

Part I

CHURCH MEETINGS

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"In Christ At Colosse"

- Col 1:2

It is bright and early on the day of the Sun, AD 60, in the Roman city of Colosse. I roll out of bed, don a toga, grab a bite to eat and it's off to another day at work. But isn't this day also called the "Lord's Day" by Christians? When is church? Since the first day of the week is a work day, our church meets in the evening, after everyone gets off work. Oh sure, the local Jews all observe Saturn's day as some sort of holy day. Wish we could afford that luxury. Anyway, after a long day, nose to the grindstone, its straight from work to the church meeting! Tired, yes, and dirty, too, but glad to be going.

Our pagan neighbors all gather in massive temples and shrines. Those clannish Hebrews have a synagogue. But we followers of the risen Christ meet in Nympha's house for church. It's the same everywhere. Across town, old Philemon has a church meeting in his home. Over in Rome, Priscilla and Aquila host a church. The apostles say that since the New Covenant has come, God is no longer "into" sanctuaries. Besides, you'd be amazed at the accountability, intimacy, fellowship and learning that having such small assemblies afford! We wouldn't trade our home fellowships for all the temples to Zeus combined!

The main reason we meet on the Lord's Day (I hate the name "Sunday") is to eat supper. However, its no ordinary meal. It is a sacred, covenant meal that symbolizes the coming marriage supper of the Lamb, the wedding banquet, the great feast when Jesus comes with His kingdom! What a time of fun, food, and fellowship it is! We are reminding Jesus to fulfill His promise and to come back. Central to the banquet is a single loaf of bread that represents our oneness in Christ. This same loaf, along with wine, reminds us of Jesus' body and blood. His death on the cross made the forgiveness of the New Covenant possible. So, after a prayer time in which we give thanks and ask Jesus to return, we dig in!

Sometimes all we do is eat and fellowship until late at night, and then go happily home. And that's all right, because our primary purpose for gathering is to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Often, however, after eating, each one shares what he knows from the holy writings, or from his own heart, or brings a song or a prayer. It's a sort of open forum. There's no set agenda, but there are rules. For instance, only one person at a time can address the church. Everything said must be designed to strengthen (build up, encourage) everyone else. No one person dominates the assembly or does all the teaching. You wouldn't even know we had leaders present unless there was some sort of problem

(like an unedifying remark or heretical prophecy). Anyhow, everyone tries to stimulate the others to love and good deeds. Sometimes two or three teach, sometimes no one does. Other times all we do is sing, or pray. You never know what the Holy Spirit has in store for us!

The heathen have a special class of full-time priests. Jesus is the only priest we need, and the whole lot of us make up a nation of priests. Unlike the pagans, there is no "funny business" when it comes to our leaders. They're just regular guys like the rest of us. They don't wear special holy clothes. They work normal jobs like we do (none of our shepherds live off the flock). There is no clergy-laity distinction. Besides, our leaders are more like servants. Of course they help guide and direct the church, but they don't "lord" over us.

Going against our culture has not been without its costs. The unbelievers accuse us of being atheists since we don't construct temples or sanctuaries. They hear us speak of the Lord's Supper and accuse us of cannibalism and orgies. Our references to one another as "brother" or "sister" invites charges of incest. The authorities think us disloyal to the state because we refuse to participate in the state religion. Jesus warned us that it would be like this from time to time.

Well, despite the opposition, God has called us to shine forth like lamps into a dark world. Our churches are little outposts of heaven on earth. We are a holy community, a visible manifestation of the invisible kingdom, a glimpse of the kingdom to come!

- S.A.

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