

I Was Glad When They Said Unto Me... (Ps. 122:1)

Reflections On Our Need To “Actually” Assemble

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INTRODUCTION

The recently declared COVID-19 pandemic serves as the backdrop for this article. At the time of its completion in May 2020, various governmental orders that run counter to clear American freedoms persist. Honest citizens are being jailed for simply trying to give haircuts. Church goers in some areas are being told that they cannot gather, or gather only with a few, even when CDC-recommended safety measures are followed. Some government officials have said that certain religious gatherings are possibly allowable, but not if they permit the Lord’s Supper or singing. The more radical leaders are suggesting that churches/religious “in-person” services might have to be suspended for as much as 12 to 18 months. Yet, these who would trample religious freedoms have no problem with lesser “gatherings.” For instance, things like liquor stores and veterinary clinics, which often involve more than 10 people closely gathered, are deemed “essential,” whereas in-person worship gatherings are viewed as unloving, unnecessary and non-essential. By the multiplied hundreds, maybe even thousands, people have continued to “gather” daily at grocery stores and supply stores (e.g., have you tried to get down a Walmart or Lowe’s aisle, lately?) as the masses scurry for their supplies and “necessary food” (Job 23:12, John 6:27). After all, getting booze for one’s mental health (yes, this is one of the reasons given!), caring for one’s pet and taking care of the old stomach cannot be overlooked, right? No, certainly not, they say. But what about “corporate worship?” As one liberal governor said, “We have to find a different way to worship.” The absolute terrifying part? Many brethren, at least by their actions, seem to agree. Wake up, brethren.

No right-thinking person makes light of death. Death is an “enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). It is something that most dread, as the “king of terrors” (Job 18:14). Yet, **IN** Christ there is great hope (Rev. 14:13; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Heb. 6:18-20). Christ has conquered death and victory is available to those that come to Him on His terms and live in faithful obedience (Heb. 2:14-15; 5:9; 1 John 5:4; Rom. 6:1ff). But while death holds some mystery, it is not something that Christians, faithful members of the Lord’s one true church—the church of Christ, should fear. Instead, for us, death is “gain” (Phil. 1:21). Christians love life and work hard to be honorable citizens (1 Pet. 2:12-17). But Christians always put God first—**ALWAYS** (Matt. 6:33; 16:24, 26)! Children of God love their fellow man deeply (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 4:28), but they love God more (Matt. 22:37-38; 10:34-39). Saints strive to be true servants to others and obey the law of the land (Rom. 13:1f) except when that law violates God’s law (Acts 4:17-20; 5:29; Dan. 6:10). **It is always God FIRST, and man SECOND.** Christians are sensible and strive to live in peace with others (Rom. 12:18). They pray for their governmental leaders and even their enemies (1 Tim. 2:1-3; Matt. 5:44). They seek to be kind and to imitate the great God of heaven (Luke 6:35-37; Matt. 5:48; Gal. 5:22-26). Although not sinless, true Christians do not live like the world (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Pet. 4:1-5).

Thus, it is a bit shocking to see so many among us reacting with panic, like the world. Yes, we should use wisdom and common sense during this pandemic, and some are in areas that demand extreme and strict diligence (e.g., New York City). **Clearly, sick people should do what sick people have always done. They should seek medical attention—see a doctor, go to a hospital, rest, heal up, stay at home, etcetera.** What right thinking person would say otherwise. Yet, as a whole, it seems that many in the country and, sadly, many in the church, have given themselves over to excess and unneeded panic. Study the statistics. It is almost like people have forgotten that around 2.5 to 2.8 million people die every year in the United States. We are talking about approximately 7,500 on any given day. How many have died in this country from COVID-19? It depends on the day/week, but it is around 70,000+/- (as of early May and using what some suggest to be inflated numbers). This number is similar to some flu seasons. True, it’s a big number and we should certainly take it seriously. But, friends, it is not big when compared to the nearly 3 million that die every year in this country! Study history. As just one example, study the Spanish Flu of 1918. It killed 675,000 in the U.S. and an estimated 50 million or more worldwide. Not only did the country not shut down in the fashion we have recently witnessed, but they instead helped fight a World War—and won! Brethren, I am NOT making light of our current situation and anyone who says otherwise does not know me. As we go about our daily lives, we should strive to be good citizens. We should do all we can to help others. But mostly, we need to love souls (Matt. 16:26). Please remember; no matter what happens during this crisis, this world is not our home (1 Pet. 2:11). Except the Lord come back first, you and I will both die. Death is not something new. Be ready for it—always put God first, and the rest will take care of itself (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1ff).

As we consider this current pandemic, we need to understand that brethren have handled this event in various ways, some continuing to worship and others doing all manner of strange things. Further, there have been numerous circumstances and nuances involved and the “exact reasoning” behind every decision made/not made by every individual/congregation is not being scrutinized. No one is “judging” the motives or actions behind all of the decisions made during this time, nor is this article an attempt to judge every situation. After all, *agape* love believes the best, until it cannot (1 Cor. 13:7). Ultimately, elderships, congregations and each individual person will one day stand before the great and majestic God of hosts and give an account for the various actions taken during this time. Without question, such accountability is true with not only this case, but with every other situation and action (2 Cor. 5:10). One day, “...all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). On that day, every decision will matter.

My intention with this article is to simply try and help my beloved brethren think through some of these things and to possibly assist their preparation for such an event in the future (Eph. 4:1ff; Heb. 13:1). While it seems certain that some need to repent from their actions or false teaching, most perhaps just need to grow or find encouragement (1 Thes. 5:6-21, Heb. 3:13). Each person, each congregation, each eldership, each preacher needs to reflect on the reality of **their own actions** during this time and compare such actions with God's Holy Writ, making the needed correction where warranted (John 12:48, Rev. 20:12, Acts 17:30-31). Some should take strength from the courage they showed in not leaving the Biblical pattern of worship. Others just need to remain strong or even perhaps get well (physically or emotionally), as they might have faced sickness and/or isolation (e.g., those in nursing homes and/or brethren wanting to "assemble with their congregation per the pattern" but not allowed to by their eldership). After reading this article, some might feel rebuked, whereas others might feel encouraged. Then again, some might feel indifferent and/or would have simply handled this subject in a very different way, but regardless, my intention is only to help (Gal. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Do with this article what you will. I have not withdrawn from anyone in this article, so please do not accuse me of such. I believe we have had much confusion (panic) and scores of congregations amending worship in odd ways, thus I felt it important to "give some reflections." I will confess that this article is probably much too long, and I repeat myself numerous times about several things, but I suppose this is okay, because even God likes repetition (2 Pet. 1:12, 13, 15, 3:1).

The congregation that I am thankful to be a member of did much to show reasonableness during this crazy time, yet NEVER did we cease to worship God on the First Day of the week, per the Biblical pattern. In short, while in my opinion we used common sense in matters of expediency, we held fast to God's requirement to "assemble" (i.e., actually assemble or literally come together) once each Sunday (the Lord's Day), partaking of the various aspects of "assembled worship," authorized by God. Put another way, we stayed with the Book and can give Bible authority for our actions. With all things, having authority for all we do is the key (1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Jn 9-11)! We told the sick to stay home and we did not "judge" those who felt that their vulnerability or possible exposure made them equally sick. **We trusted individuals to make decisions about their own personal sicknesses**, the same as we have done at other times—based on an individual's right to personal judgment within such matters as personal health/sickness (Matt. 25:14-15, Rom. 14:4-5, 2 Tim. 4:20). I am not saying every individual or congregation had to do precisely what we did in the exact same way, with all aspects (e.g., while not our choice, others had parking lot worship, with their windows down so the singing could be heard, using their car-seats as pews, and so forth—but at least they were "assembled" and "in one place," worshipping "together."). We are not the standard. Congregations are autonomous, and true Bible students understand such. However, autonomy does not trump God's Word. Autonomy and local shepherds do NOT have the right to usurp the authority of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-4). No specific congregation is the standard. God's Word is the standard (2 Tim. 3:16-17). One thing I do know: God's PATTERN is knowable and doable (Pro. 23:23). Times of crisis do not change the truth—period.

THE ASSEMBLY—OPTION OR OBLIGATION?

As we approach the subject of "actually (literally) assembling" as opposed to "assembling virtually," we should repeatedly ask this question: **Is the literal assembly an option or an obligation?** In other words, is our "coming together" (the assembly—and please note, we are talking about the Lord's Day required worship, not optional assemblies) something that involves a matter of opinion or does it involve a matter of God's requirement? This question is very important. If it is required, then what is the pattern, concerning the assembly component? Is this pattern fixed or changeable? In other words, does "actually assembling" matter, or is that part of the pattern just optional (cf., Acts. 20:7-8, many lights, the upper chamber (options) vs. "actually assembling" upon the First day of EVERY week (obligatory))? **I think many good brethren in haste have not fully thought through some of the things they have done, and the implications thereof.** Likewise, as

pertaining to divided worship (i.e., split assemblies—small separate groups from the same congregation worshipping in different homes), what about the authority to do such? For decades, sound brethren have fought this innovation (split assemblies, children’s church, cell groups), and the articles from sound brethren of the past are in print by the hundreds, showing that such action is not according to Biblical authority. We will quote many of these brethren later.

Does a crisis change this truth? Is divided assembly (e.g., split youth worship occurring at the same time as adult/auditorium worship) wrong under normal circumstances, but split worship occurring by the same congregation in numerous houses at the same time right, during a crisis? Are the principles condemning children’s church/cell groups (i.e., split assemblies) not still applicable? Is virtual (online/electronic) worship “right” during a crisis but somehow “wrong” after the crisis? If so, upon what basis? Further, it should be noted that the very concept of online/virtual worship is not, by definition, the same as actual, in-person worship. A quick dictionary search will show that the definition of “virtual” deals with that which is “almost or nearly...but not completely.” Brethren, these things need to be considered.

The difficulty with this topic is the various ways in which brethren have handled this situation. Consider the scenarios: 1) Some have engaged in one “online-worship” (with members participating in their various homes) saying they were still “gathering”—just not literally, 2) Others had small groups meet in various homes (thus allowing multiple assemblies “of the same congregation at the same time,” (hello! Sounds a lot like children’s church, to me)) 3) Still others have simply closed the doors for weeks, telling brethren who knows what, 4) Also, some have made themselves look cute (not really, but they sure made jokes about it, as they had shorts on bottom and suits on top—after all, you can do such with technology) as they recorded their sermons on Saturday, at the building with others present—but not over ten, I suppose (?). After all, ten is the magic number! They did this early so that the “play-it forward worship” (sermon) could be viewed on the Lord’s Day, as if it was some type of movie, 5) Others have told brethren to simply send in their contributions and/or to “give online” (on or not on the Lord’s Day/during these “worship services”—who knows?), 6) Some have told their members to drive by the building (before Sunday) and pick-up their communion packets for their “home worships” on Sunday (NOTE: I understand that the New Testament shows that members met in homes, but it needs to be understood that they did NOT meet in homes in the same fashion we have recently seen, but in fact, they met in these homes **AS** “the local congregation in that home.” **In other words, it was not about one congregation scattered throughout numerous homes, but it was about ONE congregation meeting “IN” that home, and another (separate) congregation meeting “IN” a different home**, etc. We should not be mixing apples and oranges!). Many other story lines could be given.

Brethren, please do not get me wrong or judge my motives. **I do believe that many good brethren have done some of these things because they did not know what to do or how to handle this ordeal. Certainly, the genuineness of many is not under attack.** Further, some have obviously felt that their cancelations were needed and thus justified due to real sickness, or potential sickness/exposure, and have done what they felt was right in postponing services “due to the emergency.” **But what do these individual decisions regarding “sickness” have to do with CHANGING the very nature of local congregational assembly?** Put another way, how can “exceptions” (sickness/exposure/advanced-age vulnerability, i.e., justified exceptions) give authority to then worship “online” and/or “in divided assemblies/homes [and we are talking about one congregation attempting to worship in multiple homes, NOT one congregation worshipping in one home]?” Brethren, understanding this issue is extremely important as it relates directly to the very nature of the local congregation and “how” the Lord’s Day assembly is to work among a local autonomous church. We must not mix the two issues—the nature of sickness among individuals and authorized Lord’s Day assembly as required by God. The sick are not, and never have been, obligated to “go to church.” But, I will address this dilemma (i.e., it cannot be BOTH ways), later.

