



Concerning Gathering

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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Table of Contents

PART I

❖ Introduction	p 5
❖ Custom	p 7
❖ The New Testament Scriptures	p 14
❖ The New Commandment	p 21

PART II

❖ The Commission of the Church	p 26
○ Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom	p 27
○ Be a Disciple of the King & His Kingdom	p 36
○ Disciple All People	p 42
○ Bear Fruit	p 46
○ The Calling of the Ekklesia	p 47
○ Be Engaged in the Matters of the Kingdom	p 49

PART III

❖ Seeking God for Guidance	p 71
❖ The Nature of New Covenant Gathering	p 76

“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to LOVE and GOOD DEEDS, not forsaking our own ASSEMBLING TOGETHER.”



*“**How** we get together is not nearly as important as **WHY** we get together. When fulfilling what one might perceive to be a mandate of scripture becomes the underlying reason to attend a local assembly, or when attempts to tear down man made organizations and structures, to get back to the way they did it back then, misses the whole point.”*

Jim Durkin Jr.¹



¹ Turning Point Gatherings, Humbolt County, CA

PART I

Introduction

When I came across the above quote, it seemed to connect with what I had been writing – namely, my series entitled [A New & Living Way: An Investigation into New Covenant Worship in Spirit & Truth](#).² In this current article, I'd like to approach the subject of "Gathering", NOT on *how* we gather, or *where* and *when* we gather, but WHY we gather, hoping that will lead to some insight into the nature of our collective life in the New Covenant. The "collective life" I'm referring to is *worship* – as we have defined it: *a lifestyle of surrender and service to the Lord*. And just one component in this lifestyle involves *gathering* – **gatherings of the Ekklesia** – WHY would the Ekklesia gather?

We will consider WHY we would gather in light of:

- 1) Custom
- 2) The New Testament Scriptures
- 3) The New Commandment

² Along with that series of articles, other suggested reading for this current article would include: "Custom and Command" by Stan Firth, "Hebrews 10:25: What are We Not to Forsake?" by Peter Ditzel, and "Gathering Together" by Jack Gray.

4) The Commission of the Church

5) The New Covenant

Before we begin, I'd like to say two things:

These will be just some thoughts on the matter – not the end of the matter. I think the Church (the Ekklesia) still needs the Holy Spirit to “guide us into all the truth.” (John 16:13)

There are a lot of footnotes. If you don't read them, you will miss a lot. In this case, the footnotes often EXPLAIN statements I make.

Custom

Do we gather merely because of custom³?

The particular “custom” I am referring to here is the custom of “a corporate worship service” which is basically comprised of the following components:

- Visiting with one another before the meeting begins
- Singing
- A collection
- Announcements
- A sermon
- More singing (representing a collective response to the message)
- Prayer (representing a collective response to the message), which sometimes includes prayer for individual needs
- Dismissal
- More visiting with one another after the meeting
- Repeat once or twice every Sunday, plus possibly, one additional evening of the week.

Did God tell us to gather and worship Him in this way?

³ A habitual practice

Old Covenant Sacrificial Ritual

God did tell the nation of Israel to gather and worship in a specific way *according to the Old Covenant*. He commanded them to come together three specific times per year⁴ at a designated place⁵ for the purpose of conducting specific animal and grain sacrifices:⁶ voluntary sacrifices - burnt offerings⁷, grain offerings⁸, peace offerings⁹, and mandatory sacrifices - sin offerings¹⁰ and trespass offerings.¹¹ This Levitical sacrificial system continued for approximately 1440 years up to 70 A.D. when Rome destroyed the temple at Jerusalem. But God, Himself, had already put an end to this system about 37 years earlier at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.¹² These material sacrifices were shadows; but the reality is Christ.¹³ Now, *in the New Covenant*, the only thing

⁴ Namely, the Feasts of Unleavened Bread (Passover), Weeks (Shavuot), and Tabernacles (Succoth). (Exodus 23:14, 17; 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16)

⁵ First, at the tabernacle of Moses, and then at David's tabernacle, and later at Solomon's temple and the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. (John 4:20; Cf. Deuteronomy 12:5, 13-14; 14:23-25; 26:2; 2 Chronicles 7:15-16; Isaiah 27:13. God had forbidden any other sites of worship. (2 Kings 18:22; 21:3; 2 Chronicles 32:12; 33:3; Isaiah 36:7)

⁶ See Leviticus 23

⁷ Leviticus 1; 6:8, 13; 8:18-21; 16:24.

⁸ Leviticus 2; 6:14-23.

⁹ Leviticus 3; 7:11-34

¹⁰ Leviticus 4; 5:11-13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22.

¹¹ Leviticus 5:14-19; 6:1-7; 7:1-6.

¹² Hebrews 10:1-10, 19-22

¹³ Colossians 2:17

that can be given to God are spiritual sacrifices¹⁴ – that is, “praise”¹⁵ – namely, verbal¹⁶ thanksgiving.¹⁷

Understanding the Old Testament types does have value in learning the mystery of Christ.¹⁸ But practicing Old Covenant rituals has absolutely no application in New Covenant worship or Ekklesia gatherings.

*But, what about the Jewish Christians
gathering in the temple in the Book of Acts?*

When we read in Acts 2:46 that the first Jewish Christians gathered “*Day by day* continuing with one mind in the temple”, we are tempted to take that as a “norm”¹⁹ for the Church today.²⁰ But, this passage describes a very unique season at the beginning of the Church: Jesus had arisen from the dead and was appearing to people all over Jerusalem. And Jesus had told His disciples to STAY IN JERUSALEM AND WAIT to receive “The

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:5

¹⁵ 1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 13:15

¹⁶ Greek: *cheilos*, Strong’s # 5491

¹⁷ Greek: *ainesis*, Strong’s # 133

¹⁸ Cf. My teachings: “Seeing Him Who is Unseen” and “Seeing Christ in the Tabernacle” – Complimentary .pdf copies are available by emailing: AtChristsTable@gmail.com

¹⁹ i.e., prescriptive, rather than descriptive

²⁰ I have belonged to churches which tried gathering daily for a season, based on this verse.

Promise of the Father”.²¹ So, that’s what these Jews were doing. There were about 3000 of them – comprised of Jews who *already lived in Jerusalem* joined by “devout men from every nation under heaven”.²² These were males²³ – not women and children – men who were highly religious – pious and devout²⁴ who had traveled very long distances on their yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Acts 2:5 says, “Now there were Jews *living* in Jerusalem....” The Greek word, *katoikeo*, informs us that these “devout men from every nation under heaven” had decided to now *house in Jerusalem “permanently”*.²⁵ These were particular men of means – not shepherds, farmers, and fishermen from the outlying districts of Jerusalem – but having left their properties and possessions were now needing food and lodging in Jerusalem.²⁶

As I discussed at length earlier in this series²⁷, these Jewish Christians continued in their customs based in the Mosaic Law for

²¹ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4.

²² Acts 2:5

²³ Greek: *aner*, Strong’s # 435

²⁴ Greek: *eulabes*, Strong’s # 2126

²⁵ Strong’s # 2730, reside, dwell, inhabit. These men had left their properties and possessions back in their various nations. (Acts 2:9-11) We could speculate that because of their pentecostal experience in Jerusalem, they may have sent word back to their households to “sell up” and join them in Jerusalem.

²⁶ Cf. Acts 2:44-45

²⁷ See *Jewish Roots in Christianity* and *Led By the Spirit* in the eBook [A New & Living Way](#).

300 years, right up to the time of Constantine.²⁸ In fact, the apostle Paul also publicly practiced these customs right up to the time of his arrest in Jerusalem, at which point, the Holy Spirit had brought him to a fuller understanding of the essential difference between the Old and the New Covenants, so that in his later epistles²⁹, he referred to these customs negatively as “elementary principles of the world”³⁰ – practices Christians should no longer be engaged in.

*What about the Jewish Christians,
including the apostle Paul,
attending synagogue services in the Book of Acts?*

One might want to make the case that the synagogue service, which probably emerged during the Babylonian Captivity³¹, is the equivalent of the church “worship service”. This is quite true – the

²⁸ This is discussed at length in *Jewish Roots in Christianity* and *Led By the Spirit* articles in the eBook [A New & Living Way](#).

²⁹ Galatians (later dating of the North Galatia Theory), 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians.

³⁰ Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

³¹ Some think that synagogues possibly began during the time of Ezra with the rebuilding of the 2nd temple. But there is archeological evidence of synagogues in Egypt dating from the 300 B.C. However, synagogues predominated as gathering places after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

“order of service” of the conventional church “worship service” and the synagogue service is similar:

1. First the “Shema”, which the Jews would repeat several times daily, would be recited - “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is Our God. The Lord is one!”³²
2. Then certain prayers would be spoken.
3. Then a reading from *the Law*.³³
4. Then a reading from *the Prophets*.³⁴
5. Then a sermon.³⁵

The two “orders of service” are, indeed, quite similar; but the point is this: **As with the conventional church “worship service”, God never commanded the Jew to practice the synagogue service.** There is no such command recorded in the scriptures. It was a cultural custom – an entirely human invention – which emerged during the Exile. Indeed, one could say that the practice of the conventional church “worship service” also reflects the reality of a spiritual exile – an adopting of the customs of the surrounding culture, with its marketing techniques, organization, schedules,

³² Deuteronomy 6:4

³³ Genesis through Deuteronomy

³⁴ Intended to illustrate the Law

³⁵ The *synagogue rulers* would decide who was to lead the service and give the sermon. A different person would be chosen to lead each week.

programs, entertainment, methodologies, and technologies – all “elementary principles of the world”³⁶.

³⁶ Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20. I have discussed these things at length in *The Elementary Principles of the World* in the eBook [A New & Living Way](http://www.AtChristsTable.org).

The New Testament Scriptures

*Do the New Testament scriptures command us
to gather and worship God in this way?*

I would like to give my answer – or answers – and then explain why I have arrived at these answers: The answer is NO – the New Testament scriptures do not command us to gather and worship God in this way – or in any other *prescribed* way. **The New Testament scriptures may encourage us as to *why* we should gather; but do not command us where, when, or how to gather.** Therefore, we are not commanded to gather and worship God in what has become *the conventional or customary “worship service”*, nor in a way which resembles *the synagogue service gathering*.

