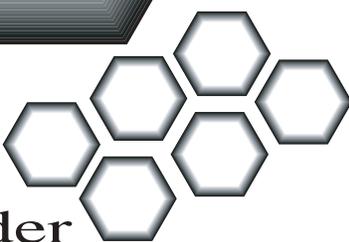


*New
Testament*
ASSEMBLY

A Sweet Design



Ingimar DeRidder

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God designed the church. He is the Author and the Architect. He is the Founder as well as the Foundation. When God raises up a new assembly it is a beautiful and sweet thing. “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good.”

From the original group that spilled out of the upper room into Jerusalem, the New Testament Church thrived as it hived-off again and again and spread across the world. There are six important elements that make an assembly authentic and healthy. This short study examines the original paradigm as found in Acts Chapter Two.

“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine, and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42). Many see four elements, I see six. I see faithfulness in the beginning and fruit at the end. One of these deals with the heart and the other with the harvest. We enter the church when we are born again. Conversion is not the same as commitment, but it is clear that until we make a commitment faith remains an academic thing rather than actual. Likewise, being part of a local assembly involves a measure of faith and commitment to a particular work, group, or gathering which makes one part of that body. When commitment wanes I worry about a marriage, or a football team, and to this we might well add the assembly. An assembly is a group of believers committed to Christ and the growth and spiritual health of one another.

I end with fruit. A healthy specimen can reproduce. God is responsible for spiritual and physical conceptions, but people have their part in both. I hope that focusing on these six main elements will encourage the church and each of its members.

The Faithful.

And they continued steadfastly.

We cannot continue what we have not begun. The church and the Christian each has its Genesis. The church if anything is a community of the faithful. Each member of the body has begun a journey that began with a positive response to the injunction of Jesus to “follow” Him. Of all the things the universal church has in common, this is the common denominator: follow Jesus.

Andrew, Peter, Matthew, John each “*continued steadfastly.*” This can be called “faithfulness.” When we come to the place where we find we can believe in Jesus, it is called faith. When we come to the place where God can trust us, it is called faithfulness. It is the faithfulness, it is the continuing that holds the church and the Christian life together with a kind of spiritual glue some might call grace. Colossians 1:17 gives credit where credit is due. It is Christ who “holds things together,” but that is from heaven’s perspective. For our part, there must be faithfulness. The church involves commitment.

“And they continued steadfastly” is at the heart of every successful story. Many pages of the ship’s log of Christopher Columbus seem uneventful and perhaps boring as it contained a simple and repetitive entry “continued westward.” Day after day on the empty and open sea Columbus simply “continued.” In so doing he made history.

The freshman class of every university is the largest. The senior class is the smallest. Many never finish what they start. In millions of dark closets there are silent guitars, purchased with good intentions by someone who wanted to make music. For a million different reasons now it sits abandoned by people who never followed through and learned to play. Living the Christian life is learning to “play,” and that requires commitment and someone who will “continue steadfastly.” Not everyone continues. Paul said, “*Demas has forsaken me.*” (2Tim 4:10).

Worse than un-played guitars, there are many sad cases of individuals who said they wanted to “follow Jesus,” but for some reason (too many to mention) have given up and quit. “*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*” (Jn. 6:66). It is pointless to discuss if these were “really” disciples or not. No one but God is able to measure or weigh men’s hearts. That is a science too spiritually complicated for mortals. “*And they continued steadfastly...*” It is enough to know that the *they* of Acts 2:42 were the real and genuine. It is up to me to make sure that I am real and genuine. It is ours to make sure that we simply “continue.”

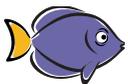
No one should be under the illusion that “continuing steadfastly” is going to be easy. Just read and witness what happened to those who tried. They were persecuted, hated, rejected, some arrested, and some killed. There will be, said Jesus many “false professors.” We do not follow them because we do not follow men. We follow Jesus. Those who follow Him make up the real church, but even they really cannot be counted on this side of the finish line. Those who “*endure to the end shall be saved*” (Matt. 24:13).

