

# OpenTheo

## Some Assembly Required (Part 1)



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Some Assembly Required (Part 1)", Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of Christians assembling together for spiritual growth and encourages the reconsideration of the traditional definition of "church". He suggests that corporate worship, regularly using one's gifts, and participating in a community of believers can lead to world-changing results. Additionally, he proposes that the church should focus on biblical models of gathering and sharing resources rather than prioritizing institutional needs. Ultimately, Gregg encourages believers to make regular assembly with other Christians a part of their daily lives.

### Transcript

Now, Some Assembly Required is one of the few clever titles I have for any of my series, but it's not original. There was a Christian album by a lesser-known Christian artist. His album was called Some Assembly Required back in the 70s.

I was very impressed with how witty that was, the double entendre. But it's a great title for what we're talking about, because we're talking about the need for Christians to assemble, but Some Assembly Required suggests that there might be some flexibility in what kind of assemblies there are. Just so there's some assembly, and it is required.

I would point out that it says in Hebrews 10 that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, which is the manner of some, he said. So Christians need to assemble together. It is generally thought that Christians need to assemble in an institution that has been with us in Western civilization for a couple thousand years, almost, that we call churches.

And this is true, but defining what churches are is something that perhaps needs to be reconsidered, because, honestly, there's a lot of different kinds of churches that we need to assemble with other Christians, but no question about that. The context for meeting with other Christians can be profitable or unprofitable. I mean, most of us here, perhaps all of us here, are not Roman Catholics, and if we had lived at the time of Martin Luther, we would have found it refreshing, I think, to have an alternative to the Roman Catholic

Church, which was pretty much the dominant way of assembling for Christians for about a thousand years.

In the Middle Ages, there were people who didn't agree with the Catholic way of doing things, but until Martin Luther's time and even afterward, these kind of people were persecuted and didn't really get away with it very long. That's what the Inquisitions were for. You pretty much had to be in the Catholic Church, at least after the time of Constantine or shortly thereafter.

So the style of worship, the kind of assembling, what was accomplished there, what was assumed about it, are things that many of us as Protestants would not agree with. What needs to be understood is that we also might not agree with everything we find in some Protestant churches. I always assume that it's better to be in some church than in none, and I think that we should endeavor to be in some church rather than none.

But Paul told the Corinthians that when they came together, they came together for the worse, not for the better, which might sound like it's not better to be in some assembly rather than none, if the only church in town is one where when you go there, the results are worse than if you hadn't met. And there is such a thing. And of course, churches of many varieties exist.

Some of them are more damaging than others. Some of them have more to offer the Christian than others in terms of nurture and opportunity to minister to others, which is what we should be doing when we assemble, if we can. I have found in my life, and especially the last 30 or more years, that a lot of people are disengaged from any institutional church.

Now, I think when this first began to happen, I was an elder in an institution. I was an elder at a Calvary Chapel in Santa Cruz, California during this period of time, and there were certain families that weren't all that pleased with our church or with any church in town, and they started meeting in their home with their family and maybe another family or something like that. And I remember at the time, this would be back in 1980, probably, that I thought, well, maybe that's the first step toward backsliding on their part.

Sort of what we were told is if someone withdraws from the church, that maybe they don't want to be accountable, maybe they have secrets in their life they don't want others to be able to discover, and by stepping away from the church, they're stepping away from accountability, and possibly the first step on a slippery slope to apostasy or carnality or secular thinking and living. However, as time went by, it became clear that in many towns, for example, I moved from Santa Cruz to a little tiny town in Oregon where there were only eight churches, and frankly, it was very hard to find among them anything a church was worth going to. They're very tiny churches in a very tiny town and very traditional, and I have to say that I could understand if you lived in a town where

the churches you've been to have not really done what churches are supposed to do, how a person might seek other options for fellowship, even outside institutional churches, and it would not be necessarily an evidence that they are backsliding.

It may be an evidence that they have only found in their area churches which they think are backslidden, and that would not be always an arrogant and wrong assertion, because much of the church has, vis-a-vis the early church, backslidden. The early church had many things about it that we don't find in modern churches, as near as I can tell in any modern churches. Now, some modern churches are better than others.

I really like the fact that, for example, that Calvary Chapel are Bible-teaching churches. Not all churches are, and I learned a great deal in four or five years sitting under Chuck Smith in Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, back in the early 70s. I owe a lot to that.

But many churches, they don't teach the Bible, or they don't allow for real fellowship to take place. I mean, they don't necessarily forbid it, but they don't provide it. And so we need to examine, what is the church for? What's the point of church? After all, we now have books and podcasts and radio programs and many other ways in which we can get teaching.

You don't actually have to go to a church to get taught, but there's other things about church that cannot be provided in isolation. Christians are not meant to grow in isolation. Now, if they have to live in isolation, then hopefully they can grow, and it's not impossible.

But that's not ideal. That's not what the Bible assumes about Christians. The assumption is that Christians, whatever they're doing, they're doing as a body, as a group with other Christians, representing Christ and promoting his kingdom collectively.

