

## The Scattered Sheep of the Assembly

1Co 14:40 records "Let all things be done decently and in order." Our God, is a God of order. The voice of the Father (Old Testament) establishes this fact at the outset of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. Num. 1: 51-3:39 records the order that God established for the host of Israel. They were to camp according to their tribes, they were to march in a certain order and assemble and disassemble in a particular manner. There were no options, only one way to obey the strict order God commanded. Num. 27: 15-17. God commanded Moses to put a man to lead the assembly so that they wouldn't appear as a country that had no leader, and to avoid appearing disorganized and without a shepherd. We all know that God led the assembly. They didn't move unless God moved and didn't stop until God stopped. However, the Lord spoke to Joshua through angels, Urim and Thummim, and through prophets to allow him to continually guide his people in the orderly fashion that he chose. What is the point of all of this? Why does it matter how the Israelites camped, or how they were to march or why it was important for them to appear orderly in the wilderness? Because our God is a God of order and doesn't want to look down on his camp and see confusion. What does the Lord see today when he looks down on those who call themselves conservative Churches of Christ? Does he see an assembly of order, or does he see confusion and disorder? The answer is the latter. The so-called Conservative Church of Christ (now apostate), has spiraled from an army of Christian soldiers into a disorderly horde marching out of order into what can only be described as debauchery. This former house of God is no longer recognizable as a legitimate Church of Christ because it has allowed confusion and disorder to defile its once perfect orderly arrangement.

### Micaiah's Vision

1 Kn. 22:17-22. What was this vision that Macaiah saw? At the present level, we saw that Ahab was slain in battle and Israel retreated from the fight. Their leader, their shepherd was killed and they were wandering lost. But the voice of the Father foreshadows the future as well. When was the church in a state that they were scattered? Is it possible that the Lord looks down from heaven and sees a disorganized, scattered assembly without a shepherd? Strife and dissention are caused by heresies, even when it masquerades itself as a method of keeping an assembly unified physically, but not doctrinally. How many churches of Christ exist today with differences in the doctrine and in the manner they worship? It's difficult to find a single local church where every member has the same belief and conviction concerning articles of faith and what have been deemed by the church as doubtful disputations. It is even more rare to find a single local church with the same doctrinal practices as another local church. Is that a picture of perfect unity? No, that is a scattered people. And why is that?

First we must establish, that the sheep fold has become the victim of grievous wolves. Acts 20: 28-30. Paul warned the elders of the church that after the time of the apostles, that the church would fall prey to wolves that would feast on God's flock instead of feeding them at the Lord's command (Jn. 21: 15-17). How does this happen? How does the church fall prey to wolves when they are supposed to be guarded and kept by the elders and preachers? Jn. 10:11-15 describes exactly how this happens. The preachers of the church stopped caring about the wellbeing of the members and began only to care about their own desires (Phil. 3: 18-19). What could cause the preachers of the now apostate church to run from the fold instead of protecting them? Not only does the fear and embarrassment of dividing a church over doctrinal issues lead the church to allow practices that were before never allowed in the assembly, but sponsor

churches, that pay the salaries of preachers of smaller churches control the pulpit by controlling the source of their livelihood. There are many cases of brethren who call themselves conservative Christians that don't believe in practices such as Christmas or Easter, but will receive a salary from churches that do. True conservative churches don't celebrate either; they don't allow the vain philosophy of liberty in matters of opinion within the church's sacred courts! When heresy enters into the church, the good shepherd gives his life for the flock. Now, these hirelings won't even sacrifice their salary, let-alone their life for the sheep. Thus, they have allowed heresy to infect the church. They have also converted the body of Christ into the image of an unclean leper, filled with the sores of a divided spirit. They may not be physically divided, but when the Lord looks down, he sees division, he sees them scattered as sheep without a shepherd. The Bible teaches that there was one individual that was willing to lay down the spiritual life (the fellowship with the universal Church of Christ) in order to oppose the heresy and wolves attempting to devour the sheep.