Now before anyone panics or begins to despair about “enduring,” let us be clear that “continuing steadfastly” is not “will power” as much as God’s power. Paul said “*Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6). Then he goes on to explain how Grace and the Christian life works. “*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Phil. 2:13). If you could look under the hood (so to speak) of a Christian life, you would see that it is not “you,” but “*Christ in you*” that is the hope of glory.

A New Testament Church is an assembly of believers who have begun and, in faithfulness, continue steadfastly. Have you made such a commitment? Have you stepped out to follow Jesus and found yourself along side others who also are following him? Have you joined the *Ekklesia* (the called out assembly) leaving the ways of the world to follow Christ unto the world to come? Have you come to the place in your life where you can fully place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? That is faith. Can He trust me? That requires faithfulness. The Bible tells us what they were specifically faithful in: Doctrine, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread and in Prayer. For these God is looking for faithful men (2Tim. 2:2). Without faithful men the local church will not continue.

Look up the following verses and answer the questions.

1. The Church has been blessed with many good and gifted leaders. Denominations are sometimes born when men follow men (even good men). Who do we follow? (John 1:37).
2. How does every Christian life and journey begin? (John 1:43).
3. The Christian life is a spiritual endeavor. From where is its origin? (John 1:12-13)
4. How does Paul describe the Christian life and responsibility in 1Cor. 4:1-2?
5. What is the spiritual counsel Paul give to Timothy in the following verses? 2Tim. 3:14; 4:1-7; 1Tim 6:10-12.



The Faith

“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine.”

This refers to what we call “the Faith.” The Faith here is not quite the same as “faith,” if by “faith” we mean our response and acceptance of the grace of God. “The Faith” here is rather the body of truth upon which our faith is founded. Our faith rests and is built upon “the faith.” The body of truth called the “Apostle’s doctrine” is simply the Word of God. *“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom. 10:17).

This is important because Christianity cannot rest on “feelings” or “sentiment.” The Christian life simply believes God’s word. Therefore it becomes the believer’s passion, it becomes faith’s passion to hear God’s word, embrace it, and stand on it.

The last words of the Lord Jesus to the New Testament Church were to *“Go ye therefore and teach all nations,”* that is to *“make disciples of all nations.”* We have been commissioned to both keep and deliver God’s word to the world.

For the believer the “word” is everything. What air is to the lungs, what food is to the stomach, the word is to faith. The word is everything. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”* Before there was anything, there was the Word. Jesus said *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt. 24:35). The Word is the beginning and the end. The Word is Jesus.

The *“Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”* (Jn. 1:14). The New Testament is the account and story of what people did with the Word. It is as simple as that. Some believed, received and followed the Word. Others ignored, rebelled, rejected it, and tried to erase the Word. The Word lived on earth for some thirty years and then gathered around Himself disciples. He gave them His Word. He said *“It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”* (Jn. 6:63). When multitudes found the demands of following Christ too difficult and were more interested in their stomachs than their souls they rejected Jesus. At this important juncture of His

ministry He turned to His disciples and asked, *“Will ye also go away?”* Peter responded by touching the heart of the issue. He said, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life.”*

Peter understood that it was the “words” that captured him, it was the “words” that fueled his faith. Everything is determined by our response to the Word of God. This sheds light on the meaning and significance of an important principle pulsing like a heartbeat in the New Testament Church: *“They continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine.”* The “doctrine” is what we believe. What we believe is the Word of God.

The early church was faithful to gather together around the word of God. At the end of his life Paul said *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”* He did not say, “I have kept my faith.” That is too subjective. I am not quite sure what his or “your” faith is. I do, on the other hand, have no question about what “the faith” is. I must keep God’s word. I must keep the faith.

