

they ignore the Lord as the great Administrator in the assembly, and the presence of the Holy Spirit as the only power for true ministry. Hence, not only is the time of all gathered wasted, but the character of the gathering is set aside ; the voice of men and not the voice of the Lord is heard, and the saints of God miss for the time being the direction that they should have for that special moment. We need only to consider all this to see how serious a matter it is to take part in such gatherings, and what dependence on the Lord should characterize those who do so.

But what of those who come together for ministry ? The way in which they come and the object before their minds in being present will most surely affect their gathering together. The meeting that we are discussing which is described in 1 Cor. 14, is a gathering having assembly character, and as such the Lord is there "in the Name of the Lord Jesus". Faith in this great fact is of the very greatest importance ; apart from this, these meetings must degenerate into mere voluntary gatherings of believers, at which it would be far better to arrange beforehand who should speak so that all might know what to expect. This is a

matter which concerns every individual for if the gathering is an assembly gathering it means that "the King holds Court". It means that we are together because it is the Lord's wish and according to His ordering, not because we like to meet our brethren, or like to hear ministry, but because the Lord calls us into His presence ; it is Himself and His will that is prominent and not our brethren and our likes.

If His Majesty the King holds a Court, they are very privileged people who are invited to be present, and they deem it a high honour ; how much more highly honoured are they who are invited to the Court of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, for nothing less than this is every assembly gathering. Every one attending at the King's invitation must be there in court dress according to the regulations. And so all who come into the presence of the Lord should be exercised in coming there according to His thoughts ; not surely in a legal frame of mind, but self-judged, and with preparation of heart by the Spirit to meet Him who is so glorious and yet who is known to us by the love that led Him to die for us. If all who come together are thus prepared, how different will be the atmos-

phere created, and how free will the Lord be to reveal Himself. We are talking now of all present, from the oldest to the youngest, and not of those who minister only. If invited to take tea with a friend, we would endeavour to be neat and clean, and conduct ourselves in his house in a fitting manner, recognizing him as the Head of it, and our host.

But how often do those who are "called saints" gather in the Lord's presence slovenly in mind and spirit, without due preparation of heart, having never looked into the glass of the His word in their homes, or sought His presence in their chambers before coming, and so are totally unfit to speak to Him in His circle, or hear His voice when He speaks in His own place. We urge upon our readers the need of much thought on this side of the question, for herein lies the cause of unprofitable and powerless meetings. Every individual member of Christ's body present at such meetings is either a help or a hindrance, and none can escape the responsibility that rests upon him.

Having come together we must recognize, not that so many or so few gifted men are present, and that our time of

profit will be great or small in consequence, but that the Lord is there, and the Holy Spirit. If the Lord's presence is realized, songs of praise will surely rise from united and glad hearts, and quiet and confident waiting and expectation from Himself will mark all present, and He will not disappoint those who wait upon Him. The ministry given will not be something that has been labouriously prepared for the occasion, as though this were a matter of individual service, but it will be fresh and spontaneous, because from the Lord for the moment ; and five words given of this character will be better than ten thousand drawn from memory, for they will be the fresh springing up and flowing forth of living water, and not the pumping out of a stagnant pool.

When should these open meetings be held ? This is an important question. In some places they are held once a month, or once a quarter, or once a year. But if we take our guidance from 1 Cor. 14, shall we be satisfied with this ? Is it not clear from that chapter that such meetings were the regular gatherings of the assembly, and were held certainly not less often than those for the taking of the Lord's supper ?

They were not special occasions held when Paul or Apollos could be present, but the ordinary every-week meetings of the local assembly. If we take up these meetings at all, ought we not to take them up in this way ? What warrant have we for taking them up at all if we are not prepared to take them up according to the scriptures ? It is said that there is neither faith nor power for such meetings now, but if there is faith and power for the gathering together of 1 Cor. 11, why not for that of 1 Cor. 14 ? It is the same Lord that presides at both gatherings, and faith has to do with Him, and it is the same spirit who is present at both, and all power is in Him.

Much failure evidently marked this special meeting at Corinth, but the apostle did not tell the Corinthians to cease to hold it because of this, but he instructed them as to how to conduct themselves in it. The chapter is there in the God-breathed Scriptures for our instruction also, and is specially said to be the commandments of the Lord, and it would be a sad thing if it became a dead or useless chapter to us because of lack of faith on our part.

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THE OPEN MEETING

WHEN speaking about the Open Meeting we usually dwell chiefly on the side of the conduct of those who take part in ministry at these gatherings together of the saints of God, but there is the other side also, the conduct of those who are gathered together. Seeing that they are the many, and those who minister are the few, they must exercise by far the greater influence on such gatherings.

Those who minister, if truly led of the Lord to do so, "speak unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3), or as it has been well put, "they build up, stir up, bind up". And the responsibility of such is very great. If they give forth something of their own they surely do it in self-sufficiency ; and