Now, there are three metaphors of the church that have come up very commonly in the Bible, which kind of underscore what the value is of gathering with other Christians, what the body of Christ is. One, it's the family of God, and this is the most common metaphor in the Bible. It's not entirely metaphorical.

It's rather literal. Christians are born of God, and therefore we have God as our father, and we are brothers and sisters of each other in a very literal sense. And as a family, we experience acceptance and nurture and security, in a sense.

As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, two are better than one. They can help each other out. A threefold chord is even better, and the more the merrier, frankly.

But the family is something where children are nurtured, and that is what the church is supposed to be, a nurturing place, but not just a teaching place. Teaching is important. Any church that isn't teaching, I think, is defective and probably not worth attending.

But even if churches teach, sometimes they don't provide a family environment. They don't provide the kind of relationship that Christians are supposed to experience together. Maybe it's because they're too large.

Certainly some of the big churches we have now are so big that it's very easy to go there for years and years and years and perhaps never see any of the same people two Sundays in a row, just because it's such a big crowd. And even if you do see them, because you tend to sit in the same seat, and so do other people every Sunday, you see them, you might even say hi to them. You might even learn their names.

But in most cases, you don't learn anything else about them during the handshake time after the songs before they sit down for the sermon. I mean, there's an opportunity. You could get to know them.

You could even make appointments to get together for lunch or something like that. It's possible, but not many are doing that, so that a lot of times in big churches, or maybe even not as big, it's not much of a family environment. Now, the Bible says the church is a family, and families are needed.

When babies are born, if they're not in a family of some kind, they die. If they're in a subnormal family, let's say a single mom or a single dad is raising the children, they don't necessarily die, but they also don't always thrive as they would in an ideal two-parent home. And the single parent knows that as well as anybody.

I was a single parent for many years with my children. And so a family ought to be functional, not dysfunctional. And a church family is as capable of being dysfunctional as it is capable of being functional.

And that's one advantage of being in a church. That's one reason that summer assembly is required, is because we need to have family. We need to have the corporate nurture, the corporate encouragement that a family of like-minded people provide, who are all committed to and related to the same Father.

So that's one image of the church the Bible gives. Another one that is given, and very commonly, is that the temple of the Holy Spirit is what we call the church. The church is the temple.

Jesus seemed to imply this in a way, though he had a slightly different angle on it, when he said, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up, in John chapter 2. And they didn't know that he was speaking of the temple of his body. Now when Jesus was here, his body was simply the individual body of one man. But when he ascended into heaven, he became the head of a corporate body.

And his corporate body is as much the temple of the Holy Spirit now as his individual body was. God dwells in people, not in buildings made with hands. And therefore, the

imagery of the temple suggests worship.

And worship is an essential part of human well-being. Human beings, unlike animals, are worshipping creatures. They're naturally worshipers.

If they don't worship God, they'll worship something else. They'll worship money, or they'll worship pleasure, or they'll worship a person, a hero. I mean, they'll worship somebody, their own children, very commonly.

We just are worshipers. Animals are not worshipers. Once they are mature, or once their children have become mature enough to be independent, the animals just go on with their life of spending their whole day looking for food and seasonally looking for a mate.

I mean, that's just kind of a - that's not a worshipping. That's not even a rational existence. It's just what animals are.

We're not animals. We're made in the image of God and made spiritual beings so that we are intended to connect with God on a spiritual level and to worship him. I can worship God at home alone or watching Zoom with a congregation, but that's - I don't know.

I don't know how God feels about corporate worship that's on Zoom. It might be fine. He might be okay with it, but certainly it's not ideal, and it's not normative.

What's normative is for Christians together standing side by side and even face to face to get together to corporately and collectively worship God. And corporate worship is what God has in mind. Even prayer is ideally intended to have a corporate expression, which is not to exclude private prayer by any means, but even the Lord's Prayer.

All the prepositions in it - I'm sorry, not the prepositions, but all the pronouns in it that speak of ourselves are plural. So it's our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Now, it's obvious that there's a group of people here intended to be praying. Now, Jesus taught this prayer to the disciples as a group. They were the church.

The church got bigger later on, but the church corporately prayed. In Acts chapter 4, we have one of their prayers recorded. They gathered together to pray because the apostles had been persecuted and threatened.

And so the whole church came together to pray. Jesus said, where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them. And he said, if two or more of you agree as touching anything, it'll be done.

So he's thinking in terms that there's a desirability of more than one person praying together in agreement, in harmony. I believe that this is normative, and I think that something is missing. If we are simply having our own private devotional life with God, and we're not linked with others who are offering up petitions in harmony and unity as the church, and likewise with worship in general.

The temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is the temple. Peter said that we're like living stones built up into a spiritual house in 1 Peter 2, 5. And so collectively, a stone is not a temple, but a group of stones built into a temple is a temple. And so we sometimes think, oh, my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

In a sense, that's true. The Holy Spirit dwells in you, but the temple of the Holy Spirit imagery in the Bible is usually of the whole collective church is the temple. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he said, do you not know that you, plural, are the temple, singular, of God? And he said that, you know, it's essentially a couple of other times in other places, too.

He said in Ephesians chapter 2 that you, plural, are built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets and Jesus Christ himself, the chief cornerstone, and in whom the whole temple is building, a building that's a habitation for God. I'm not quoting exactly verbatim, but he's talking about how we are a temple, holy temple in the Lord, a habitation for God through the Spirit. He's talking about the church, not just me.

It's not that I'm the temple of God, but the people of God collectively as stones making up a building are a corporate worshipping community and society. And so the idea that we're a family and that we're a temple suggests that we need to have nurture, we need to have a sense of belonging, we need to have a sense of security that comes with being in a family rather than being isolated, but we also need to be a worshipping community. And the third image that everyone knows about the church is it's the body of Christ.

And this image that Paul introduces in 1 Corinthians 12 for the first time, he introduces it in the context of gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are abilities and assignments that God's Holy Spirit gives to each one for service to the rest of the body, service to God, but to the rest of the body also. Actually, it's very clear that God counts service to his people as service to him, which is why Jesus said, in as much as you do it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. And the body of Christ has these different gifts.

Collectively, they make up a whole body. Every member of your body has a function to perform, and each one, if it just focuses on its own function, does it faithfully alongside all the others, you'll have a normal body that functions as it should. And so if you're all alone, if you're just worshipping God alone, and maybe you go out witnessing once in a while or something, which most people who are alone don't, but maybe you do, in other words, if you do some kind of Christian work, even though you're not associating with other believers, you simply cannot, as an individual, represent the whole body of Christ.

When the whole body of Christ comes together, Paul actually refers to this in 1 Corinthians, when the whole church comes together, then they can act in concert. And Paul talks about how many people should speak in tongues and interpret, how many should prophesy in order. And Paul gives instructions about the use of the gifts in the meetings.

But the gifts of the Spirit are not all for functioning in the meetings. The gifts of the Spirit often are things like service. The gift of serving, in Romans chapter 12, and the gift of giving, and the gift of encouraging, and the gift of leading, and the gift of showing mercy.

Now, some of those things can be done in the meetings, but I think most of that is done outside of meetings. At least in my life, even though I go to meetings, most of my giving is one-to-one with people, not necessarily at a church meeting. They might be, but they might not be.

It's something that's a whole life style. If you have a gift of giving, or a gift of serving, or a gift of encouraging, or a gift of showing mercy, you could be doing that in all your relationships all week long. Those aren't necessarily things that all happen at the church meeting.

But some assembly, and some interaction, and some mutual participation with other believers is certainly implied. The body of Christ imagery speaks of service, corporate service. I can do certain things.

I have a gift, and I can use it. I could use it even if I was in isolation and didn't ever contact other Christians. I could just be on the radio and talk to people who've never seen anyone.

But actually, the truth is, it's really hard to even really seriously do that, because I can't be on the radio and do what I do without interacting with people. Maybe I could if I recorded a lecture and played it every day, but what I do on the radio is interacting with people. More than that, depending on people, people's gift of giving, people's gift of serving, and things like that, all make it possible for someone like me to do the kinds of things I do.

I'm not independent. No one's independent. The whole body needs each other.

And so it's very important that we have this kind of some way of being in fellowship with other people, in some regular sense, in the sense that there's actually relationships. In the early church, the people, of course, in Jerusalem, all the Christians were meeting together. It says all the believers were in one place and were together and so forth initially.

After a while, when there's too many Christians in one place to actually all be together,

they broke up into smaller assemblies, but they were still considered to be one church in that town. For example, when Paul wrote to Romans in chapter 16, it would appear that he's aware of five different fellowships in Rome, but he assumes that there's only one church in Rome. There might be five congregations, but these congregations are – they see each other as all part of each other.

That's why he could write one letter to the saints in Rome and assume that all the Christians would end up reading it, even if they meet in different places when they meet, because for practical reasons, you can't always meet with all the Christians in town, too many of them. And if you did meet with all of them and not in smaller groups, you probably wouldn't really have the kind of close-knit fellowship that really is desirable. But the point is that the church needs the church.

Individual Christians need to be with other Christians. A lot of people have been disappointed with the church because they go to a church and often they don't get much fellowship. Often they don't have any outlet for expressing themselves or ministering through the gifts they have.

Unless it's putting money in the bag, that could be a gift if you have to give giving. But the truth is, usually church meetings of the traditional sort that we know of are not places where everybody is making some kind of a spiritual contribution with their gifts. Usually a few people are.

There'll be a preacher, there'll be some singers, some musicians, and some people who serve by passing the offering and people who serve by putting money in the offering. And that's usually the extent of the gifts that are functioning in a regular church service. And some people feel that their gifts are not really being used in the church that they're going to.