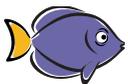
The faith involves what the word says about life. In His prayer after the Last Supper, Jesus said to the Father, *“I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them.”* (Jn. 17:8) Again, everything depends on what we do with the Word. Do we receive it, believe it, obey it, or not?

The church is a group of people who have received it, believed it, love it, live it, and declare it. Jesus said *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”* (Jn. 14:15). Paul told Timothy to *“Study to show thyself approved unto*

God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2Tim. 2:15). And also that, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, for instruction, in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2Tim. 3:16-17).

Doctrine is not a dusty, dead or lifeless thing when it is seen as the Word of God. It becomes dead when too much of men’s word’s are mixed in with it. A New Testament Church is one in which large portions of God’ word is served up and taught rather than the spiritually empty words and ideas of man. Faith wants to know one thing, “what does God say?”

1. Notice the advice Paul gave to a young preacher named Timothy. What was it? (2Tim. 4:2-5).
2. How is “faith” somewhat different than “the faith?” (Rom. 10:17).
3. Notice Mary’s response and Peter’s response to Christ’s word. How were they the same? (Lk. 1:38; Lk. 5:5).
4. What is the right response to hearing of the word of God? (James 1:22; Acts 2:41; John 2:5).
5. If doctrine means teaching what should the Church be doing? (Eph. 4:11)



The Family

“and fellowship”

The church is a spiritual family. God is our Father. We are brethren. Jesus was once told that His mother and brothers and sisters were looking for him (wanting to take Him away from his mission) and He pointed to the faithful follows. *“And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, ‘Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.’”* (Matt. 12:49-50) It seems that few relationships are more intimate than that of our family, but earthly, biological families are temporary temporal things. The spiritual family of God is eternal.

“and fellowship.” The word “fellowship” in Greek is the word “*koinonia*” which means association, communion, fellowship, close relationship. It also means generosity and participation and sharing. That describes a New Testament Church. Although we are all saved and become Christians “one at a time,” there are no Lone Rangers in God’s program. The church is a collection of once lost souls who have fallen in love with Christ and gather around the place where He is the center. *“Where two or three are (have been) gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* (Matt. 18:20). The closer we are to the Him, the closer we are to the center, and the closer we are to one another. Our fellowship with each other is only a by-product of our fellowship with Him. That is exactly how John explained it. *“That ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”* (1John 1:3).

When we try to “fellowship” with each other without first fellowshiping with God we are more likely to have a social club than a spiritual assembly. Someone said that the oneness we enjoy is simply the result of the Spirit of Christ in me uniting with the Spirit of Christ in you. Because of Christ we have a “close relationship,” we have a purposeful “association.” Because of Christ we have a unique and special “communion.” Because of Christ we are a family. We call each other “brother” and “sister, and “we are “brethren.” The moment you take another “family name” you exclude others. By taking a denominational name you narrow the circle to those who “take your name.” This is unfortunate. It was not so meant to be. *“Where two or three are gathered together in my name...”* Take any other name and you divide the church. Jesus prayed in the garden that we would be one (Jn. 17:22).

“Fellowship” describes an association. A church, like a body, must have “many members” in order to function properly. Each is associated with the whole. One sees, one hears, one touches. For this reason, the church is not one person. In a body each part has its place and its function. God has equipped the church with many gifts and gifted members. Each adds to the function of the whole. Ultimately the greatest gift given to the church is the gift of love. *“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”*

When talking about “fellowship” we are talking about love. Whether it is seen as communion, or sharing, or communicating to one another, in the church, love is the underlying force and principle. Primarily it is a love for God, but this love manifests itself in loving those around us.

In Galatians we read of Paul and Barnabas receiving the *“right hand of fellowship.”* (Gal. 2:9). This is no secret handshake, but simply a welcoming of them into the fellowship of a local church. They joined nothing, but by seeking to fellowship with the people of God they enjoyed all that being part of a family entails.

