

Meeting With God

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God in our midst, God walking in our midst, God in fellowship with His body... From the beginning, God's plan and purpose has been to indwell man. As we look back over history and see the steps that were necessary to bring this about, we get a glimpse of the very heart of God. God does not just give us the opportunity to escape from evil and the world; He has given Himself, so that we may know His divine working in each of our lives, and know it together in the church. We may now move with spiritual understanding, not just in our minds. We are here for His purpose, not ours. By His Holy Spirit, God wants to reveal to us the depths of His purpose, the depths of His heart, and what He is doing today, so that we may enter into it and partake of it.

In the 40th chapter of Exodus, there is an account of Moses erecting the tabernacle: *"...So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys"* (Exodus 40: 33-38) This was God's order in the wilderness under the first covenant.

The new covenant is described in Hebrews 10: *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Heb. 10:16-25).

The presence of God in the old covenant was manifested in the wilderness through the cloud by day and the fire by night. The presence of God in the new covenant is manifested as the Holy Spirit comes to abide within each believer's life, to guide and lead him in the way that he goes. Paul is very clear in Romans 8:14, that *"as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* God made man for Himself, so that He might be all things in him--that He might be his life, and direct and lead him in the fullness of all that He is.

God comes to dwell within us when we, by faith, receive the Holy Spirit. Then we are able to learn and partake of God as we move through each day. The Holy Spirit teaches us His ways, disciplines every area of our lives, and gives us the ability to bring every thought captive to Christ. When our minds are brought into subjection to the Holy Spirit, we can "think in God"--in the revelation of Himself as He reveals it to us.

We always begin by strengthening our relationship with God personally. This is very important. We must wait upon Him and learn to know His ways and His voice, in order to be led by Him. His sheep know His voice, and will not be led by another (John 10). God also disciplines our emotions, so that we are not led by how we feel. Submitting to the control of the Holy Spirit--knowing God's voice and learning not to be led by our emotions--enables us to partake of Him and move in union with Him. Jesus prayed, *"Father, make them one as we are one."* (John 17) This is a great mystery, but as we begin to experience what God is doing, we find that God's ways are far above anything we could imagine. It is glorious! We are being changed *"from glory to glory,"* as Paul says (II Cor. 3:18).

As we go on with God step by step, day by day, we start to realize that we can do nothing separate from Him. This includes our time of gathering unto the Lord. In Ephesians we are told that the Spirit is in the midst of His people to build us together as a habitation of Himself (Eph. 2:22). God's people come together to worship Him, to encourage one another, and most of all to meet with God collectively. For this to be a reality when we come together, it must be a reality in our individual lives before God. As we learn to move with Him--to speak when He speaks, work when He works--then when we come together God will encourage us through one another. The Holy Spirit in our midst will exhort, edify, and comfort us (I Cor. 14:3) through the manifestations of the Spirit described in I Corinthians 12.

Manifestations of the Spirit

In John 17, Jesus spoke about the Spirit of truth *"whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."* He goes on to say, *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also."* In the 21st verse, referring to those who keep the commandments of the Lord, who love the Father, He says, *"I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."* We make ourselves available to the Spirit of God by our individual relationships with Him. Then as we come together, we know His working and leading. We know when He wants to speak and manifest Himself. Then we must step on out in faith to speak the words He has given us--words that will edify, encourage, stimulate and comfort the body.

The manifestations of the Spirit are distinct from the five ministering gifts that God has given to men, to encourage and bring us to a oneness of faith, to maturity, and to the full stature of Christ. Each has its place and purpose. The five ministering gifts are described in Ephesians 4: *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."*

The Spirit of God in our midst enables God to meet with us and manifest Himself as He said He would do. Paul says in I Corinthians 14:26, *"How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all*

things be done unto edifying." He goes on to lay down the order for functioning of the utterance gifts, so that everything will be for the building up of the body of Christ. He emphasizes again and again, *"for the edifying of the body."* We don't just function to edify ourselves; the gifts are for the edification of the whole body.

The manifestations may include prophecy, tongues with interpretation, a word of knowledge, word of wisdom, or word of faith, as listed in I Corinthians 12:7-11: *"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."*

The utterance gifts are prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues. These vocal manifestations are given to the church for "edification, exhortation and comfort." *"Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying"* (I Cor. 14:1-5).

We need all of these gifts. We cannot lay aside what God has provided and end up with just preaching and teaching. We need everything God has provided for us, and I don't believe we can emphasize one against another. The Spirit is in our midst to reveal and to accomplish all that God desires to do. He may also use a *"word of knowledge."* This may come through a prophecy, a tongue and interpretation, or other means, but it is primarily a *"word of knowledge."* God uses *"a word of wisdom"* for those times when we may have knowledge, but not the wisdom or timing for how it is to be used. The non-vocal manifestations--faith, healing, miracles, and discerning of spirits--are given for purposes other than addressing the church directly.