And sometimes they just feel like there's not that kind of connection with the people that would be truly edifying and mutually upbuilding to each other. So I do encounter a lot of people who call me on the phone, on the radio usually, or email me and say, What church in my town would you recommend? And it always makes me sad because I know the phenomenon of wondering what church now. Because I actually, honestly, I've had a hard time finding a church long term.

Not that I don't get along with people. There's things about my ministry and my own beliefs and things like that that have sometimes frankly threatened certain churches. And I'll be there for a few years and then they'll politely ask me to move along.

And I've done that. I move along. I'm not a troublemaker.

But there's a lot of people like me out there who have strong convictions about certain things. And they're not shared many times by the leadership of the churches. And so you



go out and say, OK, how many of these do I have to try before I can really feel good about committing myself here? Now, those of you who have found churches that are long term spiritual homes for you and your family, more power to you.

I usually when people call me and they're not happy with the church they're going to and they're wondering if they should change, I say, if you can stay, stay. Because after all, you may not like everything that's being preached or you might not like some of the things going on in the church. But in all likelihood, the most important relationships in your Christian life are going to be with people that you meet with regularly.

And after you've been in church a few years, hopefully your lives are intertwined with other people there. And to move along sometimes offends them. Sometimes they feel like you're rejecting them.

Sometimes they just don't want to get together anymore and you have to start over. And people need relationships, long term relationships. And so it's good if you can stay in a good church, but what if you can't find one? And what is it about the churches that make it hard for committed Christians to stay in them? Well, I think it's what the church has become in many respects.

But let me tell you several reasons why it's very important that you be in some kind of fellowship. And I would say some kind of regular group. Now, it's not a sin if you visit around different churches.

But it doesn't really facilitate getting into deep relationships long term with people. If you say, well, there's like four or five churches in this town that are pretty good. I'm not going to commit myself to any one of them.

I'm going to visit around and meet lots of Christians. And that's not a sin. The Bible doesn't say not to do that anywhere.

But frankly, it makes it hard for you to really get to know people very deeply. Because you're not with them that regularly. And that means it's less likely that the congregations are going to know what you have to offer.

Or give you opportunity to minister or to use your gifts because they don't know you enough to trust you. If you stay in a church long enough and you have something good to offer, they're going to know it. And they're going to probably put you to use somehow.

Even if it's teaching Sunday school classes or moving chairs around. Those are ministries. And it's only when people get to know you that they know what you have to offer.

And trust you to offer it in their midst. And you have to appreciate the fact that churches, leaders of churches, have found a lot of people that they don't trust. People come in as

troublemakers.

People come in who've got hidden agendas. People come in who are rebellious against authority. And so they just cause headaches to the pastors.

And sometimes the pastor, when you come in and they don't know you, they don't know if you're someone that's going to be valuable to the church or someone who's going to be a troublemaker. So being in one group of people long enough that they actually get to know you. And get to trust you and convict you so that they want you to minister among them with whatever gift you have.

Usually requires being involved with at least the same core of people long term. One reason to go to church rather than stay home and just read Christian books or watch Christian YouTubes. One reason to be at church is because Jesus said where two or more are gathered, I am there.

So when Christians are gathered, there is a presence of Christ. Now you might say, but isn't he present with me when I'm alone? Well, in some sense he certainly is. But there must be another sense, apparently a better sense.

Jesus didn't talk as if it's desirable. That two would be together or more. And then the expression of Christ, the potential for Christ to minister is greater.

Because there's more people with more gifts. More people with more insights. If you're isolated, there's a good chance that you won't get challenged as much about the way you're living.

About the things you're assuming to be true, which may not be. I mean being around a lot of people who are following Jesus gives you a chance for iron, to sharpen iron. And frankly for more of the types of ministry that different gifts provide to be functioning in one place.

The presence of Jesus. You see, it is Jesus on earth. We are his flesh and his bones.

We are his hands and his feet, Paul said. And that being so, if you're just alone, you may be just a hand or a foot or a bone or a kidney. And really those things by themselves aren't worth much to the world or to anything else.

But you need the other parts of the body. And as you have more of the members of the body of Christ, more of a variegated expression of Christ, he is manifest there in a greater way. That's what I believe.

And he did mean something when he said where two or more are gathered together in my name, I'm there. He obviously means that it was somehow different than when they're not gathered together. Or else why mention it? And the second reason that going

to church is a good idea is because I mentioned prayer is supposed to be corporate.

Not all prayer. You should have a private devotional life, too. But I think world changing prayer is when like minded Christians encouraged by each other and committed as like an army of God on their knees are petitioning God for some particular, frankly, world changing result, which is what the Lord's Prayer is really about.

I mean, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven is a world changing result we're asking for. And I'm sure we all pray that privately. But when Christians pray it corporately, it then has the potential, well, apparently to be more powerful because Jesus said where two or more agree as touching anything, it will be done to the will of the glory of my Father.