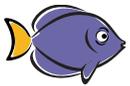
Paul also speaks of a *“fellowship of his sufferings.”* When we identify with the family of God we are as likely to make as many enemies as friends. Being in fellowship with Jesus and those who follow Him, sets us apart from the world. *“And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”* (Acts 4:13). When Peter was discovered warming himself by the enemies fire it cause quite a stir. He had no business being there. Fellowship is as much about not being with as it is being with. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with*

unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion that light with darkness?” (2Cor. 6:14).

Fellowship is more than having “pot-luck” suppers, or singing off the same sheet music in the choir. It means standing with a holy God in an unholy world. Jesus said we cannot serve two masters. James said “...*know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God?*” (James 4:4).

Only those who have been born again can be part of God’s family. “But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name.” (John 1:12). It is only those who are part of the family of God who can bow their heads and pray as Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Our Father...”

1. How does someone become part of the family of God? (John 1:12)
2. Who did Jesus say were his brothers? (Matt. 12:49-50)
3. What happens to the family when a group takes a denominational name? (Matt. 18:20; Acts 4:12; 1Cor. 3:4)
4. What are the responsibilities of being in a family? (Rom. 12:5; 1John 2:9-10; John 13: 35)
5. What does James teach about the new relationship we enjoy in the New Testament Church? (James 4:4)



The Feast

“breaking of bread”

Never was there a more important table set than this one. It is the Lord's Table. In the middle of every home there is a table. It is a focal point and a gathering place for all the family to congregate. Each family has its own table and there is a rightful place for everyone. The youngest and the oldest alike must eat. There is enough for all. Should a place be empty, everyone would notice.

The center of the Christian experience is not visiting some tomb, but sitting at a table. Jesus left the church a simple and plain request. He said, *“Do this in remembrance of me.”* Just before He went to the cross to die for our sins he gathered his disciples together in an upper room and left for them a “memorial” to remember. The Last Supper became the prototype of what we call the Lord's Supper. Some attempt to split what they deem to be a fine hair and differentiate between the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Table. Problem with that is it looks too little at the Lord. We are not to see the table or what it holds as much as the one it hails.

On the night in which our Lord was betrayed, even while the shadow in the valley of death was looming large and the night was growing dark, Jesus, the light of the world, would leave the church a symbol that would shed light on the work of the ages. Upon the table were two simple elements that speak of his submission and our remission. The bread he said represented his body, that is his life, his living for us and before us in this world a perfect life. He was the bread that came down from heaven.

As we take the bread, break it and pass it from one to another we remember how he came as a servant, submitted himself to the Father, *“became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* (Phil. 2:5). Bread is the symbol of life which He gave for us. When we see bread our mouths begin to water. Jesus said, *“blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.”* Too be sure the “grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die” if it will one day be bread (and yes, be milled, and kneaded, and

baked in the oven) but primarily it is a symbol of His life. In this case, it is his life given for us. The second symbol is that of the cup of wine. The wine reminds us that salvation required more than his life, it required his death and the shedding of blood to wash our sins and guilt away.

We are saved by the blood of the crucified one. There are many thoughts about the bread and wine that are deeper and broader than these two. As they come to mind they may all be profitable as long as we keep in mind that he said *“in remembrance of me.”* In the symbols we do *“show the Lord's death till he come.”* (1Cor. 11:26).

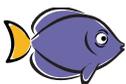
There are hundreds of illustrations, types and symbols in the Bible. None more precious than these two, the bread and cup. The fact that we are welcome to partake of these elements should compel us never to miss a meal. Of all the activities performed by the church none is more precious than this. It is not a time for sermons. It is not a time for teaching. It is not a time of ministering to each other. It is a time of worshipping Christ by remembering Him in his death on the cross for us.