A few weeks back, as I exited the building after Sunday worship, wherein our local congregation had just (actually) assembled for the Lord’s Day worship, I heard the words of a younger Christian. He was not younger in age, but in years since obeying the Gospel (Rom. 16:7). Referring to the actual/physical “gathering” that had recently subsided, he declared from a beleaguered soul, “I need this!” I remarked something to the tune of, “Yes, the Lord knew we needed it and that’s why He set it up the way He did.” God is so wonderful (Psa. 22:22, 25, 54:6; Rom. 2:4)! In Psalm 122:1, the inspired penman wrote, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” Tragically, there are many in the Lord’s church who have not heard such words in many a week—at least not as part of “the local literally assembled body of believers.” Sad, indeed! Yet, like my greatly encouraged brother (i.e., greatly encouraged by the fact that we had just actually assembled—not just because it was “in the building,” but because we had literally just “gathered together” and he had been involved with such, Jam. 2:2), many others “NEED THIS TOO”—and they know it. What is so tragic, however, is this: They could have it! If they would but follow the Lord’s SIMPLE and CLEAR teaching and “come together in the church,” that is, “come together therefore into one place,” they too, could enjoy the beautiful blessings found within “old-fashion Lord’s Day assembling” (1 Cor. 11:18, 20; cf., also, 11:26, 33-34; 14:23, 16:1-2; Acts 20:7). The Greek word for “assembly” found in James 2:2, per *Strong’s* speaks of an assemblage of persons, a congregation. The word synagogue comes from this term. *Thayer’s* says it involves, “a bringing together, gathering (as of fruits), an assembling together of men, formally gathered for religious purposes.” The question then is simple: **Does the local congregation “actually” have to assemble (i.e., literally—in person—gather together), as has been the understanding of sound brethren in the church throughout time or can they simply do so (as has been popularized in the last month) “online or virtually?”** Did God give us an “exception” to the nature of Sunday “gathering?” Further, can a congregation (eldership) simply do away with (even for multiplied weeks/months) the Lord’s Day “in-person gathering” (i.e., the worship)? After all these years, does God now accept electronic worship as equally authorized within His ancient pattern, as it relates to the assembling component? Let us study a bit more and consider these and other questions.

In First Corinthians, Paul was speaking of the local congregation (1:2), and he knew (as the passages noted earlier, clearly show) that the local congregation (church) had regular times that they literally “gathered together” (5:4). Yes, there were many times they did so as a matter of expediency (an option), even daily, at times (Acts 2:42-47, 12:5, 12). But beyond all of these (authorized but) optional “gatherings together,” **God’s Word makes it very clear that at least ONE weekly congregational “assembling” (Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:26) was/is required. This specific “gathering” is not optional, but required by God—namely, THE Lord’s Day Assembly of the local congregation upon the First Day of every Week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18, 20, 26, 16:1-2).** The Lord’s Day is His day (Rev. 1:10). Our beloved Savior came forth from the grave on this day—the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1-6). Jesus built His church on this day (Acts 2:1, Lev. 23:15-16). Christians worship on this day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Involved in this worship “gathering” or “assembling” is the fact that Christians literally (actually) come together to engage in 5 acts of worship. Not only are these 5 acts necessary to true worship, but so is the assembling component itself. These acts (actions) of worship do not involve the “mind only,” but also the whole person—with “bodily presence” (cf., partaking of ACTUAL elements within the Lord’s Supper—WHILE ACTUALLY (literally) tarrying/communing with each other; ACTUAL singing TO each other with one’s real voice/tongue/lips (even with sign-language) mutually reciprocating; ACTUAL preaching/listening to a live in-person sermon from a literal preacher; ACTUAL giving into a contribution (collection) during the literal assembly; ACTUAL directed prayer, wherein “a real person” can say, “Amen” at the giving of thanks; cf., 1 Cor. 14:16). Such worship requires BOTH mind and action, from the participants—the assembled congregation. Again, this worship equally requires bodily presence. It involves the real, the true. It requires “involvement”—literal (real) interaction/gathering. And until the Spring of 2020, it was understood by almost all sound brethren—across the

world—that such worship was to take place “IN” an actual assembling (i.e., a physical gathering—together!) of the saints.

How can anyone read words/phrases (i.e., words in the context of **THE** Lord’s Day Worship—wherein God’s 5 Acts of Worship occur) like: “when ye come together in the church,” “when ye come together therefore into one place,” “in remembrance of Me...Till He come,” “when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another,” “that ye come not together unto condemnation,” “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you,” “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them,” “I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise,” “Speaking to yourselves,” “teaching and admonishing one another,” etc., and not think that the Lord’s church (i.e., the local congregation) was **ACTUALLY** required to **LITERALLY** assemble “together” in true worship to Almighty God (cf., 1 Cor. 11, Acts 20, 1 Cor. 16, Heb. 2, Eph. 5, Col. 3)? It seems odd, that so many (even in faulty religions) have understood the clarity of the Bible concerning this subject, for hundreds, yes, even, thousands of years. Even now, some of the denominations are showing more zeal and understanding on the “assembling component” than a number of my brethren (cf., Rom. 10:1-3). Sad!

Those who wrote the First Amendment of the United States Constitution certainly seemed to understand the need for actual assembly, “...or the right of the people peaceably to **assemble**.” Likewise, those involved with the formation of the Texas Constitution (Article 1: Bill of Rights) understood its importance (cf., Section 6. Freedom of Worship); “All men have a natural and indefeasible right to **worship** Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences...in the peaceable enjoyment of its own mode of **PUBLIC** [emphasis mine – JBR] worship.” Yes, a good study of the Old Testament (cf., Deut. 12:5, 11; 14:23; 31:12; Neh. 8:1, 13:1; Ezra 3:1), the New Testament (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 11-16) and all the way through various man-made documents (cf., the U.S. and Texas Constitutions—i.e., the “Bible” of our government), one will find that literal assembly (i.e., such as seen in public worship wherein a congregation actually and literally comes “together,” in a PLACE) has always been a very important thing with both God and man. In fact, over time, many brave men have shed blood and died for this basic right. The basics of Bible truth on this subject are not hard to understand (Eph. 5:15-17, John 8:32, Hab. 2:2, Isa. 35:8, Matt. 15:10). **But perhaps we need to slow down and cover these BASICS again**, seeing as we have seen brethren from coast to coast who seem to have forgotten the simple truth about the Lord’s Day required assembly, and the fact that truly they (like us) do very much, “Need this!”

Good brethren, please consider: If we can postpone, suspend or change the “literal/actual” required assembly “for weeks or months (and by implication years!),” based on government orders, then why cannot such be done later under other government orders “for decades or even forever?” If the “short postponement” based on governmental opinion is authorized, why would not the “long postponement” be authorized? If the same “reasoning” is used both times, how could anyone argue against it? Oh, I know, I know, “this isn’t about governmental orders”, some say, but about exceptions—“the old hurricane/blizzard” dilemmas. But I will address that red herring in a bit. Then again, what about this disease/sickness, some will say? As we have briefly discussed and will see again, sickness is about an exception (personal choice) to miss the required worship, but this **IS NOT THE SAME** as canceling or changing the Lord’s Day required assembly, itself.

Good brethren, as we look at this subject, as well as others throughout our life, please let us study more on the principles of “considering [our] latter end” and “reaping even more than what was sowed” (cf., Deut. 32:29; Hosea 8:7). We need to read and reread the Prophets. In my humble opinion, I think many a saint needs to rethink some of their recent decisions—as a freedom loving American (and if you do not think our freedom is at stake when it comes to this issue, you must not have been watching the news! (cf. Governors from New York, Michigan, New Jersey; Mayor from Chicago; Judge from Dallas, and other examples). But mostly, and

ultimately this is all that matters, we all need to make sure we are doing right, as Christians. This issue is a BIG DEAL because it involves, among other things: 1) Putting God first, 2) Our love (true love—not misapplied love) for our fellow man, 3) God’s pattern, 4) The necessity of obedience, 5) Biblical hermeneutics, 6) The necessity and nature of authorized worship, 7) Strengthening or weakening others faith and 8) Our influence.

LET US NOT MIX CONCEPTS—GOD’S PATTERN, EXCEPTIONS & EXCUSES

Tragically, over the last month or so, our country and the world has been hit with the unexpected, and we should earnestly pray for our nation and all people (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Equally true, as has been demonstrated by millions across our land, sensible people have attempted to abide by the requests of officials to “socially distance” and have embraced the reality that life demanded some reasonable precautions and temporary changes. I still cannot get use to the masks, but I certainly understand why some might need to use them (e.g., those with aged parents living with them, medical workers, highly susceptible individuals with pre-existing conditions, and so forth). Following God’s beautiful pattern for mankind (i.e., the Bible, or more specifically for us today, the New Testament) caring elderships have kept scriptures in mind like Romans 12:18 or Matthew 7:12, and have opted to use expediency to alter their regular “optional” in-person Bible classes for on-line classes in order to show their **reasonableness and concern for both the government and for others**. From the beginning, NO ONE has argued that sick folks and/or that vulnerable/aged individuals should not use wisdom in making sensible choices, including “staying isolated” as they heal. A study of Leviticus shows God’s wisdom in the sick being quarantined (Lev. 13:44-46). Again, NO ONE has ever argued the exceptions to the rule; However, such did NOT (and does not) apply to the healthy (Num. 9:6-13). Read this text carefully and compare vs. 6 with vs. 13. Further, note, as one solid and sound brother once noted, **God did not sanction quarantining the congregation, but the individual**. Slow down and read that last sentence one more time. **Again, it needs to be reiterated—NO ONE—is condemning the sick**. If someone feels they are exempt due to sickness or even exposure (cf., Num. 19), then that will be between that person and/or congregation, and God. We have always understood such principles (Phil. 2:12). **But let us NOT mix concepts!** Brethren, please listen. To justify “on-line/virtual” worship (i.e., split assemblies) as being the same as “actual (literal) assemblies,” is NOT the same thing as telling sick people to stay home. Again, a person need not worship, if they are sick. **But brethren seem to want it BOTH WAYS**. Some say, “we are all sick/exposed—i.e., potentially sick, and therefore justified in not having congregational worship,” and then the same ones turn around AT THE SAME TIME (regarding the usage of online/virtual worship services), and say, “We are still worshipping (just online).” Huh? What? That makes no sense, is contradictory, and deals with **TWO SEPARATE CONCEPTS!** If brethren have determined they are sick (or exposed/thus the same as “sick”—and this would include if the whole congregation was/is sick, BUT I have never known of ANY eldership before to “declare everyone sick” with individual decisions not being involved) then they need to realize and act like sick people should. **In other words, if one is sick (again, including the argument to be potentially sick, thus exempt), then WHY the need to worship? Again, sick people are not required to worship!** Since when have sick brethren been pressured to worship? Never! But, brethren, one cannot have it “both” ways. **Brethren EITHER need to “be sick” OR they need to worship according to the PATTERN** (and online/virtual worship is not “pattern” worship!!). Further, some have said that these current “virtual/online” substitutes are the same as worshipping on a trip (cf., travelling to a foreign country with no church) when no congregation exists. It is not the same, because in that scenario those brethren are not “splitting the assembly of the local body,” rather they **ARE** the local body in that area. Equally true, if an aged person is in a nursing home for months/years, and worship is conducted (per the Pattern; all 5 acts), then those folks would be the “Nursing Home Church of Christ.” Again, this is not a “split” assembly. Brethren, wisdom is justified of her children (Luke 7:35)!

Yet, this "**congregational quarantining**" WITH the added element of "online/virtual" substitute worship (not just individual quarantining) has been the norm now, for weeks and weeks. As has been noted several times, certainly elderships have discretion within optional matters (e.g., on-line vs. in-person Bible classes, canceling/rearranging classes, meals together, use of individual communion packets vs. trays, *etcetera*). In fact, expediency is the only area in which shepherds oversee/rule congregations—since God Himself controls in the areas of doctrine (Heb. 13:17, 1 Pet. 5:1-4, 1 Tim. 1:3, 4:6, 13-16). Yet, for some odd reason, understanding this concept seems to be a problem with some. Once more, I am not assigning wrong motives to any particular brethren, but the truth is that confusion has entered in among many. Thus, for repeated emphasis sake, elderships DO have the authority to cancel and/or alter Bible classes and other optional (expedient) "gatherings," including even the formatting of certain semantics regarding THE Lord's Day assembly (e.g., time, length, Lord's Supper before or after the sermon, meeting in a building vs. a cow-pasture), but elderships DO NOT have the authority to do away with the worship PATTERN given by God. In other words, while elders overseeing autonomous congregations may/may not have Bible classes, fellowship meals and the like, they do not have authority to cancel or change the PATTERN of the Lord's Day worship, as given by Jehovah (John 4:24). To make it more practical: **While no one is arguing the wisdom of elderships amending optional items and expedient gatherings, the question is this: By what authority have elderships DONE AWAY WITH THE PATTERN prescribed by the Lord, as it pertains to the first day of the week required literal (actual) assembly (i.e., THE Lord's required pattern for assembly wherein all 5 acts of worship are imbibed)?** Asked another way: **Is the assembly (i.e., the literal gathering-together) optional or obligatory?** If it is obligatory (required by God), then how does an eldership justify changing this pattern (including the part of the pattern involved in "actually" assembling—the assembling component)? **Where is the Bible authority authorizing virtual/on-line worship (i.e., not actually gathering together) for the Lord's Day required assembly?**

Even from a proper motive, many have used examples of "immediate disaster" as the reasoning behind the cancellations and changes from literal worship, to this so-called virtual/online/quarantined worship. They say, just as an eldership might dismiss services during a hurricane, so they, too, can postpone or change "the literally Lord's Day actual assembly," for a temporary "online/virtual assembly," because of the potential for harm from disease. It has also been said that such measures are only temporary substitutes. But that which proves too much, proves too little. Again, does a local eldership have the right/authority to cancel the Lord's Day (required—by God assembly/the coming together on the Lord's Day) based on "what might happen?" In other words, is it acceptable for an eldership to postpone weeks and weeks (even months) of required worship assemblies based "on what might be or not be the case" with a certain crisis or disease? Is what happens during an immediate "momentary" disaster (i.e., when a hurricane or blizzard "literally" is pounding away "at that very moment, on the Lord's Day" wherein a local congregation is not able to physically gather) THE SAME AS canceling services for the whole winter or during the entirety of hurricane season? What person would so reason? **The true parallel we are seeing unfold is much closer to the illustration of cancelling during all of hurricane season, NOT the one-time "immediate" accident on the side of the road or one-time "immediate" active shooter incident that has been used.** Again, motives are not being judged and I think many are struggling with the difficulty of this situation. I think sincere hearts are confused. But brethren, surely sound minds can see the difference, here. Does a family trapped in their cabin and unable to get to the building during a blizzard "sin," because they do not worship during "that moment" of immediate disaster? No one would say they have sinned. Why? Because (as one solid, sound and faithful Gospel Preacher noted) we must: 1) First, have the **ability** to assemble and 2) Second, have the **opportunity** to assemble. Yes, **it is all about God's pattern, coupled with one's ability** (Pro. 3:27-28, Acts 3:6, 11:28-29, Matt. 25:14-15) **and opportunity** (Gal. 6:10, Eccl. 9:10, Phil. 4:10). Note, this principle deals with INDIVIDUAL decision making and NOT with changing God's requirements!