And these are statements in both of the last two statements are Matthew 18, ones in verse 21 and verse 19. But corporate worship, too, I mentioned, but more than just the idea that it's kind of inspiring to have a group of people worshipping. There's a statement attributed to Christ.

In Psalm 22, if you know many Psalms or even only a few Psalms, you probably know Psalm 22 because it's one of the most graphic Psalms about Christ in the entire Psalter. That's the one that talks about they pierced my hands and my feet and so forth. The crucifixion of the Messiah is depicted in this song.

It's also the song that Jesus quoted the first verse of it on the cross. We said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It's obviously a song that points to Christ and the New Testament writers have no doubt about that. But Jesus or the author speaking in Psalm 22 and verse 22 says this.

He says, I will declare your name to my brethren in the midst of the assembly. I will praise you. Jesus says in the midst of the assembly, he praises his father.

I don't know if that means that when we're assembled, Jesus is like in one of the other chairs alongside us praising his father. Or if the assembly itself is his body, him praising his father through our voices. In any case, Jesus worships among the assembly.

And that's one good reason to be in the assembly. Again, Christ is there if people are truly gathered in his name. Another issue is that it says in Amos 3.7, Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he reveals his secret to his servants, the prophets.

Now, according to the New Testament, the prophets minister in the church for the edification of the church. I don't have a gift of prophecy as far as I know. I've never prophesied.

And that being so, if I want to, if God does nothing but revealing, but he first reveals it to his servants, the prophets, I'd like to be in the loop. I'd like to be where the prophets

might speak. I'd like to be where God might let his people know before he does something.

Especially in times that are uncertain times. If God's about to do anything, and he says, well, I won't do anything unless I first tell my prophets. Then I'd like to be in the place where prophets are.

I know the first time I was in a, frankly, it was at Calvary Chapel close to Mesa. One of the guys who ministered on Wednesday nights tended to prophesy a bit. And mostly at Calvary Chapel, it's not like a Pentecostal church where people get up and prophesy all the time.

But I remember when I had first started going there, I had missed a Wednesday night. I didn't miss very many nights of the week, but I had missed one. And some of my friends at school who were there had said, oh, you should have been there.

Lonnie prophesied. And I remember just thinking, because I'd come from a Baptist background where no one prophesied. I remember thinking, wow, I've never been anywhere where someone actually prophesied.

It's like God spoke. I mean, I was accustomed to preachers speaking about God. But I'd never been in an assembly where God spoke through somebody prophetically.

And I was kicking myself for having missed that service. Well, if God's going to speak, I don't want to miss that. Now, since then, of course, I've been a little more cynical about prophecies because I've been in charismatic circles for 50 years.

I've heard a lot of people who claim to be prophets, and a lot of them are frankly not. And a lot of people prophesy, or they think they're prophesying, and it's really not. And frankly, the Bible warns about false prophets, and the Bible also warns about the need to judge prophecy.

And we need to do that because not all prophecy is true. But where there is true prophecy, and certainly the Bible indicates there is such a thing. And by the way, not just the Bible, but the Didache and the church fathers often spoke about the prophets who'd come to their churches or who were in their churches.

The early church assumed prophets would be in the church, and there'd be prophecy. And if God does nothing but he first reveals it to his servants, the prophets, I'd kind of like to be, like I said, in on that. If God's going to prophetically tell his people what he's up to, it might be good to know.

And so that's a very good reason to be in the fellowship of the church, especially one that believes that there is such a thing as prophecy, obviously, and would allow it. And then, of course, there's the need for just mutual encouragement. And this is more so as

society in general becomes more godless.

When I was growing up, I mean, most of my friends in school were not Christians, but I assume most adults were. I was probably wrong, but my parents were, my grandparents were, all the adults I knew were Christians. And just as an elementary school student, I just assume everyone who gets mature enough learns that Christianity is true.

I still believe that people who become informed enough and are honest with embrace Christianity. But unfortunately, being informed and being honest are not characteristics you find in the same people very often. But I remember thinking that everyone must be a Christian, and because the society I was in, even when I wasn't at church, was a very moral society, where Christian values seemed for the most part to be held.

I mean, not everyone lived by them, but everyone knew what they were. When I was young, you guys, everyone knew fornication was shameful. So the people who actually did it tried to keep it a secret, because they knew it was wrong.

Divorce was considered shameful. Some people still did it, but the society frowned on it. In other words, if you were a Christian with some Christian values, you were living in a society in those days that pretty much supported you in your values.

And if they didn't want to be Christians themselves, they still thought Christians were good people. They still wanted to not cuss in front of somebody that they knew to be a devout Christian, because they honored people. They might have said, well, I don't want to be a Christian.

I don't want my style like that, but if I was a good person, I'd be one. That's pretty much how they thought. We now live in a society where people think Christians are bad people for being Christians, that we are haters.

We're not progressive enough, and we're dragging society down, and we're a blight to be removed, and hardly any of our morals are affirmed outside the church. So going to a church, or going to some assembly of Christians, whether it's a formal church or not, on a regular basis is incredibly valuable in helping us to realize that we're not alone in our convictions. Because when you're at work, or at school, or around your non-Christian neighbors, you're not going to get affirmation of your views.