There is nothing supernatural, or sacred in the elements. They are merely reminders, they are pictures. The invisible God became visible in Jesus. The only picture we have of him is here. It is in the elements and all that they represent. The bread never becomes anything but bread and the wine is never more. This is no more a sacrament (if a sacrament communicates grace as some say it does) than bowing to God in prayer, or giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty. I do not like to call it a sacrament as much as a symbol. It is an ordinance. He asked us to do it.

Sometimes God may ask us to do a hard thing. Sometimes He might ask us to do a difficult thing, or dangerous thing. Here he asks us to do a simple thing. I cannot imagine God asking someone to do something large if they are not willing to do something little. Yet many places remain empty each Sunday. The bread is there enough for them as well the wine, all as tokens of his love and sacrifice and some choose to abstain, some choose to do other things. Could the absence also be a sign and symbol that something is dangerously wrong with someone's profession? We can only wonder.

The oversight of any assembly would do well to note the vacant spots as suspicious spots that may speak to the health of the local body.

1. Read the account of Matthew (Matt. 26:26-29) Mark (Mk. 14:22-24) and Luke (Lk. 22:19-20). How important is this "Do this" in the spiritual life of the believer?
2. What did Jesus say about the hearing and doing of His word? (John 13:17)
3. Discuss how the Lord's Supper is not the same as the Passover (John 13:1)
What are the similarities and what are the differences?
4. While we may remember many things about Jesus as we partake of the elements, what are they primarily supposed to remind us of? (1Cor. 11:26)
5. What promise is found in 1Cor.11:26 that prevents the remembrance meal from becoming morose or morbid?
6. If someone is not faithful in little things should he be given responsibilities in larger things (Lk. 16:10).



The Force

“and in prayers”

Nothing looks more innocuous than a saint on his knees praying, yet here is the secret of a mighty church. Prayer is the force behind every victorious Christian. Prayer is the power line that stretches from the believing heart all the way to heaven. Satan will do anything to stop us from praying. There are so many other things to do in the church that if we are not careful, we will be disgruntled Martha's working in the kitchen for God, murmuring with every cookie we put in the oven. The work of the church is spiritual work, and there can be no spiritual work without prayer.

For every reason you can think of to pray, you can think of ten reasons not to pray “right now.” Every assembly should have a regularly scheduled prayer meeting. As individuals we should have certain designated times set aside for prayer and fellowship with God. While it is true that we should constantly be in communication with God, the reality is that the prayer meeting is the heartbeat of the assembly. To know the healthiness of an church one need only listen to its prayers. Are they feeble, are they few, are they self-absorbed? Is there much praise, thanksgiving, adoration, and joy as the assembly collectively speaks to God? Are more prayers about the physical than the spiritual? Is there more heart burn than burning hearts? More about hang nails than halos? Is there more fear than faith?

We will never be greater than our prayer life. There is nothing more frightening to the forces of evil than the sight of a saint that understands the force of prayer. Prayer is the conduit, channel, the ladder into the heavens on which angels ascend and descend. Prayer is the beginning of miracles and the backbone of Christian courage and character.

When Ananias had his doubts about Saul being converted, God pointed to a kneeling figure than must have made Hell itself tremble as God said, *“behold, he prayeth.”* (Acts. 9:11). When the Church was born on Pentecost, it was born in the midst of prayer (1:14).

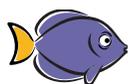
Prayer was a centerpiece of the life of the Lord Jesus. *“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”* (Mk. 1:35). Again and again we watch the Master steal away, fall on his knees and talk to His Father. What a privilege is found in prayer and what a power. If we only knew what force can be unleashed by prayer we would pray more. The church needs to pray. A prayer-less church is powerless church. When the disciples struggled with the demon at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration and enquired as to the reason for their lack of spiritual strength against evil forces, Jesus pointed to the need for prayer (and fasting).