As it relates to the Lord's Day required assembly, consider this: If a sick brother has the opportunity (i.e., the saints are meeting), but not the ability (i.e., he is sick—and certainly, this requires individual discretion), then he is exempted from the requirement. In short, he is sick—God grants the exception. Also, consider: If a brother is caught up in an “immediate moment” of “sudden disaster,” he might have the ability (he is healthy and could go), but not the opportunity (the roads are out/the wind is blowing 100 mph, he had to save the lady from the burning vehicle he came across while driving to worship, *etcetera*). Yet, one may ask, “How does this relate to local congregations and the COVID-19 situation?” Well, it depends, of course, on the specifics of the various circumstances (i.e., is one person sick, is the whole congregation sick?—and, note, for the record, I have NEVER seen before where an eldership (any eldership!) has involved themselves in the discretions of individual member **sicknesses**, and it will interesting to see if these same elders who have declared “everyone sick” (**without** individual discretion being involved) understand the end of such logic and if they will take the same nuanced and pointed judgments into the future with other ailments, as it pertains to individual decisions among their members—I seriously doubt it!). Put another way, **BY WHAT AUTHORITY** does a local eldership have the right to declare the Lord's Day (required) worship as cancelled (or changed to virtual)) because they have declared “the entire congregation sick?” Elders do not have such a right! Further, to base such decisions about God's required worship upon CDC data and government say-so, is indeed shocking. Sickness is an **INDIVIDUAL** decision (and always has been)—and wise elders should know such. Elderships cannot simply do-away-with/change God's requirements for the Lord's Day assembly based on their own personal arbitrary decisions about individuals and sicknesses. This is true because THE PATTERN of worship, including the “assembling component,” is required by God and does not fall within the area of discretion or expediency. Please do not confuse exceptions (i.e., the whole congregation cannot meet on a given Sunday because of a hurricane/150 mph winds are literally blowing, thus “no” assembly that Sunday, due to lack of opportunity—by all), with excuses (i.e., the elders have decided somehow based on their **arbitrary feelings and/or government “data”**—true, not true, partially true—(who knows?) that “the whole” congregation is somehow sick). If elders can decide to alter worship so easily, by doing away with the literal assembling component based on a “potential sickness,” then certainly a more squeamish eldership (as it pertains to these potential sicknesses) might decide to cancel a “month of Sundays,” a “year of Sundays” or perhaps even a “decade of Sundays” for said “potential sickness,” (or similar sicknesses; cf., the flu) right? After all, it is all about autonomy and up to the eldership's “discretion,” right? **WRONG!** Not when it comes to matters of Divine obligation, like the very nature of assembly and worship. No. Such things depend on God's requirements first, and then they are connected to an individual's/congregation's ability and opportunity!

Let me try to clarify a bit more, what I mean. If the reasoning is: We are all sick (or exposed, thus same as sick) **then why** the need to worship at all (cf., virtually/online), because one is exempted (the same as if said person was in the hospital)?! Is a brother in the hospital exempted from the Lord's Day worship? Certainly! On the other hand, if the reasoning is: True worship is required, but it can be done “virtually or online” as a temporary substitute (i.e., in separate places, by one online group, even though they are in separate (houses) groups—cf., divided assemblies) because of the current crisis, **then why** would an eldership be wrong for continuing such indefinitely? If such action (i.e., online/virtual non-actual assembling, “assembling”) is simply a matter of expediency (opinion), then certainly the eldership could do such “anytime” and for “any reason” that they deemed as “expedient.” If not, why not?! After all, expediency deals with options (or opinions)! With such reasoning, pandora's terrible little box has been opened. **Yet, beloved brethren, for something to be expedient, it must FIRST be authorized!** Moreover, if a doctrine implies a false doctrine then that doctrine is in and of itself equally false. So, we ask again: **Where is the authority giving permission for disassembly/non-assembled (i.e., not in-person/non-gathered) worship (a.k.a., virtual/online worship)?**

But herein is the problem, good brethren. Please listen. Many (not all, but many) of the cancellations or changes we have seen regarding the Lord's Day required assembly seem NOT to be a problem of ability or opportunity, rather such seems to be from: 1) confusion, 2) ignorance concerning the usage of proper hermeneutics, 3) a lack of Biblical authority for chosen actions, 4) a matter of convenience or 5) dare I say, a decision of panic, or fear. Again, I am not judging motives, nor do I know all of the reasons/backstories involved among the thousands of congregations throughout the land and/or the plethora of brethren involved (and FOR THE RECORD, I do not have to know or want to know, all such backgrounds. Yes, I am my brother's keeper (and you are too), but I do not wake up every day "looking for problems to fix"), rather I am just giving a generalized (personal) assessment. You will note that I have not "called names," during this article, nor "withdrawn fellowship" (and I believe calling names and fellowship both matter, because I believe the Bible), because it seems AT LEAST AT THIS MOMENT good brethren have been faced with a bizarre event and many have acted and reacted out of panic, and later they will think through their momentary mis-judgments/errors, correct them and "do better." This is my hope and prayer, anyway (Mark 9:19, Rom. 15:1, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:1f, 1 Cor. 13:7). Making poor choices/wrong judgments in moments of panic is not the same as continually teaching false doctrine, and I think wise men know the difference (Eph. 4:1ff, Col. 3:13). If, however, brethren choose to push false principles (cf., children's church/youth worship, actual assembling not being obligatory, and the like) that will become a different issue (Eph. 5:11, 2 Jn. 9-11, Rom. 16:16-18). For now, however, it seems that "forbearing one another in love" is the right approach—at least with those who are willing to correct themselves and are striving to understand and do better. As good men think through these issues, I want to believe the best, until I cannot (1 Cor. 13:7)!

But my dear friends, it is **VERY IMPORTANT** for us to understand that the government does not run the Church of Christ (Matt. 16:13f, Eph. 1:20-23)! CDC guidelines should not be what elderships consult when it comes to scriptural requirements, like the Lord's Day worship. As has been stated over and over in this article, shepherds can make different decisions on matters of option (OPTION—this is the KEY!) during times of crisis (cf., Paul's suggestion regarding the wisdom of marrying or not marrying, during a "present distress," 1 Cor. 7). Unwise temporary "bad" decisions can be fixed. Wise men can grow, learn, and do the right. **But again if an eldership can postpone the required "assembled" worship for weeks or months, as if it is an option, thus not required (i.e., again, we are speaking of the once-a-week-required Lord's Day worship service, wherein all 5 acts of worship occur among the actually assembled congregation), then why cannot the same eldership postpone this service for years (or even indefinitely)?** Think, good brethren. Think!

The very plea we have made and continue to make is to "speak where the Bible speaks" and "to be silent where the Bible is silent." Is this rallying cry still true among us? It certainly is for those still worshiping, as before. Again, where is the BCV (Book, Chapter and Verse) authorizing elderships to do away with God's pattern for worship? I do not think most elderships are trying to intentionally circumvent God's pattern, but their intentions do not determine truth. Furthermore, the "worship-is-cancelled and we'll see you back in a month crowd" needs to "get back to the Book." Likewise, elderships (and preachers supporting such) need to answer this question: **Where is the BCV allowing local congregations to change God's pattern for worship to include disassembly instead of "assembly?" Put another way, by what authority was it determined that "come together" and "the assembling of ourselves T-O-G-E-T-H-E-R" and "C-A-M-E together," does not include a literal physical "gathering?"** Remember, we need Bible for all that we do! It is clear, that those now involving themselves in the so called "online/virtual worship" believe that "actually (bodily/physically) assembling" IS authorized, for they themselves have done so for decade upon decade, and will likely return to such in the future. **Clearly, they believe those of us STILL following THE OLD PATTERN are not in the wrong.** So, once again, I ask: Where is the BCV authorizing "disassembly?" **Let those not following God's pattern, PROVE to us (Biblically) that "non-gathering" is actually "gathering"**

and that “disassembly” is actually—assembly! I think those seeking such authority will find it harder than they may think. One last time, I am not judging motives, here. **I think many good men have been caught up in this issue, just as the marvelous Peter and Barnabas once got caught up in something not good (Gal. 2:11f). But as you will recall, they fixed it (2 Pet. 3:15).** I beg the same of these brethren. We love them and want them to follow the pattern. Again, like us, “They Need This!”

GOD’S PATTERN—IS BEING “APART” THE SAME AS BEING “TOGETHER?”

To help make the assembly requirement (i.e., the component part—that is, the literal assembling part/the gathering together, “part” of worship itself) clear, let me go a bit deeper. The phrase “come together” (cf., 1 Cor. 11:17-18, 20, 33; 14:23, 26) is the same phrase (in Greek and English) used in 1 Corinthians 7:5 dealing with marital intimacy between a husband and wife. **Translation: We are NOT talking about “virtual,” but physical “togetherness.”** Similarly, we see it again in Matthew 1:18 dealing with Joseph and the virgin Mary. It speaks of her pregnancy and how she was with child before they “came together.” No wonder then that the King James scholars translated this word as “assembled” in Mark 14:53. Such words and concepts (with their applicable principles) should be studied (cf., Acts 1:21, 9:39, 10:23, 15:38, 19:32 – went with, accompanied, come together). The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible! Those who are arguing that virtual is the same as actual, are basing such reasoning upon what? I wonder. **However, those who are reasoning that the actual is NOT the same as the virtual are basing their thoughts upon principles and concepts tied to parallel concepts.** Thus, just as offspring cannot come from virtual marriages (cf., come together again, came together), neither can congregations “come together” (not in the Biblical sense) without physical interaction (i.e., an actual assembly). Surely, we are able to understand these simple words and phrases. Note, Luke 17:35. It reads, “Two women shall be grinding **together**; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” Many other like passages could be studied, but this will suffice for now. It says these women were “together.” Further, it says one would leave (be taken), thus leaving one (not taken). But taken from what? From being “together!” In other words, one departed from being “together” with the other one. Once one of the women departed, they (i.e., the two of them) were no longer “together.” Why? **Because being apart and being together are NOT the same thing.** Brethren, this concept does not involve rocket science. In the Biblical sense, together means “together.” There is nothing virtual about it! Those attempting to worship at home/on-line as if it is the same as an in-person whole congregation assembly, have deceived themselves (Jam. 1:22-25).

Let us consider **Hebrews 10:24-25**. The beloved Scripture reads, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” **First**, as it relates to this specific passage, we should note that **considering one another and stirring each other up to love and good works is forever tied to the concept of “actual assembling.” How odd that some have indicated that LOVE involves the opposite—not assembling.** Strange indeed! **Second**, this section of Scripture involves a command, namely, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” Sure, we have all heard the comments and seen the commentaries showing that “forsaking” is not dealing with a one-time missing, but a lifestyle. While I understand the point and context of the book of Hebrews, there is another point that should be made, namely this: **Forsaking is not a good nor acceptable thing, even if just done once.** We find the same word used in 2 Timothy 4:10, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” and in Hebrews 13:5, wherein God says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Question: What if Demas just involved himself in a little unrepented of sin? Would that have been acceptable? Would he still be okay with God because that would not be considered “forsaking?” In other words, was he only condemned because he totally abandoned the Lord? Who would so reason? Surely one sin is no big deal, right? Ask Adam and Even (Gen. 2:17, 3:1ff). Likewise, notice how the Hebrews 13:5 Passage ties the word “forsake” with the term “NEVER” (implying that God will not even do it ONCE)! Further, study the Old Testament (particularly Jeremiah) on this concept. They

had “forsaken” God’s law and this was not acceptable (Jer. 9:13). Compare this point with verses like Deuteronomy 27:26, James 2:10, Matthew 5:18-19 and Galatians 3:10. One sin will separate a person from God. People should not dismiss a study of Hebrews 10:25, concerning “forsaking” quiet so easily.

But let us consider the phrase “assembling of ourselves together.” When studied, one will find the comparable words (Greek, too) of 2 Thessalonians 2:1. But instead of the phrase “assembling of ourselves together” one will find the equal phrase “gathering together.” **Thus, “assembling of ourselves together” means the same thing as “gathering together.”** This is Bible explaining Bible! Not only that but this passage makes it even more clear as it describes our “gathering together unto Him,” at the Second Coming. Do not overlook that “unto Him,” too quickly. Is this virtual? Absolutely not! Rather, we will actually (i.e., really, literally, truly) be “with” the Lord. But more on this concept, a little later.