The New Testament scriptures *describe* where, when, and how the early Christians gathered, but do not *prescribe* where, when, and how we are to gather. And, just before we discuss the words “descriptive” and “prescriptive”, I would like to state the end of the matter: **Not only concerning gatherings – but in all things - both the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament authors whom He inspired, intended to both describe and prescribe Jesus Christ**

– and that is, *not according to the letter*, but according to the Law of Christ³⁷ – the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.³⁸

Descriptive or Prescriptive?

When we read of the activities of the first century church in the Book of Acts, which may also be referred to in the various Epistles, are we to take what we read as *Prescriptive* or *Descriptive*? This is discussed at length in Part 6 of A New & Living Way series – Conventional Worship Praxes. But suffice to say here:

- “Descriptive” simply means “What did happen”. *Generally speaking*, the Book of Acts is descriptive. – It is an historical account of what did happen.
- “Prescriptive” simply means “What should happen.” *Generally speaking*, the Epistles are prescriptive. – They give instructions on what to do and what not to do.
- Descriptive passages tell us what did happen, but not what *should happen*. What happened in the first century church may be instructive and may be (or may not be) beneficial to imitate,³⁹ but

³⁷ Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21

³⁸ Romans 8:2

³⁹ I would add, if led by the Spirit to do so.

may not necessarily be something that we are *commanded* to imitate. The fact that something did happen is not an edict of what *must happen*. Descriptive is not Prescriptive.

- Beyond this, we need to exercise a fundamental principle of hermeneutics by asking: *What is the author's intent in the passage – to prescribe or to describe?* What we are looking for is not what *we* intend to do with the scripture passage⁴⁰, but what did *the author* intend to communicate through the scripture passage. In their book, “*How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*”, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart say: “*Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narratives or described does not function in a normative way.*”⁴¹

Although some see the Book of Acts as *normative*, being an historical record, it should rather be understood as being generally descriptive. Some arguments specifically against the Book of Acts being generally prescriptive are:

⁴⁰ The insistent demand of our pragmatic culture to always “make a practical life applications” of scripture, may often actually encourage a specious use of scripture. (In any case, not everything is “about us”, and there is plenty of scripture which reveals God, and is not necessarily applicable to our material lives.)

⁴¹ p. 124. Cf. pp. 126-130 for “6 Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Acts”.

- 1) All the way up to his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21), Paul continued to practice in public Jewish customs based on the Mosaic Law. This is descriptive. Paul himself, later prescribed not to do this.
- 2) Because something is mentioned once in an historical record (the Book of Acts), it is likely no more than an assumption to conclude that it was practiced by all the churches in all the places all the time, and thus, assumed to be normative. While the concept of “restoration” is not erroneous in essence, it has been misappropriated by some contingents of the Body of Christ in an effort to restore “the New Testament Pattern”.
- 3) The prescriptive seems to contradict the nature of the New Covenant in essence – namely, it should be a ministry “according to the Spirit, not according to the letter”.⁴² The principle (or law) of the New Covenant is: “**I have given You as a covenant...**”⁴³ – that is, “The Law of Christ”⁴⁴ – namely, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”.⁴⁵ The New Testament scriptures are not a “law”, but are rather descriptive of Christ.
- 4) When looking at a passage in the Book of Acts – or the Epistles - we need to ask: “Did Jesus command His disciples to do this?” A

⁴² 2 Corinthians 3:6

⁴³ Isaiah 42:6

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2

⁴⁵ Romans 8:2

custom, which may have good aspects, is not necessarily a command. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus commanded perfection (*completeness* – that is, in every possible situation). What we see in the New Testament scriptures are helpful as examples (descriptions) and principles, but as prescriptions, they fall short of the perfection of Christ – specifically, they do not take in every possible situation – they are not *complete*.

Some Non-prescriptive Descriptions in the New Testament

As I said, I have dealt with these things in the article *Elementary Principles of the World: Conventional Worship Praxes*. There I specifically discussed these activities of the early church in the Book of Acts:

- *Gathering together on the first day of the week*
- *The Collection*
- *The Lord's Supper*

While many consider these activities found in the Book of Acts to be prescriptive and have become custom in the conventional

“worship service” and also in Organic Church meetings, they are, in fact, descriptive.⁴⁶

Also, a favorite activity of Organic Church adherents –

- the “Body ministry” which is found in the epistle, 1 Corinthians 14:26 – that is, each person at a gathering “has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation of a tongue”. While I believe this format for a gathering can be spiritually beneficial - more so with disciples established in the spiritual disciplines, who know the Lord, and know how to receive life from the Head and share it with the members of the Body, I propose that to say this particular format was *normative* for the first century church and is therefore *prescriptive* for the church today is merely an assumption. Nowhere in the scriptures did Paul instruct the Corinthians – or any other church⁴⁷ – to carry on this specific activity when gathering. He was merely describing the Corinthians’ customary gatherings. And Paul’s intention in the passage was to *prescribe* that “all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See *Elementary Principles of the World: Conventional Worship Praxes* in the eBook [A New & Living Way](#).

⁴⁷ There is no indication in scripture that other churches in other locations carried on this specific activity when gathering. They may have; but it is not recorded in scripture. To say it was normative is an assumption.

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:40; Cf. v.26-39.

I must say that the “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm is not satisfying to me, as I see the whole idea of **prescriptions of certain activities as being at the very core of “the elementary principles of the world”**⁴⁹. It is not the activities themselves which are problematic, it is the **prescribing of those activities** which I perceive as “of the letter” and therefore violating the essence of the New Covenant by promoting a ministry “of the letter” rather than “of the Spirit” – “the Law of Christ”, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. I am more of the persuasion to say, in a manner of speaking: Whatever we see in the New Testament scriptures that is descriptive of Christ is prescriptive. I believe it was the intention of the Holy Spirit and the authors He inspired to both *describe* and *prescribe* CHRIST through the New Testament scriptures.

⁴⁹ Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

The New Commandment

What DID Jesus tell us to DO?

Let's look at the last evening Jesus spent with His disciples and see what was on His heart and mind that He wanted to leave with them before He was arrested and crucified. He actually had a lot to say – His message that evening⁵⁰ was even longer than His “Sermon on the Mount”,⁵¹ where He also spoke much about **what He wanted us to DO**.

We can summarize that last evening's talk by saying **He taught them some very profound things concerning the New Covenant**. Again, if we focus in on just what He commanded – that is, **what He told us to DO** - we see this: “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. *By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”⁵²**

So, how does loving one another relate to gatherings? Or better...

⁵⁰ John 13-17

⁵¹ Matthew 5-7

⁵² John 13:34-35, Cf. 15:12

How do gatherings relate to loving one another?

Jesus spoke of the kind of love that “washes one another’s feet”⁵³ – that is, **love expressed through humility and servanthood**. And He spoke of the love of “friends laying down their lives for one another”⁵⁴ – that is, **self-denying love**.

Do the activities of a conventional “worship service” demonstrate this kind of love?

These demonstrations of love are in clear contrast to the spirit of the world. And in a parabolic form, they demonstrate (without words) the gospel – namely, Humanity’s redemption through the Cross of Christ and the cleansing of sin. “... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”.⁵⁵

Can you see why the Lord would intend for this love – His love – to be demonstrated out in the world?

The world cannot see our loving one another in a house or building. This kind of love (“an action word”) has to be

⁵³ John 13:34-35, Cf. 15:12

⁵⁴ John 15:12-17

⁵⁵ Matthew 20:28

demonstrated for the world to see – through various activities conducted out in the world. Worship is *a lifestyle*⁵⁶ – that is, *a lifestyle of surrender*⁵⁷ which may be done in private for the most part, but also *a lifestyle of service*⁵⁸ which is done in public for the most part. It is this lifestyle of loving service – to one another and to those still prisoners to the god of this world – which Jesus was referring to when He said:

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”⁵⁹

I believe the Lord intended this lifestyle of loving service (worship) of His people to “shine before men” - as “the light to the world”. To exercise this primarily in designated meeting places for the Church is to “put it under a basket”. At best, “in-house” activities, by nature of the case, simply nurture a sub-culture to be enjoyed

⁵⁶ This concept is discussed throughout the articles of the eBook [A New & Living Way](#).

⁵⁷ Greek: *proskuneo*, Strong's # 4352

⁵⁸ Greek: *latreia*, Strong's # 2999 (Romans 12:1)

⁵⁹ Matthew 5:14-16. In order for our good works to glorify the Father, they must be done *by the Church, in His name* – not in partnership with the world system, in the name of any socio-politico organization.

by Christians. At worst, it amounts to nothing more than a Christian country club.⁶⁰ But, it is clear, that the Lord intended for the Father be glorified by having His King and Kingdom represented out in the world.

Therefore, while there are certainly “family gatherings”, there are also to be gatherings that have to do with “good works” out in the world, which are representative of and a witness to the King and His Kingdom. So then, what are these “good works”? And ...

What do gatherings have to do with these “good works”?

By far, the best writing I have ever come across on the subject of the social ministry of the Church is “*Social Action Jesus Style*” by Larry Christenson.⁶¹ One of the “take aways” I received from this book is this: The Church is to be “a Servant Church”. But it is NOT the “servant” of the world – it is the “servant” of God. The Church

⁶⁰ I understand the need for Christian friendships – for both adults and children. I am NOT advocating that gathering as friends be abandoned. But rather, let it be recognized for what it is, and not be confused as being a scheduled “church meeting”. Friends gathering together should be on a more intimate and informal basis – for example, a meal or recreational activity together. Possibly, gatherings of young people may be larger and more organized; but still not considered a “church meeting”. ALSO: **The K-12 academic education of your children from a biblical worldview should be a top ministry priority of your local fellowship**. If your “tithes and offerings” are not providing your children a FREE K-12 academic education, you should seriously question your and your fellowship’s ministry priorities, and seriously consider a different fellowship for your family.

