



**Is House Church...
A glorified coffee klatch?
A private Christian fellowship club?
A place to meet with Jesus corporately?**

As we have more or less disconnected from the institutional Church, in favor of the smaller and simpler gathering, what have we left and what have we joined ourselves to? If we heard Jesus trumpet a call to come outside the camp, what did He call us to?

As I look over the New Testament, and attempt to comprehend the concept of the "Gathered Church," especially in Paul's writings, who appears to be the architect of the gatherings of the saints, I find myself concerned that we who have made gathering changes fail to enter into and experience what he was led by the Holy Spirit to establish in the first Churches.

While no one would reject the value of wonderful times of fellowship, shared java, and times of just hanging out together, is there something intrinsically more than this to the gathering of the saints? I think so. I think Paul thought so, and therefore I'm drawn to conclude Jesus thought so too.

Here's my concern, which I think is also the concern of the Holy Spirit, but you will have to judge if my discernment is "of the Lord." If we are not careful, our desire to be done with the organizational mandates of a Senior Pastor, or the hierarchical controls of an eldership, we will fail to allow for, experience, and fully enter into the desires and purposes of the Lord Himself for our times of gathering.

I know Jesus loves to see us love one another in shared meals, shared coffee, and shared fellowship and life stories, but I'm also very convinced He has an even higher dimension for us to enter into than these, when we gather. If we are no longer interested in a Senior Pastor's idea of how everything should be done, and it is well that we aren't, are we most interested in what Jesus would have us do when we gather? Are we gathering together principally "unto Him," or unto "one another?" Some would say there shouldn't be any difference. They would have us to believe that if Jesus is in each of us, then all we need to do is listen to the Jesus that is seeking to communicate His life through us, whether we're casually talking, eating a meal together, or praying and seeking His face. To this I would heartily agree. He is in each of us, and He wants to speak to us through one another, BUT, is this the same as purposefully "gathering together unto Him?"

In other words, do we run the risk of believing that just because we are believers, and just because we have gathered together, that virtually automatically the intentions of the Lord and the apostles for our gathering together will be accomplished? I truly doubt it. I would hope we could all recognize that while Jesus is seeking to communicate Himself through even the most mundane elements of our times together, there is a vast difference between casual conversation over coffee, and agreeing together to, with great focus, intensity, and passion, seeking the face of Jesus Himself directly, and then anticipating Him revealing

Himself through each of those gathered in a focused way before His holy presence.

In this regard, I believe we must hear a caution from the Lord, that we not allow our times together to become so "fellowshipy" that we fail, with true focus, to call upon the name of the Lord, and enter into the experience of the various manifestations of the Spirit during our times of focused gathering, as outlined and described in 1 Corinthians 14 and Ephesians 5:19.

Are we regularly going deep enough in Jesus, in our times of gathering, to the place where His holy presence begins to minister the prophetic that Paul encouraged us to earnestly seek after? Are we hearing Jesus bringing forth more than just general biblical comments through one another, but genuine spiritual revelations? Are we hearing Jesus sing something that is far more than just a parroting of our favorite Christian CD but is a genuine spiritual song, psalm, or hymn in our times before Him? I believe we are in great danger of having come "partially" out of an old system, but failing to enter into the power potential of the approach Jesus taught the apostles.

In a nutshell, I fear we are in danger of gathering more "unto one another" than Jesus, and more "unto one another" than the "Jesus in one another." If we fail to recognize there is a difference between these two, we run the danger of having our times regress into little more than just Christian coffee klatches or Christian social clubs.

I don't know about you, but when I read Paul, and sense the joy of the potential connection with Jesus when the saints gather, I'm powerfully drawn to it. I love each of you, and I know we all love another, but our times together must become something that is far more "about Jesus" than just that Jesus lives in us and we bring Him to one another just because we got together.

We need Jesus! We need lots of Him. We need to draw near to Him, to call upon Him, to connect to Him, to hear and see Him. If our times together are no longer "The Man" centered, i.e. Senior Pastor centered approach, we don't want to trade "The Man" for "One Another." That just isn't a high enough vision or purpose for our gathering. We need Jesus! We desperately need Him, and I believe He is far more accessible, and desires a far higher degree of Lordship in our times together, than we often tend to experience. If your gatherings are not falling short here, then please ignore the references to "our times." Praise the Lord that He is truly Lord in your midst. It is wonderful I'm sure.

His Lordship, accessed by His Spirit, when we gather together, give Him the access He desires to build His Church, to pour forth His love, to teach us His ways, and create His likeness in us. It is there that we experience Him the most personally and powerfully. After such times in His presence our hearts should be as burning within us as were the disciples who sat before Him in Galilee. Our times together should leave us with hearts aflame for the things He has shown us and done in us. Our nights, after departing from the gathering, should cause us to drift off to sleep on our pillows with our hearts and minds full of the thoughts, passions, and insights of the Lord. If not, then I fear we are missing the true potential for our gatherings. We may have enjoyed great coffee, and the fellowship may have given us sweet feelings, but being transformed in His presence is a goal we must press on for.

Please don't misunderstand me in these things. We need to fellowship. We need to hang out and play with one another. Not all of our times should be heavy and deeply spiritual. We are, after all, a natural people as well as spiritual. My concern is that we will tend to

gravitate towards our naturalness and fail to challenge one another to press in deeply.

As one sage said it "Sir, we wish to see Jesus...." (John 12:21)

So how, in practical and consistent ways do we do this? While Paul doesn't specifically tell us how, he makes it clear, in all his directions for gathering that we need to deeply connect to Jesus. We are to be "spiritual" in our approach to Him. I think generally this means we will want to spend some very focused time in directing our hearts towards Him, seeking to see and hear Him. Our spirits need to become full of His Spirit. If it doesn't boil down to some serious time in focused prayer then I would be uncertain as to what Paul would have anticipated would create this bond and the resultant flow of His Spirit.

As people, prayer does not come easy for us. Our culture calls for activity, ambition, and busyness, but stopping long enough to listen and focus on hearing is not easy for us. Yet, when it comes to gathering it is hard to imagine that 1 Corinthians 14 styled gathering could take place without it. If our times are to be marked by His presence, His power, and His Word coming forth then I believe we are going to have to spend enough time before Him that this takes place.

God help us to set aside some of the "fillers" we use to fill up our times together, and to move into a place of deep seeking and pursuit. If we do He will fill us, and if He fills us we will experience His purposes for our gathering. This is a worthy pursuit.