Good brethren, words have meanings. A word is a vehicle of thought, an expression of an idea. It is through words, that we understand meaning. God uses words. He uses specific words and He expects and demands that we understand them (Dan. 9:2, Eph. 3:3-4). When it comes to the basics (like worship) God’s inspired words are not and need not be complicated (2 Cor. 11:1-3, Mk. 12:37). After all, we will all be judged by His words (John 12:48, Rom. 2:16, 1 Cor. 14:37). These words are in the Bible. The very concept of plenary verbal inspiration teaches us that ALL of God’s “WORDS” are inspired and from God—EACH and EVERY one of them matter (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:3, Jer. 1:9, 2 Sam. 23:2). The jots, the tittles, the such likes, yes, even the smallest of nuances can be understood (Matt. 5:17-19, Gal. 3:16, Eph. 3:3-4, 5:17). **After all of these years and centuries, do we really “now” (all of a sudden—due to some virus, and based upon CDC data!!) believe (because as will be shown shortly, we certainly did not believe such historically) that the Lord’s Day true worship assembly does NOT actually require a physical “coming together into one place”—an “actual assembly?” Do we not still believe the simple things anymore?** Really? Please tell me such is not the case among sound brethren. Please tell me good brethren know better and will do better.

While I do not agree with many decisions being made, I can, to some degree, understand why people panic and get caught up in wrong decisions. Human nature is often predictable, and as with others, I know myself and my own frailties. Yet, good men will learn from their mistakes and come forth better and stronger (Eccl. 7:5, Pro. 15:30-31, 24:16). Good men will study and correct their errors and sins. **Elders? Preachers? Are you listening? You can make the right choice. You can restore worship to God, as it ought to be—in the—ACTUAL—assembly.** God loves you and wants you to do so. Sound brethren want you to do so. Can you imagine the good that could have been done throughout the United States if sound Churches of Christ had stood against government tyranny (as it relates to worship) with ONE VOICE and said, when it comes to the Lord’s Day assembly on the first day of the week—GOD FIRST! As for optional classes/gatherings, we will show our reasonableness. **We will bathe in hand-sanitizer if needed, wear masks and take other protective measures, but we will NOT give up God’s requirement! What an impact we could have made upon the world, an impact of distinction.** Would some have ridiculed? Without question. Would others have taken notice of the church—as being distinct and peculiar? Absolutely! But such rejection and/or unique notice among the world is not new among God’s people, as the book of Acts makes clear. Yet, I am afraid we have way too many among us that could not handle such ridicule and hate (Acts 5:41-42). In fact, I know that is the case because of the ill-treatment (harsh words—false words!) witnessed against those of us who still assemble according to the pattern—by some of our very own brethren. No, we do not want to be hated, but such is often the lot of the faithful (Matt. 5:10-12, Lk. 6:26). Untrue and false statements about faithful Christians are laced throughout the book of Acts. “...saying, These men...do exceedingly trouble our city” (Acts 16:20). “...crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (Acts 17:6). “And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath...” (Acts 19:28). “And as they went about to kill him...all Jerusalem was in an uproar” (Acts 21:31). “...they left beating Paul...And some cried one thing, some another...the violence of the

people...crying, Away with him” (Acts 21:32-36). “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Again, we have shown our sweet reasonableness when it comes to moving optional classes and extra meetings “to online,” and we will do all we can to show our submission to our government and our helpfulness to others (we do not have to shake hands and we can even spread out on the front lawn in front of the building if needed), but when it comes to GOD’S first day of the week appointment, we will keep it—no matter what the consequences (from man). **Though some have said otherwise, the truth of Acts 5:29 does apply! Perhaps thousands and thousands could have been converted if the brotherhood had acted differently, showing the unique nature of the Lord’s Church. This is the part that truly sorrows me.** Thankfully, I do know of some who continued to “actually gather,” and souls were saved. Yes, as thousands of congregations went into hiding, a certain number of good brethren just “kept on keeping on,” and precious souls were “added to the fold” (Acts 2:47). Amen! Alas, we will never know the full extent of the good that could have been done by the church, as unfortunately, many brethren (not all—and I am so thankful for those who STOOD TALL – cf., Dan. 3:17-18; 6:10) went into hiding. **But I do not have to “judge” each of these unique situations. God will!**

MISAPPLIED ILLUSTRATIONS, PRINCIPLES & ATTACKS AGAINST GOOD BRETHREN

Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies seen during this time, has been the various arguments that have been made against good brethren who have continued to assemble—in a literal physical (congregational) gathering. The very concept of ridiculing “actually assembled” congregations is almost unthinkable among the Lord’s (sound) congregations in view of Hebrews 10:24-25 and Acts 20:7, but apparently such IS the case (1 Pet. 3:16). Even though most sound brethren have opted to postpone and use online teaching and other measures for their expedient and optional classes, to one degree or another, still they (i.e., those refusing to change God’s obligatory once-a-week Lord’s Day in-person assembly) have been ridiculed and attacked. They have been called “unloving” and some have even attacked so harshly as to insinuate that the “actually-assembling-brethren” are Pharisees and potentially even murderers (e.g., if they exposed someone to the virus, – yes, one brother online actually said such). Wow! Really? This reasoning is truly unimaginable! And for what? Apparently, for simply following the teachings and principles of Hebrew 10:24-25, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11-16 and other passages. Absolutely unbelievable. Yet sadly and tragically, it is true. Condemned, cursed, ridiculed, castigated, hated, rejected, spurned, lied about, taken out of context, and the like. Again, for what? FOR GOING TO WORSHIP—i.e., as a local “assembled” or “literally gathered together” congregation! If you are one of the “unloving ones” who have been castigated, and if you are discouraged by said attacks, go read the book of Acts and/or the book of Jeremiah. You will be encouraged. The popular way has never been God’s way!

One of the main arguments used against those of us actually-assembling has been **the love/mercy attack**. In short, those using this attack (some certainly with good intentions, some perhaps, not), have said that the merciful (or loving thing) to do would be to shut services down/follow the government’s rules and “stay away.” They cite scriptures like Matthew 9:13 and 12:7 to show that “loving/merciful” action involves quarantining “everyone” (well, not everyone—they cannot be consistent!, as they have their 10 or less at the buildings to “conduct” the online/virtual worship; and I am pretty certain that many of these same folks go to the grocery store, and other places, with even more than 10), but you get the point. I suppose Noah’s family would have been okay to still “assemble” since their family only had eight, unless, of course, some bureaucrat used the number seven, instead of ten, as the limit. Then, of course, they would have been unloving if they continued to assemble. Lunacy! Not for “secular reasons, per se,” but when it comes to using such mandates to govern the Lord’s church. It is almost unimaginable how we have allowed government dictates (i.e., the acceptable assembly number for churches; is it 10 or 50, these days?) to legislate THE CHURCH’S limit for “coming together,” as opposed to just using God’s word/pattern, with a dose of common sense/wisdom (e.g.,

hand sanitizer, spacing, not shaking hands, individual communion packets, and so forth) for such “gatherings?” Love? Mercy? Yes, we certainly believe in love and mercy and support fully the Lord’s condemnation of the Pharisees because they were hypocrites (Luke 12:1). They would “say, and do not” (Matt. 23:3). **Yet, this is not what is happening with faithful brethren who are “still assembling.” Shame on those who are condemning good brethren for simply worshiping the Lord correctly! To show how insane this “attack” really is, consider this illustration:** Will congregation X (a virtually worshipping congregation) attack/oppose congregation Y (also a virtually worshipping congregation) WHENEVER congregation Y starts “actually assembling” BEFORE congregation X starts back? For instance, if congregation Y starts back a month before congregation X, should not congregation X (to be consistent) point out the UNMERCIFUL/UNLOVING actions of congregation Y? How dare congregation Y not consider people’s health? Should not congregation Y realize that an extra month of “quarantine” will (like that used by congregation X) possibly save lives? Has congregation Y now become hateful/unloving and “potential murderers” because they dared to go back to normal a month before congregation X? Then again, what if congregation X takes one Governor’s advice and waits 18 months to go back to normal with their literal gathering, whereas congregation Y does not wait the suggested 18 months, and starts back immediately? Certainly, then congregation X will “hammer” congregation Y for their hatred, lack of mercy and possible murderous ways, right? Brethren, false application of good scriptures and Biblical principles, even if done with sincerity, do not prove a point! Oh, for consistency.

Further, consider this: One preacher seemed to condemn the “actually assembling brethren” as possible or probable Pharisees, giving the example of driving to worship and seeing an accident/injury, and stopping to help (thus missing worship), as opposed to not stopping, so as to make worship. His point was that “mercy” trumped “the obligation to worship,” during such a time. We agree, men are greater than sheep, and only a hard-hearted person would think otherwise (Matt. 12:7-14). Certainly, a faithful saint would stop and help during that “immediate (and sudden)” moment of trouble. **But here is the problem: This preacher’s illustration is flawed, when applied to the current COVID-19 situation. He is mixing concepts!** First, we agree, as Jesus stated, there are “weightier matters of the law,” and “mercy” is among them, but so is “judgment” and “faith” (Matt. 23:23). But this brother did not bring those up. Just as quoting one verse on “belief” does not undo the need for repentance or baptism, so more verses and principles on this subject need to be considered, to get the “whole picture.” For instance, 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Interesting. Notice how “faith” is mentioned in both lists, but in the 1 Corinthians list, it is overshadowed (as is, by implication “mercy”) by the word “charity.” The word “charity” is love. More specifically, it is “*agape*.” **This love is about doing what is best for the soul!** It is a love of the mind or will. We see this love in Jesus dying for our sins (John 3:16). We see this love in a husband sacrificing for his wife (Eph. 5:25). We see this love in caring for our enemies (Matt. 5:44). We see this love involved in telling people what they need to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear (Mark 10:21). Throughout the Bible, but particularly the New Testament, this concept of *agape* love is seen over and over. The apostles were ridiculed and beaten. Stephen was stoned. Jesus was slapped, spit upon, lied about and physically tortured beyond belief, but all the while, what was being displayed? *Agape*! **Brethren, *agape* love involves feelings, but it is not directed by FEELINGS. It is directed by what is best for the immortal soul,** not always (not inherently, anyway!) what is best for the body! No, a man cannot beat/abuse (physically) his wife and say he has *agape* for her (cf., Eph. 5:28-29), but a man can (and should) certainly discipline (including physical discipline; cf., a proper spanking) his children—even it hurts (for a time) the body (Prov. 13:24, 23:13, Eph. 6:1-4)! No, we are not talking about abuse, that is condemned. But a good old-fashion spanking from time to time is certainly needed with young children, as the book of Proverbs makes clear. Likewise, even the loss of physical life (cf., death, the ultimate harm to the body) can be connected with *agape* love (John 15:13), and certainly there is no greater example of this than the death of our beloved Savior (Rom. 5:8). **Here is my point:** To use LOVE as the reason for not worshiping (per the pattern—a pattern that requires “actually coming

together), is a misuse of the word **AGAPE!** Yes, brotherly love (philadelphia) is also a must (Rom. 12:10), but “*agape*” is the linchpin (Matt. 22:37-40)! **And this “agape,” has an ORDER—GOD first, man second. This is critical and important in understanding our topic.** To use emotional arguments based on “immediate one-time sudden momentary disasters” to justify annulling or changing God’s law about required weekly worship—in the actual corporate assembling of the whole congregation—is a wrong application of the mercy/love concept of which King Jesus was speaking. Plus, in the same exact verse (Matthew 23:23) wherein Jesus speaks of “weightier matters,” and wherein He said, “these ought ye to have done,” he ALSO said (regarding the other requirements), “and NOT to leave the other undone.” It is not about mercy **OVER** obedience, but it is about mercy, sacrifice **AND** obedience (cf., Matt. 12:7 **WITH** 1 Sam. 15:22). But the cry being made is “mercy first,” then sacrifice—as if, “obedience” has no part, ever (?)” (without much concern for the entire context and while ignoring the true nature of the Pharisees), but not much is being heard about “Obey first, then sacrifice.”

Brethren, what are we doing? The whole world lies in wickedness and needs salvation and we have preachers trying to be “cute” on Facebook. I do not do Facebook, but occasionally friends show me examples of things like, “But as for me and my house, we will isolate” (wherein one healthy preacher was making a joke at the expense of Joshua 24:15). Ridiculous! We need to **WAKE UP** before the Lord’s church ceases to exist in our land. **It seems to me, as a whole anyway, that the Lord’s church (in too many places, thankfully not all) is no longer distinct. And this little test (the COVID-19 pandemic) has not made us stronger, but instead it has revealed the extreme weakness among many in the brotherhood.** No, assembling is not about “a building.” We all understand the difference in a building and the church. We know that the church consists of people (brethren) and not a specific building (cf., early congregations often met in homes; Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phm. 2; But, as previously referenced, it should be noted that these groups involved separate “congregations” meeting (i.e., gathering/assembling) in someone’s home **AS** a local congregation—and NOT “as a part” of a congregation meeting in one home, while “the other part” of the congregation met in someone else’s home). Study the New Testament and one will never find where members of a congregation stayed in their own homes instead of “gathering” with the local congregation.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:17, Paul says, “But we, brethren, **being taken from you** for a short time **in presence**, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly **to see your face with great desire.**” Fascinating! In 3 John 13-14 we read, “I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, **and we shall speak face to face.** Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.” What an interesting set of Passages. **What makes these Passages so fascinating? Because both of them stress the difference between DISTANCE and TOGETHERNESS!** Shame on some brethren for condemning other brethren for simply “coming together” as a congregation for the purpose of worshipping God. Pharisees? Unloving? Unmerciful? Give me a break!

