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HOW SHOULD WE DO?

MR. C. T. RUSSELL – DEAR BROTHER IN THE LORD: – I now again send you my subscription for two copies of the TOWER, also the names of two others. I have been thinking that those who get the TOWER here might come together. All that I have seen of the readers seem to be thinking about the same thing. We would like some instructions as to what we had better do. I am at present a Sunday School teacher here in the Church of England....

I shall be very truly thankful to you if you will tell me what we had better do, about holding a service together to study the Word of God.

Yours, &c.,

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DEAR BROTHER: – In answer to your inquiry, I would simply repeat the Apostle's counsel: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." – Heb. 10:25. But don't let any undue stiffness or formality hinder you or others from enjoying the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free. Enjoy your liberty to search the Scriptures, and speak freely one to another, remembering that all ye are brethren, and one only is your Lord.

Meetings from house to house are conducive to free and profitable interchange of thought.

The main object of such meetings should be to build one another up in the most holy faith, to more firmly unite your hearts in love, and to help bear one another's burdens, by your sympathy and by your common sharing of the same sufferings, in your united efforts to preach

the truth according to your ability; and the more actively you are engaged in trying to preach the truth to others, the more interesting will your evening meetings become. The need of such conferences as helps will be felt by all thus engaged.

The only test of Christian brotherhood [R836 : page 5] and fellowship is Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as the one whom Jehovah set forth to be the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Any one who accepts this foundation principle of our faith is ready to build a superstructure thereon. And for the purpose of selecting the proper materials – the gold, silver, and precious stones of truth, and properly fitting and locating them, you meet together.

Order is of course necessary to the accomplishment of any definite purpose, and it is therefore well when a number meet together, for some brother or sister to act as a leader or moderator, and if this duty falls upon each in turn, it may be to the mutual advantage.

Organization, as commonly understood, and as illustrated in the various sects to-day, we could in no sense commend; it is a bondage contrary to the spirit of Christ and the apostles, as well as to their words. Such organization prevents growth in knowledge, as well as hinders the rejection of errors of wood, hay and stubble, already received. It selects by purely human election certain men as the only authorized teachers, and so binds them to traditions, that they can neither walk nor teach others to walk in the path of the just, "which shineth more and more unto the perfect day," while they remain in such organizations. Hence, such organizations are not only not of God, but are radically opposed to God's methods.

To have our "names written in heaven" is quite sufficient; Jesus and the apostles counseled and practiced no more. All the members of the family of God will be able to discern the family likeness without a written description, and the world may know us by our fruits. Our union in Christ needs no bondage but love; it will firmly unite all his

members to each other as it unites them to him, their head, and to the Father.

Accepting God's word as truth, each believes so much of it as his consecrated mind is able to understand by the aid of the various helps provided, including the assistance of fellow members (Jude 20). This is the only kind of organization or union recognized in Scripture. In this organization God can and does make choice of some more than others for the good of all (1 Cor. 12:18-31, and 14:3-12); and such are recognized by their brethren and fellow-servants by the ability which God giveth them to bring forth treasures and things new and old, from the storehouse – the Bible – which will stand the investigation of all and every Scriptural test which can be reasonably applied to it. Thus the Lord instructs, feeds, builds up in most holy faith, and causes the entire body to grow in grace, knowledge and love unto the full stature of the body of Christ.

The apostles at the first appointed deacons and elders in each city to have charge of the affairs of the Church, and to moderate or rule as chairmen of meetings, etc., but they did not constitute a perpetual clerical hierarchy. True, they *appointed* and did not elect these officers at first; but this was probably because the churches were not sufficiently instructed, as well as because the apostles were specially authorized and qualified to do it for them. But it is evident that afterward the members of the body at each place, guided by the spirit of truth, were entirely capable of electing successors to the offices of elder and deacon. The Deacons looked after temporal interests, while the Elders (sometimes termed Presbyters or Bishops) attended specially to the spiritual interests; but there is no evidence (except to the contrary) that the Elders monopolized all the time or authority of teaching the brethren and fellow-members. This is evident from 1 Cor. 12:20,24,25,27-31. All are not apostles, all are not orators, all have not the gift of teaching, but each may and should use the gifts possessed as directed in 1 Cor. 14:26,29-31,33,39,40.

But seeing the danger of human organization, and the tendency to follow present illustrations rather than the method of the apostles, we advise that brethren be chosen for the necessary business merely as such emergency may arise, each using his *liberty* in Christ in the *service* of others; in honor preferring one another, except where all possess about the same talents. Thus, for the little while that remains, we shall look more directly to the Head of the body for direction, being without other authorities and rulers in the body – as it was in his first presence. Let every member, every disciple, look to the one Lord and Head of all.

A simple prayer at the beginning for the Lord's blessing, or if convenient, a hymn also, would be an appropriate opening of such meetings, to be followed with the earnest, united effort of all to arrive at a clear understanding of His truth, by his own appointed means, comparing scripture with scripture, and accepting its teaching in simple faith, however it may overthrow long cherished errors. This every sincere child of God will do; and if any do not, their lack of faith should not weaken the faith or retard the others from progress – growth in grace, and knowledge, and love.

The time should be given chiefly to this work of searching the Scriptures to prove "whether these things be so." In our prayers we speak to God, but through the Scriptures he speaks to us. Then let him thus speak to your hearts and to your judgments, and be "swift to hear." A simple prayer of thanksgiving and a hymn or two of praise before parting, are appropriate, solemn, and impressive, if from the heart; every hymn should be regarded as a prayer in metre.

You say you are a teacher in the Sunday School. I hope you are letting the light which God has given you shine; out clear and strong. Don't fail to use every opportunity to let your light shine, for this is not a Gospel of which you need be ashamed. But in all probability you will soon find that, with a very few exceptions, they will not want your light, but showing their disapproval, will endeavor to have you keep

silence about it. If you are a faithful steward you will not do this. It is your business to let the light shine; and the truth you will preach at any cost. Do it boldly, and it will cost you considerable. It will either lead to the conversion of that congregation to the truth, or it will lead to your separation from them. You will either go out, or they will cast you out. But if the latter course would attract most attention to the truth, and best bring the light to the people's knowledge, that is the way we should prefer, – not to attract attention to yourself, but to the truth, – that even thus you may reach some.

In the case of ministers, the manner of escape from Babylon is necessarily somewhat different. Most ministers are bound by their ordination vows to preach only the doctrines of their particular sect, hence in such cases that relationship must be broken, before they are FREE to proclaim the whole truth, as taught by the Word of God.

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