⁶¹ (1976) The original title was “*A Charismatic Approach to Social Action*” (1974).

has had the tendency to take its leading from the world regarding its involvement in social issues – that is, jumping on whatever “band wagon” that is determined to be “in vogue” for the expediency of the political climate and agendas at any given time. This can leave other social issues, which are just as worthy, totally unaddressed. Rather, the Church should be *led by the Spirit* in its mission and ministries. And the leading of the Spirit will always be in alignment with the Lord’s Commission of the Church to Represent the King and His Kingdom. Therefore, rather than just “pulling something out of the hat” regarding “good works” and gatherings, we need to consider what Jesus has told us to do – the Great Commissions – and then we will consider what some of those “good works” might be in light of that.⁶²

⁶² It must be noted that doing these “good works” is not the only way we represent the King and His Kingdom, but it is just one of the ways we witness to the world.

PART II

The Commission of the Church

- to Represent the King & His Kingdom

How does gathering relate to the fact that Jesus commissioned us to represent the King and His Kingdom?

Let's review the Great Commission(s) – that is, what Jesus told us to be doing during the Church Age:

- **Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom**
 - in the Whole World as a Testimony to All Peoples.
(Matthew 24:14; Cf. Matthew 16:13-19; Ephesians 3:10)
- **Be a Disciple of the King and His Kingdom**
(Matthew 13:52; Cf. 16:13-19)
- **Disciple All Peoples** *(Matthew 28:18-20)*
- **“Be Engaged in the Matters”⁶³ of His Kingdom** until He returns.

⁶³ I believe the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translation here has the most clear meaning of the Greek word, *pragmateuomai*, Strong's # 4231, viz. “to be engaged with a matter”. The KJV, “to occupy”, sounds too military; and the NKJV, “to do business”, and the ESV, “to be engaged in business”, sound too mercenary. (The words, “*with this*”, which would infer the money given to the servants in the parable, is in italics, meaning it is not actually in the Greek text. The meaning, therefore, is “to be engaged with matters” of Lord's household or kingdom. Cf. Luke 19:1.

(*Luke 19:13*) This is the Calling of the Ekklesia. *And related to this -*

- Do “good works” - out in the world. (*Matthew 5:14-16*)

Let's look at each of these Kingdom assignments and consider possible implications for gathering.

Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom
in the Whole World as a Testimony to All Peoples
(*Matthew 24:14; Cf. Matthew 16:13-19; Ephesians 3:10*)

There are various views on the Kingdom of God and/or the Kingdom of Heaven.⁶⁴ And consequently, there are also various definitions of “the gospel of the Kingdom”. It is not within the scope of this article to even attempt to give a full treatment to that subject matter.

However, there is a short passage in the gospels which gives us the essence of:

- the Kingdom
- the good news about the Kingdom

⁶⁴ Contrary to some dispensationalists, I do not believe scripture warrants making a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Cf.
<https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-heaven-God.html>

- what it means to be a disciple of the King and His Kingdom
- as well as the Foundation and calling of the Church or Ekklesia.⁶⁵

So, for the purposes of this article, I'd like us to examine Matthew 16:13-19 which I believe encapsulates the "Gospel of the Kingdom" – that message which is to be a "testimony"; and at the same time, shows how all the Great Commissions tie together – or better, ties together the various aspects of one Great Commission for the Church.

¹³ "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that **the Son of Man is?**" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or *one of the prophets.*" ¹⁵ He said to them, "But **who do you say that I am?**" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are **the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" ¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but **My Father who is in heaven.** ¹⁸ I also say to you that you are Peter⁶⁶, and upon this *rock*⁶⁷ **I will build My church;** and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;

⁶⁵ Contrary to what is in vogue today for some, I make no distinction between the Greek word, ekklesia, and its English translation, "church". When I say "church", I mean the full and accurate biblical meaning of "ekklesia". Simply using the Greek word, ekklesia, in and of itself, helps no one understand the biblical meaning. The biblical meaning will always require explanation for the unlearned. Therefore, I think the English words, "church" or "assembly", are adequate translations.

⁶⁶ Greek: *petros*, Strong's # 5586, a stone

⁶⁷ Greek: *petra*, Strong's # 4073 , a large mass of rock, bedrock

and whatever you bind on earth shall have been⁶⁸ bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”⁶⁹

v. 13

Jesus referred to Himself as “**the Son of Man**”. This title is found in the messianic prophecy recorded in Daniel 7:13-14; and was a title given to the coming Messiah. The true Messiah was to be born both fully God and fully human.⁷⁰ And, **the Kingdom is like its King – every human being in this kingdom must be born of the Spirit.**⁷¹

v.14

The general religious public saw Jesus merely as *a prophet* – playing a prophetic role primarily for the people in the earthly kingdom of Israel by “speaking to power” about “social justice”. This prophet was to be a forerunner for the Messiah, who would likewise establish *a righteous society* in which Israel could dwell in peace and prosperity. It took some time to convince His disciples⁷², but Jesus revealed Himself to be *a different kind of*

⁶⁸ The Greek verb is in the Future Perfect tense and Passive case.

⁶⁹ Matthew 16:13-19; Cf. Mark 8:27-29; Luke 9:18-20

⁷⁰ John 1:1, 14; 1 John 4:2

⁷¹ John 3:3-8

⁷² Cf. My eBooks: [Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross](#); [Who Is This King of Glory?](#), [The Cross & The Powers of Darkness](#),

prophet – playing a prophetic role primarily for God by speaking forth God's plans and purposes for His heavenly kingdom. He would also be *a different kind of King* – a crucified Christ. And His would be *a different kind of Kingdom* – one which was not of this earthly realm but of the heavenly realm. Therefore the good news of THIS kingdom is not about social transformation, but rather about spiritual redemption.

v. 15

Jesus asks each of His disciples for a **personal revelation of Himself**. It has been said: God doesn't have any grandchildren. The revelations of your “spiritual father” may have some inspirational and educational value; but to be a disciple OF CHRIST, you must have a personal revelation of Him.

v. 16

And, the essential revelation – the “bedrock” - is that Jesus is BOTH the King of the Kingdom (“the Christ”) and “the Son of the Living God”. If He is a Son, there is a Father. Therefore, along with *the Lordship of Christ*, one must also understand the Sonship of Christ, for we who are IN CHRIST through faith, are sons IN THE SON. THIS is the good news of THIS King and THIS Kingdom: “Christ in you the hope of glory” – “We will be

revealed with Him in glory”.⁷³ Yes, “He is bringing many sons to glory”.⁷⁴ “We will be glorified with Him”⁷⁵ – “the glory is to be revealed to us”⁷⁶ at “the revealing of the sons of God”⁷⁷ – that is, at “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body”, and the redemption of the whole of this creation.⁷⁸ This will take place “at the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power”,⁷⁹ for He has already “disarmed the rulers and authorities, made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through THE CROSS.”⁸⁰ **THIS is the good news about the Kingdom OF GOD.**

v. 17

Jesus indicated that the source of this personal revelation is “My Father who is in heaven”. **THIS Father is the “Ancient of Days”⁸¹, the MOST HIGH GOD who “judges in the midst of the gods”.**⁸² **THIS is the Kingdom OF HEAVEN we’re talking about!**

⁷³ Colossians 1:27, 3:4; Cf. 1 John 3:2

⁷⁴ Hebrews 2:10

⁷⁵ Romans 8:17

⁷⁶ Romans 8:18

⁷⁷ Romans 8:19

⁷⁸ Romans 8:20-25

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:24

⁸⁰ Colossians 2:15

⁸¹ Daniel 7:9-10, 13, 22; Cf. Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 44:6.

⁸² Psalm 82:1

vv. 18-19

And Jesus clearly stated ...

- HE would build His Church.
- He would build His Church upon THE FOUNDATION (the “bedrock”) of THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST.
- He would build His Church by REVEALING HIMSELF.
- He would build His Church WITH DISCIPLES – those who had *a personal relationship* with Him, which was based upon *a personal revelation* of Him.
- “The gates of Hades”⁸³ would not overpower THIS CHURCH.⁸⁴
- He would give THIS CHURCH “the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” – so that it might “be engaged in matters of the Kingdom”.⁸⁵

⁸³ Hades (Hebrew “Sheol”) is the “unseen” realm of the dead. Concerning our redemption from “Death”, see my article, [Some Thoughts on Evil](#). Putting Jesus’ words in the context of other scripture, He is referring to both a present and a future victory over Death, “now, but not yet” - the kingdom inaugurated now, but not yet consummated. Cf. “Gospel of the Kingdom” by George Eldon Ladd. Viz. Death will not overpower the Church, because Christ “has abolished Death” 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; and “will abolish Death”: 1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14, 21:4.

⁸⁴ Ephesians 3:10. Cf. My article [The Cross & The Powers of Darkness](#).

⁸⁵ Luke 19:13; Cf. This is the actual meaning, calling of the Ekklesia, which will be discussed shortly.

Again, “THIS Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a *testimony* to all peoples”.⁸⁶ The Greek word translated “testimony” (or “witness”) here is *marturion*,⁸⁷ meaning “A DECLARATION OF FACTS”.

Certainly, we need to *gather* for the purpose of TEACHING these “facts” to those becoming disciples of the Kingdom.⁸⁸ I would also like to suggest here⁸⁹ that we need to *gather* in order to PREPARE before the occasion of making this declaration:

- How – in what ways - can we make this declaration?
- Who – which of us - will be making this declaration?
- When and where will we be making this declaration?
- What materials and equipment will we need to make this declaration?

