

“Exploring the Relationship between Faith, Tradition and Culture” Sermon Series



**What are the Purposes
of the Assembly?**

Introduction



- Why does God desire that we get together? And, what are we supposed to do when we get there?
- “Assembly” / “Come together”
- “Worship Service” not wording of New Testament
- Inadequate model

Introduction



- **False logic, Worshiping in Spirit and in truth means performing the 5 Acts of Worship.**
- **No “order of assembly” in Paul’s letters!**
- **Partial description in 1 Corinthians 14:26-32**

Two-Fold Purpose of the Assembly

- **Body Life—Building Up**
- **God Life—Looking Up**



Activities Associated with Both Purposes—

- **Body Life—Helps us with the 2nd Commandment of Jesus**
- **God Life—Helps us with the 1st Commandment**



A Third Purpose often Overlooked

- There are other activities known to have been practiced in some early Christian assemblies.
- Being aware of this third area helps us get a glimpse at how “fluid” the body functioned
- Acts 14:23—appointing of elders
- Acts 14:27—update on missionary activities

A Third Purpose often Overlooked

- **1 Corinthians 16:1-2—the collection of funds for special contributions**
- **1 Corinthians 5:4-5—discipline of members**
- **Acts 6:2-6—creating what we would call ministries to respond to immediate needs**



A Third Purpose often Overlooked

- **Acts 21:10-14**—Agabus may have been in the house church of Philip the evangelist when he bound himself with Paul's belt, a prophetic act that could be labeled as drama.



Further Observations



- **The Lord's Supper**, various forms of teaching, exhortations, prayer, praise, and singing were probably constant practices in the regular assemblies of the early churches.
- **“holy kiss”** universal cultural practice
- Think of why the early Christian assemblies need to be simple and fluid: **transcultural** for the ages!

Further Observations

- We must remember how fluid we can be
- Cultural influences that impact our Christian assemblies: technology, pews and architecture of the building, sermon within short time frame (30 minutes or less), entire assembly time done in one hour, church building and parking lot, Sign in front lawn, Lord's supper on communion table with plates created for the occasion, etc.

Further Observations

- Historical perspective: earliest description of Christian assemblies in 2nd century; earliest practice and description of assemblies in the Restoration movement



Conclusion



- If indeed the traditional “five acts of worship” need to be reframed/ expanded with the more biblical purposes of the assembly, then here are some suggestions to think about (you may add others):

Challenging Questions

- **Question #1**—what would honor God the most today as we assemble?
- **Question #2**—Do I seek to encourage and build others up when I assemble **BEFORE** I think about what I would like or want to see done in the assembly?



- **Question #3**—Do I have clear idea of what was central to the assembly of the early churches?
- **Question #4**—Can our own religious tradition in our assemblies still help us accomplish the three purposes mentioned in our lesson above? Are there any parts of our tradition that have ceased accomplishing these three purposes?

- **Question #5**—Am I aware of the cultural influences on my own understanding and practice of the Christian assembly?
- **Question #6**—(Based on Black’s assumption: “When we reflect on the assemblies of the early Christians, we recognize that their purposes are still ours and their practices provide important precedents for what we should do.”) *If this is true, are we aware of what those purposes are, and which of their practices provide important precedents?*

- **Question #7**—what breadth and latitude is permissible with a Christian assembly? How fluid do we need to be today to reach the unreached like the early church did?
- **Question #8**—Can I distinguish between biblical core practices in the assembly, and religious traditions that have been handed down as being biblical core practices?

- **Question #9**—How can we collectively be involved in enhancing our assemblies to accomplish the three biblical purposes we have mentioned?