ONE MORE LOOK AT THE ASSEMBLY—“GATHERING,” & LITERAL “PRESENCE”

Perhaps, we should study this concept of “presence” a bit more. Notice passages like: Genesis 3:8, 27:30, 45:3, 1 Kings 12:2, Job 1:12, 2:7, Acts 5:41, 27:35, as well as others. Seriously, go read them. Now compare these thoughts with principles found in Numbers 20:6 (i.e., the **presence** of the assembly; note also v. 8, “gather thou the assembly t-o-g-e-t-h-e-r”), 1 Kings 8:22 (i.e., in the **presence** of all the congregation) and Psalm 116:14, 18 (i.e., in the **presence** of all His people). Now, let us take our thoughts on **these principles** a bit farther. **Hebrews 9:24** forever tells us that our lovely Savior, the Christ, went into “heaven itself.” This involves A LOCATION (A PLACE), this appearing “in the [very - JBR] **presence** of God.” **Watch it now, we are about to see an important principle/concept, namely, Jesus being “in heaven itself,” (i.e., a specific location—a gathering (back) together, if you will, between the Godhead, John 17:1f, Heb. 1:3) involved Him ACTUALLY being “in the presence of” God.** We will comment a little more on this point, shortly. As

this inspired text says, He did it “for us.” Can we not now (even during a time of stress and panic) do the lesser and go into “the presence of” our brethren, “for them” (cf., the language of Hebrews 10:24, connected with the words of Hebrews 10:25!). Dare we avoid His presence (and the presence of our beloved brethren) on the Lord’s Day? At such a time at this, should not we be (and I am referencing the earlier verses/principles) in “the presence of the assembly (together)/the presence of the congregation/the presence of all His people?” Yes, if we are healthy, that is exactly where we should be located.

Furthermore, **consider the implications involved in 1 Thessalonians 2:19.** We mentioned a little about this verse earlier, but now let us look at this passage again. It reads, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the **presence** of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” Notice again, that little word “presence.” Clearly, this term indicates “togetherness” (assembly, if you will) between the redeemed and Jesus, at the second coming (end of time). Along with showing that we will “know each other” (have recognition) over there, it also shows the sweet fellowship and joy found “in the presence” of each other, and especially with Jesus. **But what does this have to do with our subject at hand, one might ask? Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1,** “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our **gathering together** unto Him.” Notice, that phrase “gathering together.” This “gathering together” will be “unto Him.” And as we just read, this “gathering together” (at the end of time) involves being “in the presence” of Jesus (and each other), just as Jesus being in “heaven itself,” involved Him being “in the presence of God.” Okay, okay, okay, one might say. What is the point (especially as it applies to this subject)? Here it is: **The Greek word for “gathering together” (which we know involves being in the PRESENCE of—and this is NOT virtual “presence”!) is the SAME GREEK word used in Hebrews 10:25 with the phrase, “assembling of ourselves together.” In short, “assembling of ourselves together” involves—yea, necessitates, “gathering together,” which in turn demands “in the presence” of (actual presence)! If not, why not?** But again, almost all brethren have inherently known this truth since the church was established—at least they did until very recently (cf., March/April 2020 vs. A.D. 30/33). Sadly, by noticing some of the assembling and non-assembling going on around us, it seems that some of our denominational friends know more about this concept than some of our brethren and that is tragic—truly tragic.

VOICES FROM THE PAST—HISTORY SHOWS CLEAR UNDERSTANDING FOR THESE THINGS

To show this truth (i.e., that good brethren have understood these things—re., the need to truly assemble/gather in one place), we want to quote from many of them. When this ordeal first hit, I spent days and days studying multiplied hundreds of pages of material from our good brethren from times past, relating to the assembly issue. I dug into old bound volumes of periodicals, commentaries, books and tracts. I studied what they said about worship, about assembly, about split assembly, and the like. I did not study them to learn the truth on this subject (I already knew what I believed), but to “see what they said about such things.” I was curious. What did I find? **I found that almost without exception these “warriors from the past” spoke with a SINGLE VOICE on these issues. That voice was clear. It was sound.** It was consistent. In summary, they said, worship involves literally assembling—upon the First Day of EVERY Week. With consistent voice, they believed it involved a literal “coming together” in ONE PLACE. They understood that it involved particular actions (acts of worship) that were to be done “in the assembly.” These men made it clear (VERY clear!) that split assembly is NOT acceptable, per God’s pattern. They spoke strongly about how we should always put God first, and man second. They talked about following God, no matter the cost, even if the time came that such was against the government. They wrote these things years ago, even numerous decades ago! Again, I researched probably over a thousand pages and this voice was consistent. **It was the SAME THING we have ALWAYS BELIEVED regarding the necessity to actually/literally/physically “come together” (assemble) on the Lord’s Day.** In other words, they understood and believed in the “assembly component” as being a part of true worship. Over the years these brave men fought liberalism, cross-roads, children’s church (cf., youth worship,

i.e., split assembly), and many other innovations. As I dug into those old works, their words sounded forth like thunder roaring against the walls of a hollow canyon. Back through the decades I travelled. Page after page, I found this: True worship involves actually “gathering together.” Further, these men made it abundantly clear that split assembly (cf., children’s church or as we have seen recently—“virtual worship/split assembly”) is not authorized! **The reason this point is noteworthy is because “split assembly” is EXACTLY the problem with the virtual/online worship concept. It is the same thing, or at least a close cousin.** For the sake of brevity, all the quotes will not be used, only some of them, and even these will be partial quotes, allowing quicker access to “the heart of the matter.” **As the list is perused, the connected principles should be applied to our current situation. Remember, circumstances change, but principles remain true** (cf., children’s church (split assembly) vs. virtual worship (split assembly)). After all, without principles, including implication, men and women would not even know that the Bible applies to them. In short, as these “voices from the past” and some from “our day” are read, the application of principles and Biblical concepts should be applied. In some cases, **I have bolded and/ or underlined certain of their words/phrases for emphasis sake**, in other places, the authors themselves have done so. Please Consider:

1. **Article, “The Assemblies of the Church of Christ Salute You”** – “The Acme church of Christ has recently completed their building campaign and occupied their new facilities. The church is making news all over the United States! Its membership outgrew their old facilities long ago and the new building is a welcomed sight...The growth rate has been so tremendous that their old auditorium was not sufficient to handle the crowds. They decided that since they had Children’s Worship and Adult Worship there would be nothing wrong with dividing the church into several simultaneous assemblies to handle the crowd. At first there were objections to the assembly arrangements made by the Acme church. No one had ever divided a congregation into 35 assemblies before. It was new, daring, and innovative!...When asked if 1 Cor. 11:20 and 14:23 were violated by such an arrangement [the preacher] replied that the expression “together” and “one place” had nothing to do with it. He stated that these passages only teach what is involved when there is an assembly, not a demand that we meet in one place together. The Acme preacher reminded his opponents that the only real reason they objected to his arrangement was due to traditional, American customs that had become doctrine for those churches of Christ...He accused them of thinking more of their opinions than they did of saving souls...and implied that if a church wanted to grow they must have multiple simultaneous worship services...The Acme church had grown so fast that the auditorium...was not large enough to accommodate the crowd. The elders decided to allow everyone to remain in their classrooms and have worship there. **They had thirty-five classes, so each class became a worship assembly** at eleven o’clock. Soon these classes could not hold the numbers...Now they have increased their assemblies to 40. The Acme church has been so successful and active in winning souls that the other churches of Christ in the area have decided to dissolve their elderships, and merge with the Acme church, under the oversight of its elders. They decided to do this after reading several articles in a brotherhood paper arguing for such an arrangement. Just because the members of the one congregation did not meet in the same building did not lessen the fact that they were the Acme church of Christ. So the Acme church of Christ soon had forty assemblies in their building and another one hundred assemblies within a fifty mile radius of that building...**Just think...we could have one eldership and one church with that church assembling in ten different areas** in the city! The collection from each one of these assemblies would go into one common treasury overseen by the one eldership. In fact, if this were scriptural over a metropolitan area, why not over a county, state, or even the world! One eldership over the one church of Christ with 34,000+ assemblies! Yes, the simple beginnings with the Children’s Worship and Adult Worship have grown to gigantic proportions in the Acme church of Christ. **But, the whole thing must be scriptural because there was a need...objectors were called traditionalists, Pharisees...**The above is not a true story. But, give us

five or ten years and everything I have described will be true among churches of Christ. The roots of such an effort will be traced back to the Children's Worship!" (By Ray Hawk, CFTF, **Year: 1977**)

2. **Article, "The Young People's Church"** – "Today, there is a trend among some churches of Christ to have a Young Peoples' Assembly separate and apart from the adults worshipping in the auditorium...there has to be a scriptural authority for it...Remember, it takes only one generation for the church to be lost. Now, with no apologies to make nor bones to pick, I lower the point, lunge forward and plow a straight and narrow furrow...Hebrews 10:25, in part, states, 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...' This statement is a command that all Christians are to meet at some point of assembly for worship. This is also a Scripture that does not insult the intelligence of one to see and understand. Paul states, '...when ye come together in the church...when ye come together therefore into one place...when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another' (1 Cor. 11:18, 20, 33). Again, each **Scripture is clear within itself. When the assembling time for the church arrives, all Christians are to go to the same place and wait for one another and all worship God together – in one assembly. Thus, we have a command not to forsake the assembly. We have a command that we are all to assemble at the same time. And we have a command that we all assemble at the same place. Therefore, all Christians are to assemble at the same time and place when they meet for worship.**" (By Billy Boyd, CFTF, **Year: Appox. 1970s**)
3. **Article, "My Answers To...Youth Worship"** – "...the first step away from apostolic procedures is the fatal one, because it is the premise on which all others rest. [He then has a subtitle, **Brother Woods' Position**] Guy N. Woods says, 'Do the brethren realize that it was this very **practice in the denominational churches which resulted in isolating** the young from the old...**Where is the New Testament authority for conducting separate worship assemblies?** It is clear from 1 Corinthians 11:20, that the church was required to assemble **(a) together, (b) at the same time and place** for the observance of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, in coming together to partake of the Supper, they were to 'tarry one for another' (1 Cor. 11:33). This necessitates the conclusion that all present are to assemble together...Why not separate assemblies for old men, old women, young men, young women? The black and the white? The educated and the uneducated? Those with high school diplomas, those with bachelors degrees and those with doctorates?...**Absurd, do you say? Don't be too sure. As a matter of fact, this is the very argument some are today using to justify alleged 'home' worship thus justifying absence from the worship of the church...** Think on these things, brethren... Whether you title it 'youth church' as in the Christian Church or 'youth worship' among us, **it is digression.** The only safeguard is not to depart from the 'pattern' in the first place. [He then has a subtitle, **Brother Nichols' Position**]. Gus Nichols said at the **1975 Free-Hardeman Lectures**, 'Don't tolerate the ideas of having two churches, one for youth and one for aged people (1 Corinthians 1:10).' At the same lectureship in **1971** he said, 'But God is back of the existence of the local churches. He authorized them by requiring local Christians to assemble...And members of the family of God are commanded to meet together... We read that the whole church is to come together in one place (1 Corinthians 14:23)...The church at Troas was an assembling church (Acts 20:6-7)...The members are to assemble...**Extra services are no acceptable substitute for the services and worship commanded of the Lord in the church assemblies.** (By Jerry G. Hurt, CFTF, **Year: Appox. 1970s**).
4. **Booklet, "Junior Worship And Split Assemblies"** – After speaking of the Restoration Movement and the importance of doing what is authorized, he gives the subtitle of 'A New Innovation,' and writes, "Each of these controversies centered around the activity which took place in the assembly, the worship