In Acts 20:27, Luke records Paul as having said he “declared the “**whole counsel of God**”⁹⁰. The Greek word translated “counsel” is *boule*⁹¹; the root meaning is “will”. The NASB reads “*the whole purpose of God*”. The same word is used in Acts 13:36 – “David

⁸⁶ Matthew 24:14

⁸⁷ Strong’s # 3142

⁸⁸ Matthew 13:51-52

⁸⁹ And will be discussing in more detail shortly under “Be Engaged in Matters of the Kingdom”

⁹⁰ NKJV and ESV

⁹¹ Strong’s \$ 1012

served the *boule* of God in his generation.”⁹² In Acts 20:27, Paul was speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus. Therefore, when he uses the phrase, “the whole counsel (purpose, plan, will) of God”, we can conclude he is referring to truths recorded in his epistle to the Ephesians – specifically chapter 3, verses 1-12 – where he speaks of “the mystery” (v. 3), “the mystery of Christ” (v. 4) which God “revealed to apostles and prophets” (v.5), and that the gospel of Christ was for all peoples in the whole world (v. 6). I believe this term, “the whole counsel (purpose, plan, will) of God”, can be equated with “the gospel of the Kingdom”, which is to be “preached in the whole world as a testimony to all people”. And, this term, “the whole counsel (purpose, plan, will) of God”, can also be associated with the commission of the Church in v. 10 – “to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”. “To make known” is the translation of the Greek verb, *gnorizo*.⁹³ It can mean “to reveal” as it does in Ephesians 1:9 and 3:3 & 5. And, it can also mean “to declare – to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”. I suggest that we should

⁹² Robertson’s *Word Pictures of the New Testament*: The counsel of God. If *huperetas*, “having served”, is in the dative case, then: “having served the whole counsel of God in his generation”. But, if *huperetas* is in the instrumental case, and *geneai*, “his generation”, is locative, then: “having served his generation by the whole counsel of God”.

⁹³ Strong’s # 1107

gather to seek God and His wisdom as to how to carry out this commission He has for the Church; and to prepare when and where we are to carry it out, as well as what materials and equipment we may need to utilize.

We should gather ...

TO TEACH THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD⁹⁴
AND TO PREPARE DECLARATIONS
OF THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

⁹⁴ Acts 20:27. Spoken to the elders of the church in Ephesus. “Whole Counsel of God” (ESV); “Whole Purpose of God” (NASB, NRSV); “Whole Plan of God” (HCSB, CSB, GWT); “Whole Will of God” (NIV). Greek: *boule*, Strong’s # 1012. The same word is used in Acts 13:36 – “David served the *boule* of God in his generation.” I believe this term can be equated with “the gospel of the Kingdom”; and refers to truths recorded in Paul’s epistles to the Ephesians – specifically chapter 3, verses 1-12 – “the mystery of Christ” (v. 4) which He revealed to apostles and prophets. (v.5). Also: See footnote # 87.

Be a Disciple
of the King and His Kingdom
(*Matthew 13:52; Cf. 16:13-19*)

I believe we need to ask ourselves: Is there something amiss, if our main concern has to do with gathering *with one another*, without being **primarily** concerned with each of us also *gathering individually with the Lord*? There *are* exceptions – in both the conventional churches and in the organic churches – but the emphasis I hear coming from both quarters is centered on “being a family”, “having intimate relationships”, “experiencing community”, “practicing the one anothers”, “enjoying fellowship”, “body ministry”, etc. If Jesus were to be asked again today about the greatest and foremost commandment, He would say we have things turned around – we have “the cart before the horse”. These human relationships are good in the “second commandment” category, but act as usurpers in the “first commandment” category.⁹⁵ This is Man-centered – NOT God-centered Christianity.⁹⁶ The lyrics to a simple old praise song based on Genesis 49:10 tells us what (Who) the Center of Christianity is:

⁹⁵ Matthew 22:37-39

⁹⁶ Romans 11:36

*“We are gathering together unto Him.
Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.
We are gathering together unto Him.”*

We all can fool some of the church people some of the time at a church gathering – even in an “organic church” setting, but if the Person of God is not truly preeminent and central in our hearts and daily lives, then I fear this indictment from Isaiah regarding spiritual lip service applies:

“These people draw near to Me with their words and honor Me with their lip service; but they remove their hearts far from Me, and **their reverence for Me consists of tradition** learned by rote.”⁹⁷

When vital one-on-one relationship with the Lord is lacking at home, people gather together in public mouthing words that are not heartfelt, and go through the motion of exercising customary rituals lacking authentic reverence, instead of heart-level surrender of spirit, soul and body. This is the Lord’s response to such gathering:

“I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies⁹⁸.... They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Isaiah 29:13; Cf. Matthew 15:8-9

⁹⁸ Amos 5:21

⁹⁹ Isaiah 1:14

So, what does authentic discipleship look like? Who are “truly His disciples”? I believe it all centers on Him – not on “*the one anothers*”. “Loving one another” is the *proof* of discipleship¹⁰⁰ – it is not the *process* of discipleship. What is the *process* of discipleship? I believe it all hinges on personal relationship with the Lord:

- Jesus asks for a *personal revelation* of Himself from each of His disciples.¹⁰¹
- Jesus told us that disciples are “*taught by the Lord*” Himself.¹⁰² This happens “morning by morning” as disciples *learn to hear the Lord* and learn to speak what they have heard from Him.¹⁰³
- Jesus said that true disciples are those who are IMMERSED¹⁰⁴ in His word.¹⁰⁵
- Jesus described His relationship with His disciples as “friends”.¹⁰⁶

Disciples are those who GATHER

¹⁰⁰ “Bearing much fruit” is also a proof of discipleship, which we will discuss shortly.

¹⁰¹ Matthew 16:13-17

¹⁰² John 6:45; Cf. Isaiah 54:13

¹⁰³ Isaiah 50:4. *The Apostolic Bible Polyglot* (Septuagint) translation is amazing: “The Lord, the Lord gives to me a tongue of instruction to know when it is necessary to speak a word. He stood me morning by morning. He added an ear for me to hear.”

¹⁰⁴ The Greek word is *meno*, Strong’s # 3306, meaning stay in, continue in, abide in, dwell in – a particular place. To me, this speaks of being surrounded by His word, so I’ve used the words “immersed in”, as a type of being “baptized” in His word.

¹⁰⁵ John 8:31.

¹⁰⁶ John 15:13-15

one-on-one WITH THE LORD

So, how does an individual “gather one-on-one with the Lord”?

Through spiritual disciplines¹⁰⁷

– namely,

“THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”.¹⁰⁸

Spiritual Disciplines = Fellowship with God

Spiritual Disciplines are simply ways of having FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD – that is, various praxes for nurturing one’s “*devotional life*” with a view to spiritual transformation (growth in Christ-likeness). *Fellowship with God* requires discipline. It is probably for this reason that what some refer to as “holy habits”, have also become known as Spiritual Disciplines. Various authors

¹⁰⁷ *There are many wonderful books on the disciplines. Just some which I have read:* “Practice of the Presence”, by Brother Lawrence; “Imitation of Christ”, by Thomas a’ Kempis; “Celebration of Discipline”, by Richard Foster; “Ordering Your Private World”, by Gordon MacDonald; “Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life”, by Donald Whitney; “Sacred Pathways”, by Gary Thomas; “The Spirit of the Disciplines” and “Hearing God”, by Dallas Willard. For a complimentary copy of teaching notes for a series I have done entitled, “Fellowship With the Holy Spirit”, Email: AtChristsTable@gmail.com

¹⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1. In this case, I am not making any distinction between fellowship with the Holy Spirit and fellowship with the Spirit of the Risen Christ, or fellowship with God the Father for that matter. Regarding “the Eternal Spirit” in Hebrews 9:14, both M.R. Vincent and A.T. Robertson agree that this refers to the Spirit of Jesus, the Christ.

compile different lists, placing various disciplines in various categories. This is just one example¹⁰⁹:

1. The Inward Disciplines

Meditation / Prayer / Fasting / Study

2. The Outward Disciplines

(Inward Realities Resulting in Outward Lifestyles)

Simplicity / Solitude / Submission / Service

3. The Corporate Disciplines

Confession / Worship / Guidance / Celebration

The Components of Fellowship with the God

- **Desire**: An absolute pre-requisite, which arises out of a sense of need – specifically, being “**poor in spirit**”,¹¹⁰ and **love for the Lord**.¹¹¹
- **Discipline**: Not in the sense of self-effort, but simply letting the Lord truly be the lord of our lives, rather than allowing “the affairs of this life” to usurp His place of preeminence.¹¹²

⁷² From “Celebration of Discipline” by Richard Foster

¹¹⁰ **Matthew 5:3**

¹¹¹ The connection the two is demonstrated in the passage Luke 8:36-47.

¹¹² Suggested Reading: *Tyranny of the Urgent* by Charles E. Hummel and *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald.

- **Direction**: Scripture reading and study give the proper direction and guidance to our “holy habits” / spiritual disciplines / fellowship with God.
- **Devotion**: *They were continually devoting themselves”*¹¹³
to “holy habits” / spiritual disciplines / fellowship with God.

Discipleship Requires

GATHERING one-on-one WITH THE LORD

¹¹³ Acts 2:42. Greek: *proskartereo*, Strong’s #4242, steadfastly attentive to, constantly adhering to.

Disciple All Peoples

What does Discipling All Peoples have to do with Gathering?

The Greek word translated “disciple” is *mathetes*,¹¹⁴ which means *a learner, one who is taught*.¹¹⁵ Disciples are taught BY the Lord; and taught ABOUT the Lord by those who disciple others. Many methodologies and models for discipleship have emerged over the years, emphasizing relationship and fellowship with the mentor. Never-the-less, the primary aspect of biblical discipleship is TEACHING. There are obviously different teaching formats, such as a lecture format, and what some might call an “as you go” format.¹¹⁶ Jesus utilized BOTH in discipling His apostles.

I believe a key aspect of teaching for biblical discipleship is what might be called “apostolic fellowship”. What do I mean by that? An excerpt from my article *Díscípleshíp & The Equíppíng Mínístries*:

“... He gave gifts to men.... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as

¹¹⁴ Strong’s # 31014,

¹¹⁵ But also, one who follows one’s teachings, an adherent.