You're not going to get encouragement of that anymore. Therefore, to assemble with the people of God as an enclave of the kingdom of God is incredibly, potentially, I should say, incredibly uplifting and strengthening, because we need to encourage each other. So that's what the context is of Hebrews chapter 10, and verse 24.

Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, he said, and he says, especially, he says, encourage one another, especially as you see the day approaching. So as time goes on, even being around other Christians is more important than before. Now the

problem is, of course, I've been describing assembling with people in a sense that where you actually have biblical practices and biblical results in the church you're attending, or in the group you're attending.

So the Bible is being honored and followed, and the practicing Christianity, you can't even assume that about churches anymore. For example, something like church discipline. Church discipline is taught and commanded by Jesus, and by Paul, and frankly, even in Revelation.

Jesus is very furious because some of the churches allow fornication to be practiced there. And he's going to judge those churches because they allow Jezebel to seduce his servants in the church, and so forth. Churches today, if Jezebel's there, they'll let her teach Sunday school because they're desperate for Sunday school teachers.

They might even let her in the pulpit. Some of them. Not all churches, certainly.

But the point is that in the early church, discipline of rebels and sinners who are in the congregation was commanded and practiced. Not so much now. In fact, I've heard pastors specifically boast that they don't practice church discipline.

They apparently think it's more merciful or more Christian, more Christ-like, to disobey Jesus about this. And when a church won't obey Jesus, that's kind of their way of saying, he's not our head. And if he's not their head, they're not his body.

The body of Christ is defined by headship. If Christ is your head, you're a member of his body. If a church is following Christ's head, that's an assembly of his body.

But if they say, yeah, Jesus said it, but we don't do that here, and it's just not our practice. Well, they're saying, well, we've got some other head here, and it isn't Jesus. It's our pastor or someone else who really kind of sets the policies here, and it's not going to be Jesus.

And there's an awful lot of churches like that. And that's why it's not always easy to find what we're looking for in a body that professes to be the church. Let me just ask some questions about the primitive church.

I'm one of those who think the primitive church, the apostolic church, was better. Now, some people say it wasn't. For example, Roman Catholics and many Protestants will say, well, we have traditions in the church they didn't practice in the early church.

Because, I mean, the church was – that was an infant church. That was an infant church, and as it grows, it develops, changes, improves. And so there are some who are not ashamed of the fact that they do not practice New Testament church practices in their church.

They actually think that's to their credit. I'm more of the view that the early church under the apostles was the purest, most obedient kind of church. Now, I'm not saying they didn't have any problems, but their policies were the apostles' policies.

These guys had been trained by Jesus personally. They hadn't gone to seminary or church growth seminars or things like that to teach them what policies to adopt. They learned directly from Jesus, and the first century church learned directly from the apostles.

So I actually - I see it more as the purity of a spring coming out of the ground, and as it flows through history, it picks up silt. It picks up dirt, and it's purest at its source, and it's more inclined to become corrupted as time goes by. In my opinion, that's what church history has demonstrated.

So I'm kind of in favor of the early church's concepts about church. Now, they had things to learn too. I mean it surprised them fairly some years on into their early life to learn that Gentiles would be included.

They didn't know everything on the day of Pentecost, but the apostles, as soon as there became an issue of Gentiles wanting to be part of the church, they had a council about it and decided, okay, that's good. I mean they didn't know everything, but they didn't resist anything that's good. They were learners.

Jesus had said to the disciples, I have many things I would like to tell you, but you're not ready for them yet. He said, but when the Holy Spirit comes, he'll lead you into all truth. So as the Holy Spirit led them, they learned things like, okay, the Gentiles are in this too.

But there was never a time before that that they were rejecting Gentiles. They didn't know any Gentiles who wanted to be in the church. The whole church was Jewish for years, and it was all in Jerusalem.

So as soon as the issue came up of Gentiles, they went to the Lord about it and said, okay, this is something we haven't really considered, but we're for it. So to say that they didn't know as much as we do would be true in some areas, but it doesn't mean they were less pure or less mature necessarily than the modern church. I think it's more likely that the church has backslidden from them rather than has improved over them, as some people assume to be so.

For example, almost all modern churches believe that there's a particular day that church should be held. Some of them believe it's the Sabbath, which is Saturday. Others believe the Sabbath has changed to Sunday, and therefore it's still the Sabbath, but it's Sunday now.

Others don't believe Sunday's the Sabbath, but they still think you should meet on Sunday, and maybe you should. It may be the most practical time for most people. Our

society has been set up so that if people have any days off work, more often than not, it's on the weekend, and so Sunday becomes a logistically good time to meet.

But the idea that you have to meet on Sunday and that Sunday is somehow a more important day for meeting than other days of the week is strictly a church tradition. It dominated the churches for centuries. I think we live at a time now, just in the last generation or so, where people don't assume as much about that.