service. Now there is a new innovation... This innovation brings with it, its own controversy. The controversy over Split Assemblies (Youth Worship, Junior Worship, Children's Bible Hour, **or whatever else you may want to call it**) does not deal with the actions that take place within the worship service; **but, with the very nature of the assembly itself**. The controversy is: What is the assembly in the New Testament? **The very essence, the very being of the assembly is the controversy**. Split assemblies (or whatever other appellation you may wish to place upon it) is the removal of all or part of the children (**or any other group**) from the worship service of the church to another part of the building for a separate service for either the entire duration of the service, or part of it. I was first introduced to the concept of Split Assemblies... **in 1972**... bus ministry and... Youth Worship... In talking to one of the other elders of that congregation, I learned that the Christian Church had been practicing the concept for many years. This brother stated that every Christian Church that he knew of who introduced the practice had experienced division, sooner or later, as a result. [He Then Quotes From the book, *Why I Left*, and a quote from *The Christian Standard* (Sept. 17, **1932**), and of the 'Little Folks New Testament Church – a thing unknown to the Bible – [who] met in the basement of the building at the same time the old folks met upstairs... So, it seems with the Junior Church idea; **it requires two churches**... [He then references several articles about the Methodist (one from **1980** and one from **1979**) showing that even some of the Methodists found children's church (divided assembly) not to be good] As one specialist in children's ministry from Australia put it, '**The common denominator in sick and dying churches (is) that children [substitute "others" – JBR] are consistently segregated (during worship) and sent off to another place.**' There is one difference between the church of our Lord and the denominations. The church of our Lord asks, 'Is it right?'; the denominations ask, 'Is it wrong?' [Under subtitle, *The Assembly*, after quoting Hebrews 10:23-25, he writes] This passage contains a direct command... Webster's... defines the verb 'assemble' 1. To collect into **one place** or group... 2... to meet together: Convene... in or **into one place**, mass, collection, or group... mutually reciprocally... To boil it all down, what the English means is this: Every Christian is to meet in one place as a part of the whole, as a part of the congregation. The word 'assemble' carries the **implication of coming into one place** or group; and, the word 'together' acts as a reinforcement of that implication... the example of the disciples coming together upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)... 'Assembling... together' is from the Greek word, *episunagoge*. Young's Analytical Concordance states that the word occurs in the New Testament but twice. It is translated once 'assembling... together' (Hebrews 10:25), and once 'gathering together' (2 Thessalonians 2:1). Thayer's... a gathering together in one place... **The Greek by the very definition... carries within it the same implications as the English that of coming into one place** or group. No one argues the fact that 'our gathering together' unto Christ is the bringing together of the saints into one group and to one place. Can it be consistently argued then, that *episunagoge* does not have the same force in its only other occurrence in the New Testament? The root verb... whether it be used in secular literature, the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, or the New Testament carries inherent within the word the idea of **to gather together in one place**. 'Assembling... together' is, therefore, a correct and accurate translation of the original language, Greek, including its implications. The direct command of the Scripture is for each congregation to assemble together in one place... **It would be strange indeed, if every avenue of worship contained in the assembly was specified, and yet the very nature of the assembly itself was not**. However, **even as every avenue of worship is specified, so is the assembly itself**. The assembly of the saints was, and is, the coming together of the members of the local congregation **into one place as one group** in order to provoke one another unto love and good works, offering praise and thanksgiving unto God. (By Roderick L. Ross, Booklet, **Year: ? (not recent)**, purchased 2006).

5. **Article, “Yes, ‘What About The Children’s Bible Hour?’”** – “...we will address ourselves to the question of whether or not the New Testament authorizes assemblies instead of **assembly**...If we conclude...that the assembly is not commanded, but that it is rather a matter of ‘judgment,’ it will be needless to discuss the divided assembly question further. People would be at liberty to make whatever arrangement that suits them best...1 Corinthians 11:18-20. The expression, ‘come together therefore into one place’ either means together in one place or it doesn’t. It has to mean one or the other! **By what rule of interpretation could one get a plurality of places?**...Hebrews 10:24-25. This is a direct command to assemble together, **which involves** the provoking of one another unto love and good works. Again, I ask, by what rule of interpretation could ‘assembling together’ mean a number of separate assemblies?...I am asking...**what rules of interpretation [are] used which allows [one] to conclude that ‘one place’ means a plurality of places and ‘assembling together’ means assembling apart?** Furthermore, **if ‘one’ doesn’t mean one, and ‘together’ doesn’t mean together in our English translations, how can we know what any of the English words mean?**...there is no authority to dissolve or do away with that assembly, whether by splitting it into multiple assemblies, or carrying it to the point of forming home churches where there will be no assembly larger than the family...As brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. used to say, ‘If there is no authority for it, don’t do it!’...What does ‘congregational autonomy’ have to do with the issue?...**Until [one] proves that the assembly is a matter of ‘judgment’...[that person] should forget the autonomy question. No congregation has the right to dispense with something which the New Testament commands us to do!**...I cannot question the sincerity of these brethren...when they say it is not their purpose to encourage separate assemblies, but to show that such is a matter of judgment. **But...I don’t think there is any question but that they will encourage separate assemblies. This will be due to the fact that they have been known for standing for the right in days gone by, and some will be inclined to accept their conclusions without study**...Friends, I don’t want to face the judgment believing or having taught others to believe, that the assembly is just a matter of ‘judgment’! I don’t believe these brethren will want to do so either, after they have given some serious study to the matter” (By Walter W. Pigg, Jr., CFTF, **Year: Approx. 1970s/80s**)
6. **Book, “Silence Can Be Sinful”** – “...our obligations to our government must not conflict with our duties to the kingdom of God. What Jesus was teaching is very plain. We live in two realms—the civil and the religious...**We cannot—we must not—allow our allegiance to the United States of America to overshadow our love for God and our work in his church...must we place our duties to God above our duties to the state?** Benito Mussolini wrote, ‘Everything for the State. Nothing against the State. Nothing outside the State.’ Mussolini and many ancient Romans made a god of the state...The book of Acts gives us one very impressive example of civil disobedience...(Acts 4:18-22). The apostles could not obey the dictates of the Jewish council. They went right on preaching the word...The Jewish leaders asked the apostles, ‘Did we not give you strict orders not to teach anymore in this man’s name? And, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine...(Acts 5:17-21, 24, 27-28). If the Jewish authorities thought they could intimidate the apostles, they were badly mistaken...Peter very boldly said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than man’ (Acts 5:29)...But how does one harmonize Peter’s response to the Jewish elders with what he said about submitting to civil rulers (1 Pet. 2:13-17)? **The answer is very simple: We must obey civil rulers unless they require us to violate the law of God. For example, if the United States government forbade Christians to worship God, we would have no choice but to disobey our government. We cannot disobey our God for any reason—political or otherwise, that is, if we want to go to heaven.** But would modern governments actually take away men’s rights to worship as they believe they ought?...The sad truth is: There are governments all over

the world that allow men and women to worship only as the government wishes... There are many other countries where those who claim to be Christians are persecuted, such as India, Morocco, Nepal, China, Cuba and Russia... Could the United States ever become like Hitler's Germany or Pol Pot's Cambodia or Stalin's Russia? Our Constitution guarantees churches freedom from governmental interference. **So why should Americans worry about the erosion of religious freedom? It could not happen here, could it?** My friends, our Supreme Court and other governmental powers have already removed some of America's religious freedoms... **If and when the government passes laws that restrict our privilege and obligation to serve the living God, we must protest, even if that means defying the laws of the land.** We must not allow anyone or anything to prevent our worshipping and serving the God of heaven." (By Winford Claiborne, Book, **Year: 2002**)

7. **Book, "Worship: Heaven's Imperative or Man's Innovation?"** – [Subtitle (on Cover): A Brief Treatise Setting Forth The Will Of God Concerning Worship And Refuting Some Of The Popular Innovations Currently Being Foisted Upon The People Of God; Note, terms below in this article are bolded from the author.] "...The Divided Assembly. One innovation introduced by some is the divided assembly, also at times termed 'children's church,' 'junior worship,' 'children's Bible hour,' or other names. In seeking out many inventions, brethren often have been fascinated by and have adopted sectarian practices, which militate against the unity always wanted and demanded by God. These include having one or more assemblies taking place separately, parallel to and at the same time as the regular assembly... In the Old Testament, the place of worship was vital... This promoted unity—one priesthood, one place, one law, one sacrifice, one assembly. The individual tribes were not allowed to select the place, priest, time, or other specified items. Jeroboam realized the power of such assembly for unity, and thus forbade the ten tribes to return to Jerusalem; he set up Dan and Bethel under the pretense of convenience, which actually promoted division—changed the priesthood, time, place, and object. Fellowship today is of vital importance, encouraging faithfulness and carrying out the great commission. How long would faithfulness continue if we went our separate ways? Here is God's wisdom. We would lose fellowship, love, concern, mutual feeling and assistance. We work together, study, sing, pray, give, edify each other. If we met separately, what would result? Love would wax cold, we would stumble with no one to lift us... Leviticus is the background to understanding the assembly. The Hebrews were closest to God when they offered sacrifices together at the tabernacle; God's glory was just behind the veil (Lev. 1:1-2). It caused a realization of God's holiness and of man's need and imperfections. It provoked holiness in one's life, causing one to appreciate more the spiritual rather than the material. Likewise, when we assemble, Christ is present, and greater spirituality is produced (1 Cor. 10:14-22). Fellowship with God's people is vital (cf. Lev. 20:22-26). We, like the Hebrews, are encouraged to appreciate the cost of sacrifice and redemption, the purpose of the priesthood, and of God's being in our midst... Notice that 'all Israel' was called together... (Deu. 31:10-12)... Under Ezra, 'there was gathered together unto him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children...(10:1)... Our Lord did not separate and segregate the multitude into various ages, backgrounds, or other groups, at the time of His sermon on the mount (Mat. 5-7), nor did he segregate the five thousand men, women and children (Mat. 14:14ff)... What about the early church? They **assembled together** to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20), signifying unity of the **one body** (1 Cor. 10:16-17) and unity with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3-10). Division makes impossible the partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-20, ASV)... Note the phrases 'we **all** partake,' 'come **together** into **one** place' (emph. CAC). Paul wrote, 'If therefore the **whole church** be assembled together,' 'when ye come together' (1 Cor. 14:23, 26). He taught the same doctrine 'everywhere in every church' (1 Cor. 4:17; 14:33; 16:1-2). He wrote, 'In the midst of the congregation will I sing praise' (Heb. 2:12). Further, he commanded, 'Not forsaking

our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another' (Heb. 10:25). How is this possible when we are divided and segregated into 'junior church' and/or other groups? When the church 'came together, to break bread' (Acts 20:7, KJV), when they were 'gathered together' (v. 8), did that include the children?...The significant Greek words for this study of the assembly are: 1) *Sunerchomai* (1 Cor. 14:26). It is defined: by Thayer as 'to come together i.e., **to assemble**..by Arndt and Gingrich as 'come together—lit. assemble, gather; and by Vine as 'to come together.' 2) *Ekklesia* (1 Cor. 11:18, 14:19, 35, et al.). It is defined by Thayer as 'in the Christian sense, **an assembly of Christians gathered for worship** and by Arndt and Gingrich as '**when you come together in church**.' 3) *Episunagoge* (Heb. 10:25). It is defined by Thayer as 'a. **a gathering together into one place**...b. (the religious) **assembly** (of Christians)...by Arndt and Gingrich as '**meeting of a church...neglect their own meeting(s)**...and by Vine as 'a gathering together.' 4) *Sunelthein/sunerchesthai epi to auto* (1 Cor. 11:20; 14:23). It is defined by Thayer as 'have convened, **come together to the same place**, (1 Cor. 14:23)'; by Arndt and Gingrich as 'come together to the same place I Cor. 11:20; 14:23': and by Vine as 'In I Cor. 11:20 and 14:23, A.V., the phrase *epi to auto*, lit., 'to the same.' 5) *Sunago* (Acts 20:7). It is defined by Thayer as '**to be gathered i.e. come together**, gather, **meet**'; by Arndt and Gingrich as '**gather, come together, assemble**'; and by Vine as 'to gather or bring together.' What are the implications of the divided assembly? **It contains the seeds of congregational destruction.** In addition to violating the command to assemble, there is a great danger in dividing to '**meet people's needs**.' If a church divides to meet the needs of children, would it not be equally Scriptural and expedient (by the same human reasoning) to divide by age, by education, by sexes, by skills, by degrees of Bible knowledge? Where would it stop? There lurks great danger also in dividing to meet **in various places**. If dividing into various groups is authorized, then is also authorized to meet in various and sundry places. What is to keep some from worshiping at home, on the parking lots at the races and/or football stadiums, on the lake, at the campgrounds, or anywhere else?...Why could brethren worship 'together' effectively in the Old and New Testaments, whereas brethren cannot in the twentieth century? **It causes many to miss great blessings...It fails to encourage family togetherness and worship...It has destructive implications upon church organization, function and growth.** If we as the church, need not assemble together in one place, no need exists for the local congregation...The early church met together: let us follow the New Testament pattern. Otherwise, we destroy congregational fellowship and the bearing of one another's burdens. Soon, there would be no congregations. (By Curtis A. Cates, Book, Year: 1993)