¹¹⁶ The “as you go” format can be seen throughout the gospels. Examples of the “lecture format” would be The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49).

shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ....”¹¹⁷

“This passage tells us that Jesus gave certain **gifts to men** and gave certain **men as gifts** to the Church. Something that is important for us to understand is this: In building His Church,¹¹⁸ **Jesus blesses men – not methods**. There may be some value in considering methodologies for how to make disciples; but in the end, Jesus blesses disciples through men rather than through methods. Acts 2:42 tells us that **the disciples “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship....”** In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, reminds us that the disciples were also **fellowshipping with the apostles**. The syntax in the Greek text has *both the teaching and the fellowship referring back to the apostles*. In fact, The Amplified Bible translates it as: **“the instruction and fellowship of the apostles”**. Jesus gave certain **gifts to men**, and gave certain **men as gifts** to the Church. The apostle Paul could say to the Thessalonians, “You know what kind of men we proved ourselves to be....”¹¹⁹ What qualifies these men to equip the Church is not their fulfilling the presupposed “job descriptions” of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, but rather *who they are as ambassadors of Christ*¹²⁰. These are men who “have been with Jesus”¹²¹, and bring the presence of Jesus.”

¹¹⁷ Ephesians 4:7, 11-12. (“as” in the NASB, and “to be” in the NKJV are not in the Greek text.)

¹¹⁸ Matthew 16:18

¹¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1:5 *The Amplified Bible*

¹²⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:20

¹²¹ Acts 4:13

What does gathering have to do with teaching disciples?

The *context of the spiritual disciplines* we've just discussed are those daily one-on-one *gatherings with the Lord*. For biblical discipleship, the additional context needed in tandem with this are gatherings for teaching and equipping which will “nurture”¹²² those one-on-one *gatherings with the Lord*.

Discipleship is learning Christ through ...

Revelation and Relationship *with a view to Reflection of Christ*. In the **Revelation – Relationship Continuum**, *teaching on Seeing Christ Throughout All of Scripture* has to do with the REVELATION aspect. And a *teaching on Fellowship with the Spirit (through various spiritual disciplines)*¹²³ has to do with the RELATIONSHIP aspect.

Biblical Discipleship requires disciples ...

- *Gathering one-on-one in relationship with the Lord,*

¹²² Or “motivate”, “encourage”, “stimulate”, “inspire”, “grow”, “guide”, etc.

¹²³ I am not referring to fellowship with one another – I am referring to a disciple's one-on-one fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It's true that some of these disciplines can be practiced collectively; but, as with “worship services”, that collective exercise will be shallow, if people do not have an authentic devotional life as individuals.

as well as,

- *Gathering for teaching with equipping ministries.*¹²⁴

Much like the fluidity of the Spirit-led Christian life¹²⁵, the process of discipling a given disciple *must follow the Holy Spirit's leading* alternating between teachings on REVELATION OF CHRIST and teachings on RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST. Essentially, my series, *A New & Living Way*, is all about seeking understanding of how to do that “according to the Spirit”, rather than “according to the letter”.¹²⁶

Therefore, in addition to all I have written on DISCIPLESHIP and DISCIPLING¹²⁷, I would make this statement: **At least some, if not all, of our gatherings need to be for the purpose of discipling.**

Certainly, we gather for the purpose of discipling.

¹²⁴ For a complimentary PDF copy of “*A Guide for Teaching Disciples*”, Email: AtChristsTable@gmail.com

¹²⁵ Cf. John 3:8

¹²⁶ That is, according to the “new commandment” of the New Covenant (John 13:35-35, Cf. 15:12) - according to “the Law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2), according to “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2).

¹²⁷ [The Vineyard of the Lord, The Husbandman, Christ-centered Discipleship & Equipping Ministries, Christ Is Pre-Requisite for Church](#), et. al.

Bear Fruit

Jesus said: “My Father is glorified by this, that you *bear much fruit*, and so prove to be My disciples.” Well now, that’s something we certainly want to do! But, what is a “fruitful disciple”? We can give that a *spiritual* answer or a more *functional* answer. I think *both combined* would be the best answer. What is “spiritual fruitfulness”? Growing in *Revelation of Christ* and *Relationship with Christ*? Yes. Growing in Christ-likeness? Yes, again. But, let’s also consider the question in light of the Great Commissions - being fruitful by ...

- **Being “engaged in matters of His Kingdom”¹²⁸ until He returns.** (Luke 19:13; Cf. The calling of the “Ekklesia”). *And related to this is -*
- **Doing “good works” - *out in the world*.** (Matthew 5:14-16)

*What does that mean?
And what does gathering have to do with that?*

¹²⁸ I believe the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translation here has the most clear meaning of the Greek word, *pragmateuomai*, Strong’s # 4231, viz. “to be engaged with a matter”. The KJV, “to occupy”, sounds too military; and the NKJV, “to do business”, and the ESV, “to be engaged in business”, sound too mercenary. (The words, “*with this*”, which would infer the money given to the servants in the parable, is in italics, meaning it is not actually in the Greek text. The meaning, therefore, is “to be engaged with matters” of Lord’s household or kingdom. Cf. Luke 19:1.

The Calling of the Ekklesia

Let's establish the context of Jesus' words, "be engaged with matters (of the kingdom) until He returns": The nature and commission of the Church is to be the Ekklesia¹²⁹ of the Kingdom. W.E. Vine defines this as: "A body of citizens called out and gathered to discuss the affairs of state." He further explains it as "*a gathering for a definite purpose, a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation*".¹³⁰

Such a gathering would "**be engaged with matters of the Kingdom**", functioning much like other group meetings with more contemporary names, such as a "task force", defined as, "a unit or formation established to work on a single defined task or activity." Other examples might be: a "Town Hall" meeting, an "Investigative" meeting, a "Project Planning" meeting, a "Work" (Team) meeting. In making these comparisons the essential difference from these contemporary consortiums is that the Ekklesia meetings would not be led by a committee or by a

¹²⁹ Strong's # 1577

¹³⁰ Vine's *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. See Acts 19:23-41. Although this was a gathering of people from the world system (who were set against the kingdom of God), this passage does allow us to see the secular Greek *ekklesia* "in action" (albeit against the preaching of the gospel by the apostle Paul). Also: Acts 15:6-29 is a clear and excellent example of the Church functioning as the Ekklesia of the Kingdom of God.

“democratic” process, but rather by the Holy Spirit – the “Governor” of the Kingdom. And the task “on the table” is always to represent the King with a witness of the Kingdom – namely...

“⁸To preach to the nations the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; ¹⁰So that the manifold wisdom of God might **now be made known through the church** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.¹¹*This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:8-11)¹³¹

¹³¹ See my article [The Cross & The Powers of Darkness](#).

Be Engaged in Matters of the Kingdom

One of the ways we are to “be engaged in matters of the kingdom” is by DOING GOOD WORKS – Out in the World.

What does THAT have to do with Gathering?

Disciples and the World¹³²

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ **Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**” (Matthew 5:13-16)

“Glorify Your Father Who is in Heaven”

Something which needs to be clear at the outset of this discussion of “*Doing Good Works*” – *Out in the World*: Whatever good we do **MUST be done in the name of God**. Why? In order to “glorify your Father who is in heaven”: The one that is *named*, is the one

¹³² The paragraph heading in *the NASB , Updated Edition*, Lockman Foundation (1996)

who is *credited* and *glorified*. That's so obvious – why do I even bring up the issue? The apostle John made it abundantly clear that everything Jesus did on the earth, He did “in the name of the Father” – so that all that He did would be *attributed* to His Father, and so that His Father would be *credited* and *glorified*.¹³³ Jesus did NOTHING in the name of Caesar, nor in the name of the Roman government – nor in the name the nation of Israel, nor in the name of the temple in Jerusalem. Yet, throughout history, Christians have carried on much activity in the name of various religious denominations – for the credit and glory of those religious organizations. Christians have also carried out much activity *in association with* and *under the auspices of* secular charitable organizations and government-sponsored social programs.¹³⁴ Those doing the work may be children of their Father who is in heaven, but earthly organizations are getting the credit and glory for their work, because it is not being done in His name.

There is a related issue of “separation”. For our purposes in this article, suffice to let the scripture speak for itself here without commentary:

¹³³ John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28, 45; 12:49; 14:10

¹³⁴ A blatant case in point: The Progressive Christian “Social Justice” movement backing the social policies and programs of the Democratic Party in the USA.

¹⁴ “Do not be bound together (lit. unequally yoked) with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹⁷ Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. ¹⁸ And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

Anyone who has engaged in “doing good” *in association with* and *under the auspices of* secular charitable organizations and government-sponsored social programs has experienced the inherent spiritual conflicts of opposing worldviews. But the point is NOT that God wants us to avoid these conflicts, NOR that He “needs” to be glorified. This simple point will become more clear as we go along: **We MUST “do good” *in His name*, because what the Lord is building is His household (His Kingdom) – He is NOT building, or even “repairing” the kingdom of the world.**

“Let Your Light Shine Before Men”

Jesus said: “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father....” But, shortly afterward, He also said: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.” (That is, “doing good” in your own name and receiving the “glory” for it.)¹³⁵ So, how do we reconcile His two statements? I don’t think this is problematic: Jesus wants us to **display “good works” to the world so that the Father will be glorified** - not for us to be noticed by men. I believe there is a connection with the right motivation, and the meaning of the word “good”, and also, the nature of the “works” He wants to display to the world:

“Preach the Gospel. Use Words if Necessary”?

This is a popular quote attributed to Francis of Assisi. While this may be said with a good sentiment intended, there are two problems with this quote: 1) Francis of Assisi didn’t say it.¹³⁶ 2) It is not biblical: It is **preaching** which God has chosen to use as His

¹³⁵ Cf. Matthew 6:1-5

¹³⁶ It is contrary to his reputation – he was well known for his preaching; and was known to have preached up to five times per day.

means of salvation.¹³⁷ Our works cannot save ourselves, nor anyone else. But, **Jesus' work** in His death, burial and resurrection *does* save people. The gospel¹³⁸ is not something we can *do* – it is something we are commanded to preach. And while it is true that “(our) words are cheap” and “(our) actions speak louder than (our) words”, these sayings denigrate the words of the prophets as well as the words of Jesus and His apostles which are recorded in the inspired scriptures. In fact, these sayings do not apply at all to the gospel – the “word of God”, the “word of Christ”. **The gospel – the message of Jesus' work of the Cross - has supernatural power - “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”.**¹³⁹ The scripture does NOT say that “good works” will enable people to call on God, believe on Christ and be saved. (If you have been involved in doing good works out in the world, you will know that from personal experience with non-believers. Generally speaking, when the “hand-outs” stop, they stop coming around.) The scripture DOES say that people will be saved through the preaching of the gospel.¹⁴⁰ If we do not preach the gospel (along with living out its implications), then our “good

¹³⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:21b “... God was well pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe.”