The Lord gave the disciples a template for prayer in what we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. It touches every aspect of the spiritual life and should stir us to pray. The *“Our Father which art in Heaven...”* puts life into proper perspective. The “our” reminds us that life is more than “me, myself, and I.” Immediately we see others. The word “Father” not only puts things in perspective, but should bring a sense of “peace” to our hearts and remind us we are loved. We are not in charge, we are just children. *“If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”* (Matt. 7:11). The words, *“Which art in heaven”* should cause the church to look up. This world is not our home, we are only passing through. And so it goes, on and on, the Lord's prayer should teach us to pray.

The idea is not to repeat some special prayer or follow some formula. The best way to pray is to pray. Holding classes on prayer, listening to lectures on prayer, reading lessons (like this one) is no substitute for the simplest prayer. We need to stop talking about prayer and pray. Nothing of any real spiritual significance happens until someone prays.

It is the power, the force the energy that runs like electricity through the assembly. It is also the sweetness. It is a sweet communion with God. The Christians often sing “Sweet Hour of Prayer.” It seems that the author of that song had discovered just how sweet prayer can be. Solomon said “*Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel.*” (Prov. 27:9). In prayer we approach our heavenly Father, but we also approach a Friend with a capital “F” as Jesus said in the parable of the loaves at midnight (Lk. 11:5). Many come to us with needs we cannot meet, therefore we need to often go in prayer to this Friend.

1. If we follow Jesus, where will He eventually lead us? (Mk. 1:35)
2. What were the believers doing in the upper room while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 1:14).
3. What were they doing in Acts 1:24 and why were they doing it?
4. Why were the disciples praying in Acts 4:24?
5. What happened at the prayer meeting spoken of in Acts 4:31?
6. Why were the Saints praying in Acts 12:5?
7. Why did the early church pray so much and what was the result? (Acts 12:12; 4:29,31)?



The Fruit

The New Testament assembly was fertile. *“and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* (2:47). A healthy body reproduces. This is the most basic fact of life. It is seen in biology and in spirituality. The church is always one generation away from extinction. Rachael’s cry is the cry of the church: *“give me children or I die.”*

The New Testament church spilled out of the upper room with the startling message that Jesus Christ had arisen from the dead and that He is both Lord and Christ. These Spirit-filled Christians began to speak *“the wonderful works of God”* (Acts 2:11). This message captivated the crowds. *“Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (2:21). Peter delivered a powerful sermon. Thus began the *“foolishness of preaching.”* The result was that many were *“pricked in their heart.”* They asked *“what shall we do?”* (2:38). The answer was *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* The results of such preaching were startling. Thousands of people were born-again.

To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. A healthy church involves In-Reach, Up-Reach, and Out-Reach. As the disciples paused and waited for the promise of Pentecost, the Lord explained that his goals and plans were much larger than the disciples had imagined. They would have been content to remain in Jerusalem and enjoy the benefits of salvation. As the Jews seemed to lose the sense of “why they had been chosen,” so the early church might very well have fallen into the same error. The vision must be larger than Jerusalem. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* God had big plans for the church.

Jesus promised the disciples *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8).

We have just experienced a horrific ice storm here in North Carolina. Covered with black ice, trees toppled by the thousands pulling down power lines and plunging millions of homes into cold darkness. Emergency Power crews from seven states rushed to the aid of CP&L (Carolina Power and Light Co.) to help restore electricity to a million and a half people huddled in freezing darkness. The job was monumental. Tree limbs and fallen power lines, and exploded transformers had to be replaced.

During the first twenty four hours a few thousand were “back on line,” but most would go for many days without heat, light, electricity, and some without water. Everyone was in the same boat for a little while, but one by one electricity was restored. Soon the population was divided in two: the haves and the have-nots. There were no Republicans and Democrats, no Blacks or Whites, no Rich or Poor. There was just those who had power and those who did not.