But Sunday, go to church, is really the tradition of Christianity for most of the last several centuries. And they met whenever they could, daily. We read of the early Christians meeting daily together, breaking bread, fellowshiping, eating, praying.

In other words, church was a life. It wasn't something they'd tack on once a week to their ordinary secular life. They were always church.

Sometimes they gathered as a church, but when they weren't gathered, they were still church wherever they were, but they weren't meeting as a church. But meeting as a church was something they did as often as they could. In the Jesus movement, I remember Calvary Chapel, where I was going, had church every night, gatherings every night.

And most of us in the Jesus movement wouldn't miss one if we could avoid it. It was my habit to go every night. That one time I missed the prophecy was an exception.

I was kicking myself, the one time I missed it, I missed that. But they met more often because church was more a part of their real life. It wasn't something they took aside from their real life to do something unusual on a Sunday morning or something.

But meeting with other Christians was their lifestyle. They were a community, a family, and it wasn't just, like I said, something added on one day a week, which was quite unlike the rest of their week. It was more like whenever they could, they wanted to be with other Christians, assembled in some way or another.

And they might not be able to practically every day, although the early church did meet daily, but that may not have been the case in all the churches. We're talking about the Jerusalem church at this point. But meeting more because it's more a part of your life is the idea.

It's not like legalistically, I grew up legalistically thinking you have to go to church on Sunday or there's something, I mean, you're going to have to give an answer to God for that. I don't think that anymore. I don't think I have to answer to God if I don't go to church on Sunday.

But if I don't want to be with Christians as often as I can, practically do, many times a week if possible, then there's probably a symptom in me of something that's not as it



should be. Why wouldn't I desire to be together with other Christians as often as possible? In Malachi chapter three, this short book of Malachi actually was written to Israel at a time when the exiles had come back from Jerusalem and they were starting to get a little lukewarm. They were not tithing as they should.

They were not bringing the best animals for sacrifice. They were trying to get away with bringing blind animals to offer to God because they were of no use to them and no value to them. They were getting divorces.

I mean, they were just kind of slack in their religious fervor. But there was an exception. It says in Malachi chapter three, verse 16 and 17.

It says, Now, this is in a book where most of the religious nation of Israel, which by the way was the church of Old Testament time, was carnal, was vaxxed with, was lukewarm, was a robbing God, God said. I mean, he had some serious objections to them. But there were those who feared the Lord.

Nonetheless, there was a remnant. And they sought to get together with each other and speak with each other and fellowship with each other often. And God says he sees that.

He sees that their hearts are for God. And he's going to remember them when the judgment comes and he burns the house down. He's going to gather them like jewels are gathered from a burning house.

You're going to take what you value out for safety. And that's what he said he would do with those, that remnant who were faithful and who longed to be with each other. People who are really lovers of God love to be with God's other children because you love what God loves.

If you love God, you love what he loves. And he loves his kids. And so that's why they got together as often as they could.

Many times it was daily. Where did they meet? They didn't have church buildings back then. They met wherever they could, but mostly in houses.

It's not like there was some rule that they had to meet in houses, but that's the most practical thing to do. You don't have to pay rent on a church building if you're meeting in houses because, or you don't have to buy one, because somebody already owns the house. It's already being paid for just by a family living in it.

And to open it up as a fellowship center of some kind is a good economy. It also is the case that houses can only house limited-sized gatherings, which means that they're likely to get to know each other in a smaller group. It's also the case that a home is a home.

It's a family dwelling, and therefore the feeling in a home is much more of a family feeling than a religious institutional temple-like feeling. So those were no doubt some of the reasons they chose to meet in homes. Not that they didn't meet in bigger venues sometimes.

I'm sure they did in the temple rooms and things like that or in the school of Cyrenus. But most of the churches appeared to have met in homes, and they didn't have church buildings because God didn't dwell in buildings made with hands, and technically he still doesn't. What did they do? It's interesting.

They didn't hold meetings of the type that we have very often. One of the things that almost all denominations agree on is that the church meeting should be, the center of church life should be communion, or in the Catholic Church, they call it the Eucharist. And yet in the New Testament church, it's not so much that they had a theater gathering and then they'd take a ritualistic communion as part of the gathering.

They met for meals. They met in homes and they met for meals. They had what they called the agape feast.

We can see that communion was taken in the early church in a feast rather than in a theater-seated auditorium because Paul said that some were eating too much and drinking too much. And some were going away hungry and others were going away drunk. Obviously this was not a situation where they're passing around a little thimble full of juice, a little cracker.

This was a meal. And the early church fathers continued to speak of the agape feast. The church was a family gathering.

I'm not against theater seating like we have right here. I'm not against a speaker in the front. I am the speaker in the front many times in many meetings.

Not always because I'm not a pastor of a church, but I think there's a place for that. But that's not typical of how they had church. They did listen to the apostles teach.

