religious group exists who calls on the name of Jesus, does not make that group a representative of Jesus (See Mt 7:21-23). Jesus knows only those who know and do His will. We can be known for our works, but we must be zealous to do works according to His will. *"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples'"* (Jn 8:31).

CLOSING SUGGESTIONS

Almost all those who fall under the umbrella of Christendom focus on single assemblies once or twice a week for the members of a particular group. Throughout this book we have challenged the theology that the Sunday morning assembly should be the identity of the church. We firmly believe that such a means of identity is contrary to the nature by which Jesus said His disciples would be identi-

fied (Jn 13:34,35). Now that many churches have worked themselves into a corner on this matter, we thought it would be good to close with some suggestions on where to go from here. Suppose you have allowed yourselves to fall into an "assembly identity" of the church. Where would you go from here? The following are some suggestions that come from other single-assembly churches who have found themselves in the rut of single-assembly churchianity. There are literally thousands of these churches who, over the past thirty to forty years, have started working themselves back to a relational oriented body of believers.

- The leaders must sit down and make a plan of how they are going to approach the challenge of focusing on one another in small group fellowships. The plan must be written down and given to all the participating members.
- Start teaching the nature of discipleship as it is portrayed in the New Testament. Teaching on this subject should be over a period of several months. Some churches have conducted camps for all the leaders where the subject of relational Christianity was thoroughly studied over a weekend.
- Those leaders who will begin the initial fellowship groups in their homes must spend a great deal of time in prayer that God prepare them to minister to the needs of others. These leaders must thoroughly study the rela-

tional behavior the early disciples had with one another.

- Be patient with everyone. If a group of disciples has been thoroughly indoctrinated with institutional assembliology, it will take several years to change the way they understand the behavior of the early Christians. It will take each person at least one year in a small relational fellowship to begin understanding the dynamics of the “one another” relationship that Christians are to have with one another.
- Remember that there is no ritual for house fellowships. Since nothing is stated in the New Testament, then use your imagination.
- Small group fellowships can be started during the week, or Sunday evening, depending on the desires of those who are leading the groups.
- Continue with the Sunday morning assembly. We have found that when churches in a region start focusing on their house fellowships as the means by which life changes can be encouraged, the focus of the Sunday morning assembly changes. It changes to an opportunity to invite others to come for initial contact. Since the world of Christendom is focused on the Sunday morning assembly, this may be the place where they initially contact all the church. Churches that have house fellowships throughout their communities use the Sunday morning assembly as an opportunity to reach their community.
- Some churches that have moved into being multiple-assembly have changed their Sunday morning into an evangelistic outreach to the community. They have subsequently moved the Lord’s Supper to the house fellowships on Sunday night in the homes of the members.
- Continually focus the thinking of the members on the relational fellowship of the house groups. Once these groups begin to bond and function, they will in turn begin other groups. Do not assume that every member must be present for the Sunday morning assembly. When groups start other groups, the new, secondary groups may be too far from the common place of assembly for entire families to journey to the place of assembly. The work of the seed of the kingdom must not be hindered in its leavening process throughout a community. Our assemblies on Sunday should never hold back the permeating work of the leaven of God’s word throughout a region.