8. **Article, "I'm Giving Up On Organized Religion"** – "...God does not approve of do-it-yourself religion. Worship must be given as God wants it, since it is for Him. Listening to a favorite preacher's podcast at the gym or worship song around the house does not replace giving God **His Sunday a cappella concert**, heartfelt prayer, and sincere gratitude around His Son's table. While Christianity is a personal, heart-felt religion (Matthew 15:8; Romans 6:17), it is not meant to be practiced alone. A part is done in secret (Matthew 6:6), but discipleship is not meant to be secret (John 12:42; 19:38-39). Shouting the gospel 'on the housetops' (Matthew 10:27) is better done in a **public assembly** than in a private residence...God's wisdom is that gathering with the church is essential to spiritual growth and to a relationship with Him (Hebrews 10:24-25; Ephesians 4:12). **The Greek word for church includes assembling in its very meaning.** The early church gathered—daily, in fact (Acts 2:46). The New Testament emphasizes that Christians 'come together' (Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 11:17-20, 33; 14:23, 26). It was a priority to them. History says they often assembled before dawn or after dark because Sunday was a workday in the Roman Empire. They lost jobs, homes, families; some even gave their lives to follow Jesus. To be more authentic, we should take church more seriously—more church, not

less... **Church is where we get what we cannot find in the world.** The church is the storehouse of God's blessings. In church, we encounter the power of gospel preaching (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12). Church is where Christ's life-changing message is experienced in **its optimal environment.** As live-streaming services have become common, some churches find online 'attendance' surpassing in-person attendance. **No longer does one have to leave home on Sunday. A living room becomes the auditorium; an easy chair, the pew; Facebook Live, the pulpit; a computer replaces congregational singing and fellowship. Church attendance becomes just another app that allows one to 'worship' in comfort and isolation. Live-Streaming is important for the homebound, for those looking for a new church, and as a study tool during the week, but it **is not worship replacement.** Watching a livestream feed in our pajamas or a TV church service while eating a bowl of cereal **is not the same as being there. Internet church is not really church.** It does not offer the benefits of being **with** fellow worshippers in the presence of God. There are not interactions, no warm greetings and conversations, no voices blending in praise. Being together—with God **and each other**—is the whole point (Psalm 116:14). Christians are not to forsake the assembling of the church (Hebrews 10:25). Jesus said that 'where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:20). **This requires close fellowship with real people** (Acts 2:42). **Watching as a spectator is not substitute for participation as a worshiper.** Preaching is where God's power intersects with human hearts (Romans 1:16). Personal study is needed, but public teaching, encouragement, correction, and challenge are essential (2 Timothy 4:2). Worship nourishes the soul (Acts 20:32). One churchgoer wrote...to a newspaper editor, '...if I had not gone to church, I would be spiritually dead.'...Humans are social creatures...Four-of-ten people experience intense loneliness, yet many have not considered finding connection in church...In church, we find hope for this life and beyond...**What the church offers cannot be found anywhere else.** (By Allen Webster, H2H Website, Year: ?)**

9. **Book, "When Is An Example Binding"** – "...Considering the evidence of the three passages (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20, and 1 Cor. 16:2), the logical conclusion follows that on the first day of every week, **the members of each congregation are to meet together in one place (come together in an assembly)** in order to eat the Lord's Supper. This certainly is in harmony with the instructions which God gave to the Jews to 'remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' Even without God's saying '*every* Sabbath day,' the Jews knew that every time a Sabbath day 'rolled around,' they were to keep it holy...but the point about the distribution of the obligation of Christians to meet every first day of the week is comparable to the responsibility of the Jews to remember *every* Sabbath day. In fact, as noted above, 1 Corinthians 16:2 actually says, in the Greek and in many English versions, 'every first day of the week.' Also, it must be noted that the total context makes clear that this was a matter of general command, Paul said, '...as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye' (i.e., the church at Corinth, 1:1-2). The members of the churches were commanded to put into a common treasury every first day of the week. Thus, when it is seen that the meeting was to take place *every* Lord's day, and that a basic purpose of their 'coming together' (meeting in assembly, 1 Cor. 11:20) was to eat the Lord's supper (cf.; Acts 20:7), **it follows logically that Christians are to meet together in assembly in order to eat the Lord's Supper.** [He mentions William Woodson's help on this section (regarding Acts 20:6-7) and then writes] The meeting referred to occurred on the first day of the week after the disciples had tarried (waited) seven days. The disciples came together and remained together for some time (that is, it was not a momentary gathering). The perfect participle indicates that **they came together and remained together.** While they were gathered together, Paul preached to them... Thus, it should be seen that in Acts 20:7, there is a purpose stated by the use of the infinitive: On the first day of the week the

disciples came together *to break bread*. From 1 Corinthians 11:20, **it is clear that the Christians were to come together in one place in order to** eat the Lord's Supper. So, it is clear that a basic purpose of their coming together on the Lord's day was to eat the Lord's Supper...it is clear: [1] the disciples were **under obligation to meet every first day of the week in order to lay by in store**, [2] a basic purpose of their coming together was to 'break bread' (eat the Lord's Supper); and, thus, [3] they were under obligation to eat the Lord's Supper together (**in assembly**) on every first day of the week. (By Thomas B. Warren, Book, Year: 1975)

10. Book, "**The Bible Doctrine of Christian Fellowship**" – "[From Chapter Seven: The Divided Assembly: Its Dangers To Congregations and Disruption of Christian Fellowship (No. 1). He writes,] Author's Note: During the latter part of 1978 and the early part of 1979 I wrote a total of eleven articles...dealing with the Divided Assembly...Many requests have come to put this material into a permanent form. Because **the practice of the Divided Assembly does so much damage to the Lord's church and disrupts Christian fellowship** to such an extent. I have decided to adapt this material to the overall theme of this work on Christian Fellowship. **Fellowship, in its comprehensive nature, cannot survive in the wake of destroyed congregations and the divided assembly definitely has the explosive potential to destroy congregational framework** as I propose to prove most abundantly in this and the subsequent chapter...[Under the title, "What Is The Nature Of The Practice?, he writes] It is simply the case of having more than one assembly **or having parallel assemblies while the hour of worship is in progress**. What has produced the practice...? Perhaps the one thing that has triggered it most frequently is the bus ministry...But this has not been the sole motivation...Relative to this matter [children's worship/divided assembly – JBR] some have argued that the elders may set up just as many parallel assemblies as they deem feasible. Thus, there might be two, five, ten, twenty, forty, eighty or more. Quite obviously, though, **there is no logical stopping place once the concept is accepted that parallel worship assemblies are permitted and simultaneous hours of worship may be carried out within the same congregation. How could there be a logical termination to such one it has begun?**...(1) Just how far can this matter be carried in dealing with particular needs of the various groups within the church? (2) Will it be necessary that all groups meet in close proximity to each other though in different worship groups? (3) What if some desire to have their preferred assembly deal with certain problems by securing a more distant location? (4) Will such practices as these immediately disrupt Christian fellowship in the congregation and in the long run destroy the local church at work?...Most importantly of all, does the matter possess some Biblical authority? Ultimately, this is where the matter has to be settled...These are the questions we raise and for their answers we seek plain, pointed and practical answers...This matter is a controversial one and judgments differ in treating its complexities. Yet I fully and firmly believe there are some critical and crucial dangers to congregational continuance and Christian fellowship in this ever growing and popular practice. [Under the title, "Just How Far Can This Matter Be Cared In Meeting Particular Needs?, he writes] **Another projected justification has to do with the meeting of particular needs**. It is reasoned, as per the theory, that the needs of young people are vastly different and therefore a segregation of ages is called for in worship...What strange priorities brethren sometimes have!!...**Just how far will this notion of needs go? Are young people the only ones with special needs?...Shall we therefore divide the assembly into a dozen or more groups at the worship hour?** If it can be done for two groups—older and younger—why cannot it be done for three, six, twelve, twenty-four or even forty-eight different groups. An exceptionally large congregation could well have as many separate worship sites for its varying worship groups as Solomon had to have for his idolatrous wives and their worship sites (1 Kings 11:7-8). Just where is the stopping boundary going to be placed? **And will it be essential that they all meet**

on the same premises?...Elders who are persuaded to follow such a practice as the divided assembly need to realize that such a perilous practice contains in it the seeds of congregational dissolution. It is a serious strike against the fervent fellowship and closely knitted unity of a congregation—ALL MEMBERS OF IT—that worships regularly in **the common assembly** called for by Biblical authorization. The enormous consequences of this perilous practice cannot be ignored in this overall problem. **Some elderships are completely oblivious to these consequences;** they have not begun to weigh such in the light of prudence and Scriptural teaching. [Under the title, Is Proximity of Location Really Demanded?, he writes] **This is one of the most crucial and critical questions...What if certain groups within the congregation decide their particular needs can be met best by meeting in a variety of locations and under a system of varying circumstances? What if their desires along these lines do not demand that they even meet in close proximity to each other? What if the opposite is even demanded, i.e., distance? After all, grant the premises of the divided assembly and what grounds is there to suggest that all assemblies have to meet upon the same general premises? There are then no logical grounds for such and it amazes me to no end that naïve preachers and inattentive elderships have not surmised such with this pet project of theirs...On the granted premises that the divided assembly is right if it meets NEEDS, who will say they are wrong in contending for a family worship at home?...**[He then speaks of some who] have been converted to the divided assembly concept by their preacher and their elders where they attend. They pursue the practice an additional step and decide they will just have their assembly...meet their needs [rather] than doing it the old way they have been doing. They can take a fifteen minute break under a shade tree, have a song, a prayer, a few verses read from the Bible, partake of the Lord's Supper (grape juice kept cold in a small thermos) and they can hand their \$2.00 each to the congregation treasurer next week when they see him in town...Grant the premises of the divided assembly and what logic condemns their practice?...Elders and preachers should not be naïve in thinking that brethren will not carry the logic to such ends. **Yet naïve preachers and sleeping elderships who are presently pursuing this pet project seemingly do not realize the seeds of destruction to the local congregation embedded in this matter of divided assemblies...**Numerous congregations have begun to have parallel worship assemblies. The extended justification for it all calls for as many assemblies as there are special needs. Reduce this logic to its lowest denominator and one can reason something like this: **'I have special needs that no one else has. Therefore I will stay home and worship in my own bedroom all by myself.'** If the premises for parallel worship will not ultimately lead to this point what logical blockade will impede the pet project from leading to this point? **Such adopted practices will result in congregational dissolution. If not, why not? I am confident that many good brethren have been sold this destructive bill of goods before they have pondered well its perilous potential for the future.** [Under the title, What Will This Concept Do To Christian Fellowship And Congregational Continuance?, he writes] Grant the overall premises for the divided assembly or parallel worship and you grant simultaneously the extended premises by implication for each group or even each individual to have either their or his own worship period **WHENEVER** and **WHEREEVER** will best meet those special needs. **This may remove entirely the need to have the local church congregate into one central place for worship. If there is no need for the local church and its worship assembly, then there is no need for an eldership over it.** Have the elders who are traveling this dangerous and perilous route really thought through this pet project?...**Who would attend if the members feel no necessity in coming? Would outsiders be interested in attending that which the very members refused to attend?** Have preachers who are sold on this pet project really thought through what they have been advocating? I cannot believe they have...**We therefore plead for elders and preachers to wake up to such obvious dangers as a few of us are pointing out** in lectures, in Open Forums, in sermons, in

Question and Answer sessions, in private conversations and correspondence and by means of the religious pen in articles, tracts and books. The divided assembly is dangerous to congregational continuance; it is absolutely disruptive of Christian fellowship from its beginning stages onward.” [And these comments are just some of the comments from chapter seven, **written over some 40 years ago! Get the book and read chapter eight** if you want more, including **his absolute condemnation and refutation of the divided assembly**. Note, ALL CAPS in this article are from brother Taylor, whereas the bold words/phrases and underlining are emphasized by me - JBR] (By Robert R. Taylor, Jr., Book, Year: 1980)

11. **Book, “Perspectives On The Development Of Liberalism In The Churches Of Christ” –**

[Addressing the theme of liberalism, particularly as it relates to its nature and various innovations in the past, from early times, to the restoration period and even later, and concerning those who stand for the truth vs. those who attack truth (including an attack upon those who defend the truth), he writes] “It is a fact that liberals borrow from other liberals. When observed in a very minute manner, liberalism seeks to appear saintly and as seeking peace. In reality...[it] actually seeks to undermine the Word of God...Some seem to think that the remedy for liberalism is to be all positive...If we believe the modernists and liberals, we would think they alone are the bearers of intelligence in religion...**It is a reflection upon the intelligence of people to assert that brethren who respect the Bible are the ones who are causing the problems. Such is not the case.** Division is everywhere, and it spreads as liberalism spreads. May we open our eyes to what is happening and be prepared to resist the devil (James. 4:7)...[There are] those who are never sure about any situation, except they are sure to keep quiet on all the crucial issues that arise in the church. If a wee word does slip out occasionally, it is usually a word that could be spelled either backward or forward. It is always positive—until it becomes negative, and in such cases one wonders if the wholly positive brother really knows whether he is coming, going, or has already arrived...There are brethren who absolutely deny that liberalism prevails in the church...**words that have been understood for long decades, and which have been used in the expression of cogent and intelligent sentences, are no longer to be used. They take on different meaning within their liberal speech. That is about the most convenient concoction ever devised by the devil, but ‘...we are not ignorant of his devices’ (II Cor. 2:11)**...It is very sad that some brethren sealed their lips and laid aside their pens. What a pity that some/many have acted as if no trust whatsoever had been committed to them...Not one person attempted to justify the innovations by the Scriptures. **Their usual procedure was to compare one thing with something else. The Digressives never ran out of comparisons...Digressives accused those who opposed those innovations with causing trouble. This sounds like old Ahab** who accused the prophet of God with causing trouble (1 Kings 18:17). It would seem that some people just will not admit their unscriptural concoctions.” (By Wayne Coats, Book, Year: 2004).