#### The Lord's Supper.

In the latter part of 1 Cor. 11, Paul speaks about the Lord's Supper and brings in spiritual elements. 1 Cor. 11: 17-34. While verses 23-28 deal directly with the observance of the Lord's Supper, the rest of the chapter is full of spiritual language that deals with much more than the observance of this single act. We know the Spirit has used synecdoche throughout the scriptures, using a portion of his service to represent the whole. Is. 56: 7, Matt. 21: 13, we also know that in the Temple and in the church today, there is more than prayer that is used as a service to God, but the Lord uses prayer to signify the entire worship service. 1 Sam. 4:4, we recognize that the Lord didn't dwell between the cherubim on the mercy seat, and we know that the mercy seat was used to describe the Ark of the Covenant, a part representing the whole, but what dwelling between the cherubims represented was the presence of God with his people. So, in describing disarray and disorder in the Lord's Supper, Paul was also describing disorder and disarray in the worship service. Therefore, in Paul's admonition to the church over the Lord's Supper, he also is admonishing them over the worship service. This is understandable, as the context in 1 Cor. 11: 1-16 speaks of disorder in the assembly. In verse 29, Paul makes reference to the Lord's body. We know that the Lord's body is the church, so again, not discerning the Lord's body is an accusation against those that not only fail to partake of the Lord's Supper worthily, but to those that blemish the body of Christ, that is the church. Why, in verses 18-19 does Paul mention divisions and heresies? This cannot simply mean that there are differences in opinion over the partaking of the Lord's Supper. The divisions and heresies mentioned by Paul contain nuances of eschatological language and judgment. 2 Pt. 2:1-2, 13. Now, the Corinthians are not the fulfillment of 2 Peter, but what it brings to the mind is that the spiritual language Paul uses is a warning to the future the state of the church (now present), when church leaders would introduce damnable heresies into the church's doctrine, teaching lies and opinions from the pulpit. In verse 13 of 2 Peter, we understand that the expression "feasting with us," represents the false prophets eating the Lord's Supper with us, partaking in the agape, the love feast, that is to say, by synecdoche, the worship service, and also alludes to the spiritual Passover as a whole. This is a spiritual reference to the worship service. So while Paul warns the Corinthians about heresies (spots) in the Lord's Supper, the spiritual language of the gospel leads us to understand that this is end-time language and a vision of what is to come to pass in the end-time church. This is not to say that the Corinthians didn't have issues in their assembly or with the literal Lord's Supper observance, but Paul's language in verse 30 leads the reader to understand this is also applicable,

even more applicable to an eschatological vision of the church in disarray. Verse 30 is resurrection language. The Master himself used this language when he described Lazarus's condition. Jn. 11: 11-14. The church in Corinth did not have people dying because they weren't partaking of the Lord's Supper correctly. The members of the church were in a type of slumber and in a spiritual state of repose, (we know that all Christians die at baptism) in hopes of awakening with a "new body" at the Lord's Return (Psa 17:15). Therefore, *some* were not discerning the Lord's body properly! Thus, the Lord did not recognize the offering elevated to him through the worship service after the offense was made manifest and reproved. The so-called Church of Christ remains today in a spiritual stupor, not performing the worship service perfectly as commanded by God while He looks down on it and sees a disorderly service, scattered sheep with no shepherd, as he is no longer their shepherd.

#### Parable of the Wheat and the tares

In verses 31-32 of 1 Cor. 11, Paul again uses eschatological language when he mentions judgment. Paul asks the church to look at itself, because if it does not, it will be judged of God. The former house stopped examining itself, contrary to 2 Cor. 13: 5, believing its doctrine to be perfect; church leaders trusted that all they had to do was to hold on to what they already knew and all would be well at Christ's return. However, it had not yet reached the point of blamelessness, and therefore, they were judged of God. The church itself is judged of God, not the world. The Lord doesn't look to preserve the world, but only looks to preserve his followers. Matt. 13: 24-30. The kingdom of heaven is the church. This isn't a vision contrasting the church with the world, but a vision of the Lord looking into his field, the church, and seeing, the springing up of the seedlings of heresies alongside the true apostolic doctrinal teachings. Just as Satan appeared in the garden introducing lies and sin, so he does from the outset of the establishment of the Church. However, in this case, the "householder" allows the development of both together within the kingdom until the complete gospel fruit is produced and ready for harvest. Only until then, will he apply the sickle. This is a vision of the church not altogether united because of the heresy remaining undetected within its midst until the time of its manifestation and repudiation. It would be at the last days of the Christian Dispensation that "false prophets" would be exposed among the faithful. Even though there is not a physical division between the wheat and the tares, the Lord knows the difference between the two. Just because they dwell in the same field together, does not mean that the Lord has marked them both for salvation. Daniel's vision of a divided kingdom helps to clarify. Dan. 2: 41-45. The iron and the clay, just as truth and heresy, though they were together, could not be bound together. Because of this, it could not withstand the Lord's judgment (a rock made without man's hands). Though not physically separated, they were still divided and ultimately crumbled. The church's fear and embarrassment of division have resulted in the practice of allowing differences on what they call matters of opinion. They claim the Lord has granted them liberty to decide on matters of opinion and the assembly doesn't have to agree. This is erroneous and nothing more than a lazy hireling allowing heresy to disseminate in the assembly and devour the members while they continue to collect a salary and do nothing to further the understanding of the Word. Matt. 25: 24-30. Matt. 24: 44-51. The lazy, slothful servant, that doesn't see the eminent coming of the Lord buries the gospel in the ground where he cannot see it, and allows the church to revel in disorder. This is the same as not caring for the flock, it is the same as abusing them. Many preachers of the former house take a salary from congregations that don't believe the same as they do when it comes to "doubtful disputations" (as they say), yet they still take this salary.