¹³⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

¹³⁹ Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁴⁰ Romans 10:13-15; 1 Corinthians 1:21b

works” will only point to *ourselves* instead of to **Jesus**. So, whatever these “good works” are, they do not replace **“preaching the gospel of the kingdom in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples”**.¹⁴¹ THIS is the calling of the Church - *“to proclaim”*¹⁴² the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”¹⁴³ And again, I suggest that **we should gather to seek God in prayer for His wisdom as to HOW to carry out this commission He has for the Church.**¹⁴⁴

Showing Our Faith By Our Works

While it is true we cannot preach the gospel without words; it is also true that we should *live out the truth of the gospel* – even without words. In most translations, Ephesians 4:15 reads: “speaking the truth in love”. Yet, Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, says that the meaning of the Greek word, *aletheuo*¹⁴⁵, means “BEING truthful” or “WALKING in the truth”.¹⁴⁶ So, Paul is saying that what we do and how we live should be in agreement with the truth of the gospel. James says that what we do and how we live

¹⁴¹ Matthew 24:14

¹⁴² Greek: *exangello*, Strong’s # 1804.

¹⁴³ 1 Peter 2:9

¹⁴⁴ This is the calling of the Church – “to proclaim (Greek: *exangello*, Strong’s # 1804) the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

¹⁴⁵ Strong’s # 226

¹⁴⁶ *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*

should not “lie against the truth”¹⁴⁷. In fact, James says that we **“show our faith by our works”**:

14 “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? **17** Even so faith if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. **18** But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.**”¹⁴⁸

THAT is what the Lord desires when He says: “Let your light shine before men in such a way **that they may see your good works**, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”¹⁴⁹ – SHOWING (EXHIBITING¹⁵⁰) OUR FAITH BY OUR WORKS. THAT is the testimony and witness of the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven.

“Good Works”

Let’s give some general definition to the term “**good works**”, then review the Commission of the Church to Represent the King & His

¹⁴⁷ James 3:13-18

¹⁴⁸ James 2:14-18

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 5:16

¹⁵⁰ Greek: *deiknuo*, Strong’s # 1166, to show or exhibit.

Kingdom, and then take another look at WHY WE GATHER in light of these things.

In the phrase “good works”,¹⁵¹ the Greek word translated “good” is *kalos*.¹⁵² Greek scholar, W. E. Vine tells us this word denotes that which is intrinsically good, *fair* and *beautiful*. Works which are *intrinsically good* are not motivated by pragmatic or utilitarian purposes – that is, to win popularity with people, or to attract people to the church services, or even to achieve supposed “social justice”¹⁵³ goals in society. I believe the particular “goodness” Jesus wants *to display to the world for the glory of the Father* is the nature and character of the Father God. In a manner of speaking, “doing good works” is doing what God would do, the way in which God would do it, while reminding people no one is intrinsically good except God alone.

Jesus highlighted this in His encounter with the rich young ruler, when He said to him: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.”¹⁵⁴ Why did Jesus say that to him? Because this

¹⁵¹ Matthew 5:16

¹⁵² Strong’s # 2570

¹⁵³ e.g. The Progressive Christian “Social Justice” movement backing the social policies and programs of the Democratic Party in the USA.

¹⁵⁴ Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23.

rich young ruler referred to Jesus as, “good *teacher*” – he did not recognize Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God”, as Peter did. He recognized Him only as a “good *teacher*”. If Jesus had acknowledged Himself as “good”, then the rich young ruler would have also considered himself able to achieve “goodness”. After all, his attitude was this: “What should I do to be good? Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it. No problem.” As it was, he still didn’t get the point: “The righteousness of God is by faith, not by works”.¹⁵⁵ You see, people naturally think “do-gooders” are “good”; but Jesus doesn’t.

THIS IS SUCH A PROFOUND ISSUE! It is the difference between the gospel of “salvation by grace through faith” and the “Social Gospel”¹⁵⁶, which professes the ability of human effort to

¹⁵⁵ Romans 3:22, 11:6; Ephesians 2:8

¹⁵⁶ **Peter Abelard (1079-1142)** proposed what became to be known as his *Moral Influence Theory*.¹⁵⁶ In a nutshell, this atonement theory states that Christ died to influence humanity toward moral improvement. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy any principle of divine justice, but teaches instead that His death was designed to greatly influence mankind with a sense of God’s love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. Thus, the Atonement is not directed towards God with the purpose of satisfying His righteousness, but towards man with the purpose of influencing him towards a just and moral society. Abelard’s “Moral Influence Theory”, along with Charles Sheldon’s “Christian Socialism” and novel, “*What Would Jesus Do*” (1891), were significant influences on **Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918)**, who is known as the father of the Social Gospel. Rauschenbusch defined sin as betrayal of the bonds of care among human beings. He believed that the root of sin is not rebellious refusal to obey God, but a deep-seated selfishness. He saw selfishness as more than a personal failing – it was a transpersonal evil, institutionalized in social systems that benefit some individuals while exploiting and oppressing many others. Rauschenbusch did not view Jesus’ death as an act of substitutionary atonement but in his words, he died “to substitute love for selfishness as the basis

redeem society through “good works”, quite without the need for the atoning blood sacrifice of “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world”¹⁵⁷.

How utterly muddled things get when we want people to think we are “good”, or when people mistakenly esteem us as being “good” because we serve the Lord. So, whatever these “good works” are, in doing them out in the world, we must try our utmost to communicate the nature and character of the Father God whom we are called to represent out in the world, while reminding people no one is intrinsically good except God alone.

As for the Greek word translated “works”, it is *ergon*,¹⁵⁸ meaning work in the sense of *employment* or *occupation*, indicating more than just a single “act of kindness”. So, somehow, when doing these “good works” out in the world, we cannot give the impression we are offering people “random acts of kindness” with

of human society." Rauschenbusch also devoted considerable effort to explicating the problem of evil, which he saw embodied not in individuals, but in "suprapersonal entities", which were socio-economic and political institutions. He found four major loci of suprapersonal evil: militarism, individualism, capitalism and nationalism. To these he juxtaposed four institutional embodiments of good: pacifism, collectivism, socialism and internationalism. He cited these six "social sins" which according to him, Jesus bore on the Cross: Religious bigotry, the combination of graft and political power, the corruption of justice, the mob spirit (being "the social group gone mad") and mob action, militarism, and class contempt.

¹⁵⁷ John 1:29

¹⁵⁸ Strong's 2041

hopes that they will listen to our “sales pitch” and come visit our church. The nature of this “work” is not so much a social event, or even a social program, but rather *a calling* and *a lifestyle*, representing our nature and character.¹⁵⁹ These “good works” need to be an expression of God’s love nature, who we are as children of the King, and the character of life in His Kingdom.

A Lifestyle of Service

Well then, what are these “good works”? I think a good place to start identifying these good works is to understand what it is that the Lord wants the world to see. He wants the world to see HIS LOVE.¹⁶⁰ As we discussed earlier about the “New Commandment” He gave us¹⁶¹, He wants the world to see HIS KIND OF LOVE in our lifestyle of service to one another. Therefore, these “good works” – out in the world – consist of a lifestyle of service - to those “in the world” as well. The apostle Paul referred to those “in the world” as “those who are outside”¹⁶² – that is, outside “the household of the faith”. However we express our love in service to one another in the family of God,

¹⁵⁹ 2 Peter 1:4

¹⁶⁰ John 3:16

¹⁶¹ See pages 17-21.

¹⁶² 1 Corinthians 5:12- 13; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 3:7

we should express that same love in service to those “outside the household of the faith” – namely “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the LAW OF CHRIST.”¹⁶³

What is the “Law of Christ”? The Law of Christ is the governing principle of the New Covenant. The Law of Christ is loving one another as He has loved us¹⁶⁴ - but “according to the Spirit, not according to then letter”.¹⁶⁵ That is, not according to “the elementary principles of the world”.¹⁶⁶

It is in like manner as: “not as the world gives peace, but *as Jesus gives peace*”¹⁶⁷. The Hebrew word for peace, *salom*¹⁶⁸, and the Greek word for peace, *eirene*¹⁶⁹, both mean *wholeness, complete well-being, and harmony*. “Doing good works” is more than meeting a particular material need, be it food, clothing, health care, housing, education, etc.¹⁷⁰ – it’s more complete than that. It is “*Social Action Jesus Style*”. As I mentioned earlier, that is the title

¹⁶³ Galatians 6:2

¹⁶⁴ John 13:34, 15:9 and 12.

¹⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:6

¹⁶⁶ Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

¹⁶⁷ John 14:26-27. Please note from this passage that this peace that Jesus gives is inextricably connected to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶⁸ Strong’s # 7965

¹⁶⁹ Strong’s # 1515

¹⁷⁰ “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.” Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4.

of a work by Larry Christenson. In my own words, I would like to share another “take away” I received from his brilliant treatise, for *right here* is the dividing line between the world and the Church – what makes our “good works” different *from supporting government social programs* – the quintessential difference between the “Social Gospel” and “Social Action Jesus Style” – namely, THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE FAITH.¹⁷¹

The Household of the Faith

⁹“Let us not lose heart in **doing good**, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us **do**¹⁷² **good to all people, and especially¹⁷³ to those who are of the household of the faith.**”¹⁷⁴

Why “do good” – especially with, particularly with, chiefly with, and mostly with “the household of the faith”? Because God loves us more than those in the world? Because we are more deserving – nicer people? Because “Charity begins at home”? No! It’s

¹⁷¹ What follows about “the household of the Faith” has partially been gleaned from Larry Christenson’s book, “Social Action Jesus Style” – and it is merely gleaned – there is a much fuller treatment of the subject in his book. There are many other things in his book that support all the various points of this article. His book is, by far, the best writing I have come across on the subject of the mission of the Church in the world.