They also prayed collectively and they ate together. These are the things they did according to Acts chapter 2 and verse 42. And they fellowshiped.

It was much less like a religious meeting or a formal meeting and much more like a big family get-together like Thanksgiving dinner. And they did take communion, but it was over a full meal apparently. So, it's somewhat different.

It felt different than the institutional churches have become. I'm going to just have to reach a point of taking a break here because we're going to have another hour after we take a break. But I need to stop at a better place.

How were the finances managed in the early church? Well, in modern churches, of course, they take an offering, and I'm not against taking an offering. Many churches assume and teach their audience to assume that they're supposed to give 10% into the bag. And that there's this doctrine of what they call storehouse tithing and that you're supposed to take 10% and give it to your local church.

Well, I think that a lot of people are robbing God if they give 10%. Sometimes the pastor says, if you don't give your 10%, you're robbing God. But sometimes people who are giving 10% are robbing God because God really deserves more.

There is no teaching in the New Testament that says that Christians are supposed to give 10%. But most churches basically teach that that's how the church is financed. And when the finances do come in, where do they go in the average church? Largely to real estate, building programs, salaries, maintenance of the property, and so forth.

Now, some, in a good church, some of it's going to go to outreach, some of it's going to go to benevolence. They're going to be helping some of the poor in the church, and they'll be supporting missionaries. That's very important.

But most churches, that's not the very large part of their budget. At least most churches I'm familiar with. I've only been in the church for 64 years or 67 years, I guess.

So, you know, I haven't seen everything, but I've been around the world and spoken in many denominations. I don't know very many exceptions. The money that comes in in the offering usually goes, most of it goes to facilities in some manner or another, or to salaries.

As far as we know, they didn't have either of those things for money to go to. In the early church, if people were poor in the church, the people who had money would divest themselves of extra property and so forth in order to give to them. We never read of them ever giving a tithe.

They might have. I mean, some people might have tithed. Jesus commended a woman who gave two pennies because of all that she had.

She didn't tithe. And there were other people tithing, and Jesus didn't express any real impression of them being especially impressive to him. But frankly, the money was spent on the church, and in their minds, the church is people.

In our minds, in the institutional church, the church is the institution. And many times a pastor is like the CEO of the institution, and he's got the vision, and people are supposed to support his vision, and that takes money, and so they're supposed to give 10%, and then they can support the leader's vision. I don't read anything of that kind of stuff in the New Testament.

We don't read of the pastors being salaried. I don't know if they ever were. They were supported.

That was a good thing. Paul said if you've received spiritual benefit, then it's no big deal for you to give back something materially to the man, and those who are taught should share in all good things with the one who teaches. But that's not the same thing as saying put them on a payroll and handle it like a secular company where you hire employees, you hire leaders, and so forth.

They might have eventually done that. I don't know, but we don't read of it. And the money that was given was used to help the poor, and no doubt people also gave to the apostles and to the other church leaders who were in full-time ministry, but the point is that a lot of the financing of modern church, and this has been so for almost 2,000 years, I'd say probably for 1,700 years, money goes to support buildings and staff, church staff.

And some might say, well, how do you suggest that the church support these things if it's not from the office? Well, that's between the leaders and God. It's not mine to judge how any particular church uses money. Perhaps they need a building.

Perhaps they need staff. But I think the early Christians, because different gifts will reside in different Christians, I think they volunteered, even the preachers. Jesus said to the apostles, you have freely received, freely give, which I assume means don't charge.

If you're giving something freely, it means you're not requiring to be paid for it. And so I believe that everyone, including the preachers and everyone else who had gifts and ways they served the church, did it as volunteers. That doesn't mean they weren't supported.

I mean, I know this very well because of my own life. I've never been salaried, never wanted to be salaried, but I am supported. There's a difference between support and salary.

Salary is given to you when you're an employee of some group that drafts you a check. Support comes to ministers who are just trusting God to support them because they believe they're doing God's work, and if they are, God does support them. But it can be in unpredictable ways.

The point is that churches now, the finances of churches are often handled like the finances of a secular corporation. And without meaning to be overly critical, some churches are essentially like secular corporations. They're just not secular.

They are purveyors of spiritual goods to their customers, which are the members of their churches, their clients. And they've got a CEO, they've got a board of directors, they've got a building, they've got a statement of mission. I mean, like most secular companies do.

And then they have customers. Now, that sounds very cynical. And if someone thinks I'm saying all churches are that way, I certainly hope that's not the case.

But no one who's been around can argue that that's not the way a great number of churches are. They're purveyors of spiritual goods to a clientele rather than a family of people. And offerings often go to the institution for the needs of the institution.

Now, for in the early church, when people sold stuff and brought it to the feet of the apostles, they distributed it to the poor. And I'm sure a lot more of the ministers lived by faith back then than perhaps is commonplace now. But those are some ways that churches change.

I want to talk to you about how it changed when we come back after a break. And maybe make some suggestions of how a more biblical kind of assembling can be implemented. We'll have to wait until we have another session for that.