Once people got their power back on they were ecstatic and grateful- for a little while. For them, once the power was on, the crisis was over. The storm of the century was over. They sat in their well lighted and heated homes enjoying all the technology of the modern age and went on with their lives. For thousands of others, the darkness continued. Thousands huddled around kerosene stoves (if they were lucky enough to have one) or wood burning fire places, lighting their candles and trying to hear news of some hope being on the way on their battery powered radio.

Now everyone has been re-connected and has received electricity again. However, millions are still spiritually alone in the dark. *“And ye shall receive power...”* It is one thing to have power, it is another thing to know what to do with it. What will the church do with the power God gives it? Will we sit around the family hearth and roast spiritual marshmallows or will we look for those who are still “powerless” and lost in the dark? Will we enjoy basking in the light of God’s word and be unconcerned about the millions who live in an endless night?

When a power crew finally came to our street after four days of Eighteenth Century living, I noticed from the lettering on the side of their truck that they were from the Florida Power and Light Co. They came from far away to help us. They were missionaries on a mission. They wanted to give us back our power.

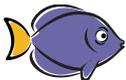
God had to use persecution to “scatter” the church to the four winds in order to evangelize the world. “...and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1). The Prophecy of 1:8 took the ice storm of 8:1 to be fulfilled. Persecution rather than having a chilling effect on the church seemed to set it on fire. They began to fulfill the great commission of going into all the world to make disciples.

Paul seemed to hear a plea with the Macedonian Call. “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” (16:9). Evangelism for the New Testament church was as natural as the longing of a young couple for children. John said, “He came unto his own, but his own received him not.” Yes, this is sadly true, but Paul tells us that there loss was the Gentile’s gain. And John went on to say, “but as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:11:12).

Have we received power yet? Is our local assembly enjoying the light of God’s Grace and the power of the Holy Spirit? If so, we must seek and search for those who are still lost and in the dark. When we do, God will add to the church daily those who should be saved.

The lepers of 2Kings enjoyed the spoils of God’s victory at the gates of Samaria until they were convicted of their selfishness and one said “We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace...” (2Ki. 7:9). The early New Testament church could not “hold their peace.” Peter said, We cannot help but speak the things we have seen and heard.”

1. Who was added to the church and who added them? (Acts 2:47)
2. What was the great commission? (Matt. 28:19-20).
3. How do people hear about the need of Salvation? (1Cor. 1:21; Rom. 10:17, 14).
4. What is needed for evangelism to be successful? (Acts 1:8)
5. Men and women have a role in the propagation of the race, but who is the creator of life? (Ps. 113:9; Gen. 30:1; Lk. 1:13)



Conclusion

The Word of God is likened to something “*sweeter than honey in the honeycomb*” (Ps. 19:10). Jesus is the Word. He must be in the midst of the authentic assembly. He has left us his Word and the promise that He will come again for us. The New Testament church loves the Word of God more than honey.

The Church has been called the Bride of Christ, and she will be one day. This is a spiritual picture of the loving relationship we shall enjoy with the Lord forever. “*How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine! And the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue: and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.*” (SS 4:10:11). What is sweeter than a pure blushing bride standing at the marriage altar?

The promised land was described as a land of milk and honey. Such is heaven to us. But until we get to heaven, we have the local assembly where the Saints gather together around the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to enjoy sweet communion, first with Him and then with one another. “*Oh, come and taste that the LORD is good.*”

Until we are finally leave this world and take our place at the marriage of the Lamb we gather in local assemblies. A healthy authentic assembly is a gathering of Christians who are committed and faithful to Christ, pouring over his many words and wishes both believing and obeying them as we “keep the faith.” A healthy assembly is a family that loves God and one another, and comes to a common table to worship Christ in his own appointed way. A healthy assembly is in constant contact with heaven through the communion of prayer which is a conduit through which God’s power, grace, and guidance flows. A healthy assembly reproduces and enjoys witnessing and caring for the spiritual babies born anew in faith into the family of God. Christ said “*I will build my Church*” (Matt. 16:18).

When it is built His way, Oh how sweet it is!