¹⁷² The Greek word is *ergazomai*, Strong’s # 2038, meaning to be engaged with and committed to, work as an occupation. i.e. Not “an act of kindness”.

¹⁷³ The Greek word is *malista*, Strong’s # 3122, meaning particularly, chiefly, mostly

¹⁷⁴ Galatians 6:9-10

because God's agenda is not the same as the world's agenda:

The world's agenda is to engineer and transform society, eliminating all its ills – or at least, appear to be doing so – enough for politicians to be re-elected (that is, to buy votes) and keep the populace utterly dependent upon the government. But God's agenda is NOT to transform society and eliminate all its ills - but rather to build the Church, “the household of God”,¹⁷⁵ so it can *be a witness to* and a *testimony to* A COMPLETELY ALTERNATE SOCIETY¹⁷⁶ - “A New & Living Way” – “here on Earth as it is in Heaven”¹⁷⁷.

We are to “go into all the world”¹⁷⁸ and work “good works” out in the world, but not to “fix” it. God's plan is that we would “snatch some out of the fire”¹⁷⁹ before “the elements pass away”¹⁸⁰, so that they too may be “rescued from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son”¹⁸¹, and have eternal life in the new heaven and new earth.¹⁸² **Our work is to co-**

¹⁷⁵ Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15

¹⁷⁶ Cf. my article, **The Church: A Community for Transformation**

¹⁷⁷ Matthew 6:10

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8

¹⁷⁹ Jude 1:23

¹⁸⁰ 2 Peter 3:7, 10-13

¹⁸¹ Colossians 1:13

¹⁸² Revelation 21:1; Cf. 2 Peter 3:10 and 13; Isaiah 65:17, 66:22

operate with Jesus as He builds His Church¹⁸³ – “the household of the faith”, “the household of God”, and be a witness to, a testimony to, the Kingdom of God. Rather than “transforming society”, or merely meeting people’s material needs, the Lord’s agenda is that “those who are outside” would “taste of the Lord and see He is good**”¹⁸⁴ – experience “the household of God”.**

An Experience of the “Oikos of God”

The Greek word translated “household” is *oikos*¹⁸⁵. The *oikos* was the basic unit of Greek society – the members of a household. It was one’s nuclear family; but more than that, it included extended family, as well as household workers, and anyone else associated with the household. The term also included the whole estate – the house, the land, and the family business. **The “Oikos of God” is the family of God, complete with spiritual parents, brothers and sisters, and a network of friendships.**

Luke 2:49 contains an interesting phrase, where Jesus says “I must be about My Father’s *house*”¹⁸⁶. Other translations say, “I

¹⁸³ 1 Corinthians 3:5-10; Ephesians 4:11-12, 16

¹⁸⁴ Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 2:3; Hebrews 6:5

¹⁸⁵ Strong’s # 3624

¹⁸⁶ NASB

must be about My Father's *business*"¹⁸⁷The literal translation would read, "I must be about *the things of My Father*", or "I must be about *the matters of My Father's household*." The phrase, **"household of God"**, goes beyond human relationships into the area of activity – working and serving in the house, studying and teaching the things of the Father, **being about the business of the kingdom of God.**

The point is this: The Lord's agenda for "social action" is that **"those who are outside" would experience "the Oikos of God" -** *tasting, perceiving, seeing, experiencing that "the Lord is good"*, including experiencing the presence of Jesus. Those "outside" need to be given an opportunity to **experience the household of God**, including the love of the family of God, the depths of the truth of God, the richness of the wisdom of God, the giving and receiving of the various ministries of the Body of Christ, and the adventure of living in the kingdom of God.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ NKJV, NIV

¹⁸⁸ It must be noted that John 3:3 & 5 maintains that one cannot fully "understand" (Greek: *eido*, translated "see") or enter the kingdom of God without experiencing regeneration.

Bearing One Another's Burdens in the Household of the Faith and "Doing Good" in the World

I'd like to share a couple of other thoughts before leaving this subject. Firstly, let's combine the opening and closing thoughts Paul gives the Galatians in chapter two: **"bearing one another's burdens" and "especially with those who are the household of the faith"**.¹⁸⁹

ALL the "burdens" of those *in* "the household of the faith" ARE THE SAME BURDENS of those *outside* "the household of the faith" because we are all human beings with universal human needs. All that God wants us to provide **firstly** for those *in* "the household of the faith" CAN ALSO BE AVAILABLE to those *outside* "the household of the faith".

But to truly co-labor with God in this, we must understand His ways. God said that His people "always go astray in their hearts not knowing His ways".¹⁹⁰ He said this specifically in reference to the spiritual season when He was leading Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. This is what God intends to do with the

¹⁸⁹ Galatians 6:2 & 10

¹⁹⁰ Psalm 95:10; Hebrews 3:10 NKJV

Church – lead us out of the “domain of darkness” - namely, the world system, and into “the kingdom of His beloved Son”.¹⁹¹ In fact, He “desires that ALL people would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”¹⁹². But, in order to co-labor with Him in this, we MUST understand His plans and purpose, along with His ways. His intention is more than merely meeting people’s material needs.¹⁹³ Along with revealing Himself and His love through His disciples, the Lord’s ultimate intention is to bring those who are *outside* His house *inside* His House. I am not speaking of “getting them to come to church”. I am speaking of people repenting – that is, changing their worldview, changing their hearts and lives, having saving faith in Christ, receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and seeing the kingdom, and entering the New Covenant community.

You see, when we “do good” out in the world, the Holy Spirit who “convinces the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgment”¹⁹⁴, will also convince those in the world that THE PROVISION IS IN THE HOUSE. In Luke’s Parable of the Prodigal Son, it says that when the son “came to his senses”, he realized

¹⁹¹ Colossians 1:13

¹⁹² 1 Timothy 2:4

¹⁹³ Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4

¹⁹⁴ John 16:8

THE PROVISION IS IN THE HOUSE,¹⁹⁵ and returned to his father's house, confessed his sin, received forgiveness, and "came to life again" (was regenerated).¹⁹⁶ THE PROVISION IS IN THE HOUSE. The apostle Paul indicated that "the riches of the glory of His inheritance is IN THE SAINTS"¹⁹⁷ – IN THE NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY.

What Does the New Covenant Community Look Like?

What have we concluded thus far regarding gatherings of the Ekklesia informs us of what a New Covenant community looks like:

- Equipping ministries discipling people through their teaching and fellowship.¹⁹⁸
- In tandem with this, individual disciples devoting themselves to fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹⁵ Luke 15:17-18a; Cf. vv. 11-32

¹⁹⁶ Luke 15:18b-24

¹⁹⁷ Ephesians 1:18 I realize and agree that GOD'S INHERITANCE is "the saints". But, Paul is praying here for the church to understand God's PROVISION FOR THE SAINTS. He is not praying for God's "eyes to be enlightened so that He will know the hope of His calling and His inheritance".

¹⁹⁸ e.g. Acts 2:42

- Disciples seeking the Lord (in prayer) for His guidance¹⁹⁹ in making declarations of the Gospel of the Kingdom in the whole world and discipling all peoples.²⁰⁰
- Teams of workers making preparations for declarations of the Gospel of the Kingdom.
- And I believe we can add: Disciples having meals together in each other's houses.²⁰¹
- Practicing the Presence of God together.²⁰²
- Praising God as a lifestyle (rather than a religious ritual).²⁰³
- Beyond this, being generally “engaged in the matters of the kingdom” and “bearing one another’s burdens” in the household of God and “doing good” out in the world.

Some thoughts about “bearing one another’s burdens”: Just as ancient Israel was an alternative covenant community the Ekklesia should be the center for –

- Health Care
- Education
- Financing (without interest)

¹⁹⁹ See Part III of this article, *Seeking God in Prayer for Guidance*

²⁰⁰ e.g., Acts 2:42

²⁰¹ e.g., Acts 2:46

²⁰² e.g., Acts 2:43

²⁰³ e.g., Acts 2:47

- Legal cases between believers (1 Corinthians 6)
- Supporting the businesses of other believers (Cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)²⁰⁴

Some thoughts about “doing good” out in the world: Christian groups have historically been the builders of –

- Hospitals (physical health care and “renewing of the mind”²⁰⁵ as psychological counseling)
- Schools (“renewing of the mind” to a biblical worldview)
- Centers for learning life skills
- Various types of charity missions²⁰⁶
- Centers for the support of the Arts

Some Related Exhortations from the New Testament

- Philippians 2:4 “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
- Hebrews 13:16 “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”
- James 1:27 “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

²⁰⁴ Each of these ministries deserves a separate article for further discussion.