Why? Why are their wages more important than agreeing and keeping the word of the Lord? They no longer care for the assembly, they no longer take the Lord's talent and bring usury to him. They merely eat and drink with the drunken and leave the assembly in disorder before the Lord.

### The Slavery of the Members

The church promises freedom from the bondage of sin to all who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This is undoubtedly true, however, they have forsaken the ways of Christ and have followed after man-made teachings. In Jn. 8: 32, Jesus said "the truth shall make you free" but if the church is preaching heresies and lies, what are they doing? They are putting on the shackles of slavery on the members. 2 Pt. 2:17-20. These men that claim to be giving the church liberty, freedom and salvation are actually feeding the church with lies. How credible can freedom be, when it is offered by another, himself in bondage of sin? Matt. 23: 15. In another aspect, the licentious churches offer their members the freedom to choose whether or not they want to comply with, what are to the true believer, genuine articles of faith. They claim each member has liberty and freedom to decide on their own if they wish to fulfil these acts, such as prayer by genuflection, the women using an artificial covering, men lifting holy hands, etc. They have even go so far as to condone the abominable observances of Christmas and Easter claiming God has given us liberty to decide on our own concerning disputable matters of opinion. There are no matters of opinion when it comes to doctrinal law and articles of faith! While men exalt this observance as "unity in diversity," the Spirit denominates them as heresies and abominable (Lk. 16: 15). To the faithful, this practice is a strange god. There is only a direct commandment and an approved example! This "freedom" to decide on one's own, is nothing more than stocks used to bind the congregation. It is not freedom, it is not liberty. It is a shackle used to appease the itching ears of the congregation and ensure the continued salary of the hireling. What does the Lord see when he looks down at the former house and sees all the confusion in the assembly? Does he see an army of order, marching each to his banner and in step? No, he sees a scattered people and disarray.

### The Vision Seen by a Member of the Assembly

Gen. 18: 20-21. Why did God send his angels to come down and inspect the status of Sodom and Gomorrah? He obviously heard the cry of it in the heavens and knew what was happening? Couldn't he have just peeked down from heaven, sent destruction and overthrown the cities? Why did he have to send angels to inspect those nefarious cities? Why does he often use angels, spies and messengers to inspect and to learn what he already knows? He does it for our benefit in the church. We, the members of the church, serve as the Lord's eyes and ears in the assembly! This process of visitation and inspection represent the "seven eyes of the Lord" that inspect the entire earth, Rev. 5: 6. In short, the Lord sees whatever we see happening in the assembly, and the action that we take accordingly (if in the right), represents Himself acting on his own behalf. Deut. 7: 10. How did God repay all the enemies of Israel to their face? He commissioned a servant, a judge or a king to take vengeance for him (Num. 25: 16-17, 1 Sam. 15: 1-3). Job 40: 6-14; Isa. 59: 16. The Lord's arm exists in the form of his faithful servants. Joh. 13: 20.

Again in the Genesis account we find the Lord is foreshadowing the Christ in the form of a servant, which, in the Christian dispensation represents a member of the church, experiencing and seeing firsthand the cry of the martyrs in Christ calling for the Lord to take vengeance on the shedders of blood, (2 Pet. 2: 6-7; Rev. 6:10; 11: 18). The Lord isn't going to physically come

down and judge the nations. He does so through the body of a faithful servant that he commissions through election. Heb. 10: 5 (which references Psa. 40: 6) puts it as simply and as plainly as can be. Again, Matt. 24:45-47 demonstrates the reward for the faithful and wise servant that feeds the flock with truth and righteousness, not heresy. This vision of the Lord coming down to examine the status of the confusion wrought in Sodom and Gomorrah is fulfilled again when the Lord returns and sees the status of his church in confusion. This is the vision of Micaiah, who sees the sheep of spiritual Israel, scattered with no shepherd as also was accomplished in the last days in a faithful member of the church. This faithful member believed in the commandment of the artificial covering for the woman based on the order of authority established by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11: 3. This established headship places the church in perfect order by demonstrating the proper roles for both genders within and without the assembly. This act of faith has ushered in a new dispensation of judgement against the church. The Lord has seen his once faithful church in disorder and disarray and because of their rebellion, their refusal to change, has condemned them as he did Korah, Jd. 1:11.

### Conclusion

God does not approve of all the different opinions in the church over personal opinions nor the disrespect for explicit articles of faith. The church must be one united body that brings an offering to Him in an acceptable manner. The Lord wants us all with the single, undivided heart. 1Co. 14:33 "For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."