12. **Others – The Volume of Similar Material From Sound Brethren Is Literally Overwhelming.** The material from sound preaches/preaching schools (past and present—**Quotes from men like: Bill Jackson, Andrew Connally, Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Wendell Winkler, Thomas B. Warren, Garland Elkins, and MANY others**) could be stacked on top of each other showing the UNITY of thought (their direct teachings and/or their implications) on “the necessity to actually/literally assemble” each Lord’s Day as a collective congregation, the unacceptable nature of divided/split assemblies, and the nature involved in the very acts of worship—thus showing that “gathering together” is just as essential as the “acts” themselves. Even though they were often dealing with children’s church or other innovations of their time, **the principles are the same, and the implications from such research as it applies to our**

subject at hand, is crystal clear! As an example, an absolutely outstanding article (manuscript) on the subject of the assembly—including the necessity of the “actually assembling component,” was written by Bob **Beard** (HCB (SBI)) Lectures, years ago). His assignment/chapter was entitled, “***What The Bible Teaches About The ‘Assemblies of Exhortation’ (Hebrews 10:25).***” In this intriguing manuscript, he shows that while sickness is not forsaking [which, of course, is something we have all known for many year – JBR], the very nature of the “assembling/gathering” itself, is mandated. Starting on page 106 he asks, “Is the Lord’s day assembly one which involves the brethren’s exhortation of one another?” and also, “Is there a Divine mandate for the attendance of every member?”...The worship services in which the Lord’s Supper is observed involve exhortation and spiritual encouragement as is evident from an analysis of any of the five avenues of worship kept in the biblically prescribed manner—in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The preaching, singing, prayer, Lord’s Supper, and contribution **all involve the participants** in mental, vocal, or other **behavioral activity** which serves to encourage or exhort brethren unto love and good work...That such assemblies ideally **involved all of the saints** of a particular congregation **is evident** from the New Testament accounts of those meetings...Being both assemblies of exhortation and assemblies where **all were expected to be present together**, these assemblies which included observation of the Lord’s Supper, are assemblies described in Hebrews 10:24-25 and are, therefore, not to be forsaken by any member.” On page 109 he goes on to say, “Note carefully that authorization by expediency is not authorization for that which would help accomplish an end which itself is unauthorized.” On page 110-111, under the heading of Children’s Church Arrangements [cf., split assemblies/virtual worship – JBR], he pens, “Today, many congregations of the Lord’s people have these separate assemblies. The assemblies in mind are not simply separate Bible classes for which there is Bible authority...rather, these are separate assemblies in which...people...are removed from the Lord’s day services which qualify as assemblies of exhortation described in Hebrews 10:24-25...and therefore these members’ absence is required from assemblies which the Bible says they must not forsake. Though it is certain that some of these churches employ these assemblies with all good intentions, it is also certain that the practice is not justifiable by Scripture...**The practice of separating some of the members from an assembly which God requires that they attend is the common element here criticized**...Regardless of the ends sought, an unauthorized or forbidden practice is not made pleasing to Him who demands man have authority for all he does (Col. 3:17; Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). **Means do not justify ends and to say otherwise opens the door of situations ethics** and a torrent of unscriptural innovations.” Speaking of elderships, on page 113 he continues, “They are shepherds, but serve under and are limited by the authority of the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-4). As already noted the shepherds ordained by the Holy Spirit over a local congregation can appoint an assembly of the type specified in Hebrews 10:24-25; however, **those same men cannot ‘unappoint’ an assembly of that same type if it is directly specified as such by God’s Book (Acts 20:28; 2 John 9).** **The Lords’ day assemblies in which the Lord’s Supper is observed are so specified**...To use the supposed justification ‘the elders said we can do it’ in this instance when the Bible says otherwise is as ludicrous as claiming that a woman can present the public sermons to the whole church or that a denominationalist can teach a Bible class because the elders authorized it (1 Tim. 2:9; Eph. 5:11). **Elders like all others are bound by the Bible to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9)**...It should be noted here that there are no requirements that a church have two worship services on the Lord’s day and there is no prohibition against having members divided into two or more Bible classes on Sunday morning and on Sunday evening. **The problem here discussed occurs only when men endeavor to have a Biblical worship service of the type held in Acts 20:7, a service in which the Lord’s supper is observed with an unnecessary reduced number of members. Men thereby divide what the Lord’s pattern indicates is indivisible.**” Another such article (or manuscript) would be from

the *Blight of Liberalism*, lectureship book, edited by Michael **Hatcher**, written by Bobby **Liddell**, entitled, “*Liberalism And Worship.*” In this fine lecture (from 2005), **he references how liberalism prefers “relationships over requirements, and love over law,” and then correctly says, “Faithful brethren have shown repeatedly that love and law (and law keeping) are not mutually exclusive (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Psa. 119:97)”** (p. 311). He has solid and sound statements, such as, “Like the sinners of old, modern liberals want to change worship to make it like they want/like; to make it more appealing to others; to make it according to their wills instead of God’s will...**Liberalism misses the point of worship. Worship is not focused upon man—but God...Any change man makes from what God has prescribed will always be for the worse, and never for the better** (cf. Rev. 22:18-19)...**Worship, as God commanded, is something one does—not something one watches**” (p. 310-317). How wonderful when he says, “If we will worship as God intended, we will put to silence the critics of Christian’s worship” (p. 324). This same good brother was the Editor of the 2007 MSOP Lectures (Epistles To Corinth). Beginning on page 289 of that sound work, brother Larry **Acuff**, under the title of “*Come Not Together Unto Condemnation, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34*”, writes, “...Would one get the distinct impression that the early church came together? This blows out of the sky the idea that it is not necessary for the saints to assemble together. The world has the idea that assembling together to worship God is wholly unnecessary...Many seem to want to do their worship simply by watching some televangelist. The scriptures are clear. [He then quotes Hebrews 10:25, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Etc., then writes] We learn, from the above that **assembling together as God’s people is essential. We have the examples as well as the command to do so.**” Likewise, brother Tom **Wacaster**, one of the most diligent students of God’s Word and finest men I have ever known, (in his book, *Studies in Hebrews, written in 2009*), beginning on page 407, writes, “**Love for the brethren simply cannot be shown while forsaking the assembly. Christians cannot isolate themselves from one another and at the same time fulfill this sacred obligation.**...when any generation shall forsake the house of prayer and worship, that generation is dangerously near to losing those institutions inherited through the piety of others.” On page 410, he quotes brother **Coffman**, thusly, “Reasons why people forsake the assembly are rationally explained, ardently advocated by them that wish to defect, and established with all kinds of charges, excuses, allegations, and insinuations against the church; but the only true reason for disobeying **this basic commandment** is simply unbelief, or the carelessness and sin which lead to unbelief.” Brother Wacaster then comments himself, “The various reasons that men offer for missing the services are ludicrous to say the least. When business, recreation, **personal desires**, unexpected company, **bad weather**, et al, are offered to others as a ‘bonafide’ excuse for absenting one from worship to God, it sends forth the message (whether intended or not) that these things are more important than one’s devotion and worship to God.” Yes, all one needs to do is to dig into these various commentaries, books, tracts, articles, and sermons that these men have taught/written (especially as it pertains to the books of Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, Acts; cf., the subject of worship, and the like), and the evidence will be overwhelming concerning what has been **CLEARLY—and historically—**taught “among us,” about the NATURE of the assembly! Then again, there is no need to do so—as it has already been done! The jury is in. Our sound brethren’s past teaching on the subject of worship and the necessity to actually (truly/literally/really) assemble is hard to misunderstand. I certainly have no intention to misrepresent these men, especially as it applies to this current issue. However, **I do know that principles remain true over time**, and that words are meant to be understood. Situations and circumstances may change, but principles of truth (from God’s Word) do not change. While I do not advocate accepting any man’s teaching for the truth on any given topic—just because a certain man said something (including myself), that is, not to say that truth cannot be taught and understood from sound men. All teachings should be tested upon the teachings of Scripture (1 Pet. 4:11). However, I do know

that our brethren—the historically sound ones, anyway, (and this is not to say that all such men stayed sound)—are undeniably and overwhelmingly clear, on the subject of true worship, including the “assembly” or “gathering” component connected with true worship. In short, through their writings they made it extremely clear that we are to gather-together/actually-meet in a real (literal) assembly and worship God according to HIS PATTERN (John 4:23-24, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 11-16).

CONCLUSION

Dear brothers and sisters, I love you and I love the Church of Christ (Rom. 16:16-18). I love you and I love the church, because first and foremost, I love Jesus (1 Jn. 4:16-21). Without the Savior, life has no meaning (Eccl. 12:13, John 11:25). King Jesus is what it is all about. **But I do not know how to follow the Lord without obeying Him** (John 14:15, 15:14), and this includes following His CLEAR and basic TEACHING on the nature of THE ASSEMBLY. Relationships without rules, do not really exist—not true/proper relationships. **We cannot “feel” our way to truth** (Prov. 14:12, Jer. 10:23). Sure, I know the liberals among us do not believe such, but they need to study the book of John. Of the Father, Jesus said, “...but I **know** Him, and **keep** His saying” (8:55). His knowing the Father was directly tied to his obedience (7:29, 8:29, 14:31). The same is true with us. Sheep who “know His voice,” are the very ones who “follow Him” (10:4). It was Jesus who said, “He that is of God heareth God’s words” (8:47). The same inspired John also recorded 1 John 2:3-4. It reads, “**And hereby do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.** He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Can you imagine a husband telling his wife that he “loves” her very much, but then not keeping the “rules” of that relationship (i.e., marital faithfulness, *etcetera*)? True love demands not feelings only, but also obedient action (1 John 3:18; note, this is *agape* love)! True love is not about words (only), but it is about ACTION—OBEDIENT ACTION, and such action is always (ALWAYS!) connected with what God’s Word teaches (1 Jn. 5:3, 2 Jn. 6). It involves a “faith which worketh by love (*agape*)” (Gal. 5:6; cf., also, Rom. 10:17).

Dear friends. Beloved brethren. Please realize that my only intention in writing this article (okay, maybe it turned into a book) is the unity of the church based upon the truth, as revealed in God’s knowable pattern (John 8:32, 17:17-21, Ps. 133:1). As the sound Gospel preacher I grew up under use to say, “**There is a way that is right and cannot be wrong.**” This I know; **it is right and not wrong to worship God according to His clear PATTERN (and this includes the “actually assembling component”).** Brethren, what we have done (actual assembling) since the first century is not the new thing! The new thing is what we have seen over the last few months. Stop and meditate upon that for a moment.

I do not agree with the liberal Governor of New Jersey when he was questioned about not allowing religious groups to meet/gather, and regarding the fact that a group of fifteen were being ticketed/arrested for assembling, when he said, “**We have to find a different way to worship.**” **NO SIR, Mr. Governor (and/or to any of my dear objecting brethren), WE WILL NOT “find a different way to worship.”** As he admitted in the interview, “I wasn’t thinking of the Bill of Rights when we did this.” I guess not. Nor the Bible! The United States Constitution is extremely clear on such things as assembling. Likewise, I am afraid that some of my (otherwise well-meaning) brethren have committed a similar offense when they hastily changed “actual” worship for “virtual/online” worship—i.e., they were not thinking of God’s Bill of Rights/Constitution—The Pattern, “when they did this” (cf., 1 Pet. 4:11). The constitution of the United States might one day fall, but God’s Word will never change (John 10:35, 1 Pet. 1:25, Heb. 1:1-2, 13:8).

To conclude, please read this rich story from our past (**An Open Door**, by Bill Goring, Date Written: ?): “While researching restoration history in Clay County, Missouri I found some very interesting information in the records of the Liberty Christian Church, formerly the Church of Christ, where Moses E. Lard preached

between 1853 and 1857. During the Civil War, when Liberty was under the command of Federal Troops, **an order had been issued by the commander that no public meetings of any nature were to be held** in town. This included services of the church. Dr. W.A. Morton, a staunch Southern sympathizer, was determined to keep the church doors open. **The first Sunday morning the order was in effect Dr. Morton came to the meeting house and opened the doors** preparing for the morning service. The members showed up for worship service as usual. Word of this action spread rapidly through town, reaching the ear of the commanding officer. The latter **immediately sent an aide to the meeting house, bearing orders that no services were to be held.** The soldiers rode up the church, found Dr. Morton, and said, **‘I have orders from the officer in charge of the community that there be no meeting here today.’** Dr. Morton replied at once, **‘I thank you sir, but I have orders from a higher officer than yours to have services and we plan to obey His command.’** The aide withdrew and services were held, not only that Sunday, but every succeeding Sunday thereafter. When word reached other members of the community that the [Lord’s] Church had met they too decided to meet the next Sunday. This group was restrained from meeting, however, because the officer told them that, ‘If it was not worthwhile to have services last Sunday, it is not worthwhile to have services today.’ Thus, the matter was closed, and the Liberty Church of Christ holds the distinction of being the only church to have held services during the period of occupation by the Federal Troops. **If we were issued the same order today, would we close our doors as some of them did, or would we have the courage to stand for the truth as these brethren did and obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29)?**

“Now **when Daniel knew** that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, **as he did aforetime**” (Dan. 6:10). Dear brethren, government orders, statistics, supposition, comments/likes on social media nor any other such thing changes God’s clear PATTERN (Heb. 10:24-25, Acts 20:7). Let us say, as did David, “...neither will I offer...offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing...” (2 Sam. 24:24). If you are sick, stay home, get well, let others pray for you. If not, the nature of God’s assembly has not changed. “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Ps. 122:1).