²⁰⁵ Romans 12:2

²⁰⁶ e.g., Acts 2:44-45; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1; Hebrews 13:16

- 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8 "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.... Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."
- 1 John 3:17 "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

PART III

Seeking God for Guidance

in “Being Engaged in the Matters of the Kingdom”
and Doing “Good Works”

The astute reader would have noticed that I have not given any “practical applications” for “doing good works”. I don’t have any to give – God does. **We must seek God in prayer for guidance.** When I speak of “seeking God in prayer for guidance”, it can be equated with *“the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”*²⁰⁷. Reflect on how Jesus described the ministry of the Holy Spirit towards us who are His disciples:

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.**” (John 14:25-26)

¹² “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, **He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and **He will**

²⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1.

disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore, I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.” (John 16:12-15)

It is imperative we hear the voice of God for guidance in the work of God. We dare not continue building “according to the letter”²⁰⁸ – according to “the elementary principles of the world”.²⁰⁹ As His co-workers²¹⁰, we must work *with* Him and not against Him. Our example is Jesus, and how He walked with the Father while He ministered on the earth – saying only *what he heard the Father saying*, and doing only *what He saw the Father doing*.²¹¹ There is a prophetic passage which addresses the necessity of CO-LABORING WITH THE LORD IN HIS WORK:

“Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”

(Isaiah 50:10)

We must have reverence for God and His work, having humility and acknowledging when we don’t know what God is doing. We

²⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 3:6

²⁰⁹ Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

²¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:9

²¹¹ John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28, 45; 12:49; 14:10

must have utter dependence on the Lord. Not “trusting in chariots and horses”²¹² – “Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit”.²¹³

¹¹ “Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who gird yourselves with firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment.” (Isaiah 50:11)

If we “do our own thing” in our own strength,²¹⁴ we will suffer the consequences.²¹⁵

Over the years, a number of scripture passages have become especially significant for me when seeking God in prayer for guidance in the work of ministry:

- “The people who know their God will display strength and take action.” (Daniel 11:32; Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-24)
- “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)
- “A ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the messengers (angels²¹⁶) of God were ascending

²¹² Psalm 20:7

²¹³ Zechariah 4:6

²¹⁴ Psalm 118:8; 146:3; Isaiah 2:22; 30:1

²¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:13-17

²¹⁶ Greek: *angelos*, Strong’s # 32.

and descending on it.... This is none other than *the house of God* and this is the gate of heaven.” (Genesis 28:12; 17)

- “Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and *confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands.*” (Psalm 90:16-17)
- “I will build My Church... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19)
- “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Corinthians 3:7-9)
- “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (John 6:29)
- “Our father who is in heaven, hallowed be you name. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9-10)

It’s natural that we might have a desire for “practical applications” of the principles I’ve laid out regarding **“Being Engaged in the Matters of the Kingdom”**. As I said, we MUST receive those leadings in prayer with the Holy Spirit. And, of course, the New Testament scriptures would be our “go-to” source from which we would affirm the trustworthiness of those Spirit-leadings. I have, in fact, listed above some principles (not “patterns”). And, along that line, I’d like to repeat what I said at the close of the previous

section entitled *The New Testament Scriptures (PART I): The “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm is not satisfying to me, as I see the whole idea of prescriptions of certain activities as being at the very core of “the elementary principles of the world”*²¹⁷. And again, it is not the activities themselves which are problematic, it is the prescribing of those activities which I perceive as “of the letter” and therefore violating the essence of the New Covenant by promoting a ministry “of the letter” rather than “of the Spirit” – “the Law of Christ”, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. I am more of the persuasion to say, in a manner of speaking: Whatever we see in the New Testament scriptures that is descriptive of Christ is prescriptive. I believe it was the intention of the Holy Spirit and the authors He inspired to both *describe* and *prescribe* CHRIST through the New Testament scriptures.

This brings to mind an oft used phrase: “What Would Jesus Do?”

²¹⁸ THAT is what we need to discern in every unique situation –

²¹⁷ Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

²¹⁸ The origin and usage of the phrase: It is the theme of “Imitation of Christ”, written by Thomas a Kempis in 1481. The phrase was repeated a number of times in a sermon given by Charles Spurgeon in 1891. Also, in 1891, A.B. Simpson wrote a hymn with this title. The phrase was the title of a novel written by Charles Sheldon in 1896, whose theology was labeled “Christian Socialism” and was the primary influence on Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the “Social Gospel”. (I do not identity with their use of the phrase.) In the 1990s, Janie Tinklenberg,

What would Jesus do? – “according to the Spirit”?²¹⁹ For **THAT** is essentially the governing principle of the New Covenant – “the law of Christ”²²⁰ - “the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”.²²¹ Of course, the guidance we receive “according to the Spirit” will never contradict anything the Spirit inspired to be recorded in the New Testament scriptures. But at the same time, it may be “far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think”²²² – that is, something “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined”²²³. I say this because, Jesus said “the Spirit will guide us in ALL THE REALITY”.²²⁴ While Greek word, *aletheia*²²⁵, is usually translated “truth”, its literal meaning is “reality”. In fact, Greek scholar, Hermann Cremer, defines it as, “the reality lying at the basis of an appearance; the manifested, veritable essence of a matter”²²⁶. **THAT’S what Jesus would do** – in every unique situation we encounter between now and “the end of the age”.

a youth leader in the Calvary Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, used the phrase which started a global youth movement.

²¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:6

²²⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2

²²¹ Romans 8:2

²²² Ephesians 3:20

²²³ 1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV

²²⁴ John 16:13

²²⁵ Strong’s # 225

²²⁶ *Biblico-Theological Lexicon*

The Nature of New Covenant Gathering

From surveying the Scriptures, walking in the New Covenant - in both our individual and collective lives - seems to involve:

- **Knowing God**
(Jeremiah 31:33; 9:24)
- **Being Born of the Spirit**
(John 3:3-8; Romans 8:9)
- **Being Led by the Spirit**
(Romans 8:14; Cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10)
- **Being Governed by** (in both our individual and collective lives):
 - **“The Law of Christ”** (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2)
 - **“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:2)
 - **“According to the Spirit”** (2 Corinthians 3:6)

How does the “New and Living Way”²²⁷ Jesus opened for us relate to the nature of New Covenant Gathering?

“... not forsaking our own assembling together....”²²⁸

²²⁷ Hebrews 10:20

²²⁸ Hebrews 10:25

This phrase, verse 25 of Hebrews 10, appears in the very same context as the subject matter of the passage – *a “new and living way”* (v. 20). The Greek verb translated “assembling together” is *episunago*.²²⁹ Every time this word appears in the New Testament, the context and reference is Jesus gathering with His people – either the Lord expressing His desire to gather with His people²³⁰, or the Lord’s people gathering together with Him in the air.²³¹ Thus, the primary object of “our own assembling together” is Jesus, and *not one another*.²³² Jesus confirms this the one time He mentions our gathering together:

“Where two or three have gathered together in My name, **I am there in their midst.**” (Matthew 18:20)

This is the conventional translation of the verse; and the conventional interpretation is that, if we gather together, Jesus has promised to honor our gathering with His presence.

²²⁹ Strong’s # 1997

²³⁰ Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34

²³¹ Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

²³² In Mark 1:33, the people of a city gathered at the door of a house Jesus was in. In Luke 12:1, a multitude of people gathered to listen to Jesus. Cf. Peter Ditzel’s article, “*Hebrews 10:25 - What are We Not to Forsake?*”

But, let's look deeper into a more literal translation of this verse: "Where there are two or three *are being gathered together* (or even, **"are being led to gather together"**) in My name, there I am in the midst of them." The tense of the Greek verb is present participle, passive voice.²³³ Thus the gathering is being initiated by Someone other than "the two or three" – that is, "according to the Spirit".

The Holy Spirit, the "Governor" of the Kingdom, leads as to when, where and how the Kingdom Gathering (Ekklesia) takes place – "in the name"²³⁴ of Jesus, that is, with the AUTHORITY of Jesus – according to "the Law of Christ", "the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus".

Also: There is a definite article in front of "in"²³⁵, indicating *into* a "place". The literal translation would be: **"are being led together into My name"**. In other words, the Name of Jesus is a "place" – a spiritual place – His presence, which we gather into. Proverbs 18:10 tells us that: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it and is set on high." It is "the secret place of

²³³ The verb, *sunago*, is a combination of Strong's # 4863, *sun*, "together" and Strong's # 71, *ago*, "led"; i.e. led together'

²³⁴ Greek: *onoma*, Strong's # 3638, meaning authority, character, name.

²³⁵ Greek: *eis*, Strong's # 1519

the Most High”.²³⁶ THIS is some of what it means to be “IN CHRIST”.²³⁷ And being IN CHRIST is the essence of the New Covenant.

The Father has ...

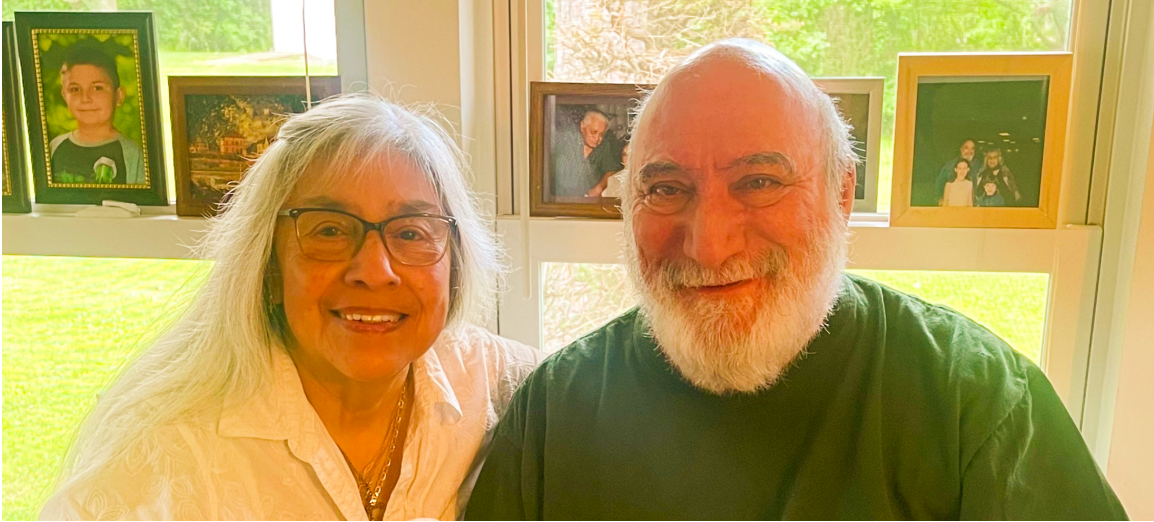
**“given Christ as a covenant to the people
and
as a light to the nations”²³⁸**

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~

²³⁶ Psalm 91:1-2; Cf. Exodus 33:21-23; 2 Samuel 22:2-3; Psalm 18:2; 61:3.

²³⁷ There are many lists of the truths of being “in Christ”. Here is one good example by Ken Boa:
<https://kenboa.org/spiritual-formation/who-does-god-say-i-am/>

²³⁸ Isaiah 42:6



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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