As God's word comes as a manifestation of the Spirit to the churches, it will have the authority of Christ. It is the Lord that is manifesting Himself, revealing His purpose, and searching the hearts of the believers. The Holy Spirit is the only one that can bring balance to our lives, so that as we meet with God, He can speak to us, edify us, encourage us, strongly stimulate and comfort us in any specific situation we find ourselves in. We cannot hope to be what God wants us to be, *"built up a spiritual house"* (I Peter 2:5), without God in our midst. Yes, we need apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers--each of them has their appropriate place and function in the body of Christ. But we also cannot do without the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit. The Spirit moves on different members of the body of Christ *"severally as He will."* Each of us must make ourselves available to God, to see this happen.

If we become cold or indifferent, the Spirit of God is not free to move and guide us as He desires. The church at Laodicea said, "We have need of nothing. We are rich." God said, "You are naked, poor and blind. Come buy of Me" (Rev. 3:15-19). This is what we need to see today. Too many have reverted to listening to one or two men with a spoken ministry, rather than knowing the presence of the Holy Spirit

moving through a many-membered body to edify, to exhort and stimulate us into movement and growth. God doesn't want to write His commandments in stone, but on our hearts. It is life and fellowship that He desires with His body, the church.

We must be careful not to let these manifestations of the Spirit become common or "familiar" to us. We should constantly move in faith and be aware that God is in our midst to speak to us. Rather than just seeking the Lord in our time of need when we cannot find the answer in any other place, we need to know God all along the way. We need to be alive in Him. We need fervency for fellowship with Him and with each other as we meet with Him.

If a member is "in the flesh," trying to bring manifestations of the Spirit in his own natural ability, he should be judged properly, for his own good and for the good of the body. This is what we would call "strange fire" (see Leviticus 10 and Numbers 3). God is not interested in strange fire; He wants the real thing. As we have possessed the Holy Spirit and as He witnesses within our hearts, we can know what is real and what is not. We can have confidence, and move with purpose together. We can move in love in all situations.

All Things...In Order

At the very beginning, the overflow of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ caused Paul to set the manifestations in order, that all things might be to edification. Notice the order Paul gives by the Spirit for the manifestation of tongues and prophecy: *"If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge"* (I Cor. 14:27-29). When this instruction is followed, needs will be met, brothers and sisters will be edified, and words of comfort will be spoken which man cannot reproduce or even hope to imitate. Many have tried to prophesy in their own strength, out of their own minds, but a true manifestation of the Spirit is discerned by those that have the anointing of the Spirit. As I John 2:20 says, *"Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things."*

Paul goes on to say, *"For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted"* (I Cor. 14:31). Prophecy is not preaching. Many have defined it as such, doing away with the supernatural aspect of prophecy. Many have done away with tongues and interpretation of tongues, because they cannot control it. It doesn't fit into their "program." It was never intended to. All the gifts are under the control of the Holy Spirit. He moves *"severally as He will,"* not as man wills. If there were ever a time when we needed the presence of God and His working, it is now. The Lord has not done away with any of the manifestations of His Spirit, or with the purpose for which they are given. We need Him more today than we ever did. We need words of comfort. We need to be edified, built up and nourished.

God's presence will not be in our midst just because we want it, but there are steps we can take to open the way for Him. The first step is a desire to know God and to meet with Him. We must desire God to manifest Himself to us in the order He has set forth, not in the traditions of man. There are no substitutes. We must have God--all that He is and all that He wants to do. We need every manifestation He will give us.

This is a time when we need to encourage each other, and this can only be done as the love of God fills our hearts. John speaks about this love: *"But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God*

perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (I John 2:5). Love will be brought to full maturity as we come together and function with other believers. The love of God "suffereth long, and is kind; envieth not; vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth..." (I Cor. 13:4-8). But even if we have love, it will not substitute for the presence of God in our midst manifesting Himself, bringing true fellowship, enabling us to move in union with Him, knowing the communion that He brings.

It takes a big step of faith to move past the traditions of man and man's way of thinking, to wait upon God, renew our strength in Him, and know the work that He wants to do in this hour. May God speak to us; may we see the urgency of the hour we live in; may He give us the ability to move; and may we take the time to wait upon Him and be renewed in our inner man, in our relationship with the Lord.

Sanctified Unto the Lord

Those that the Father loves, He chastens (Heb. 12:6). He brings correction or rebuke as it is needed, and prepares our lives together so that we may contain His fullness. He does not overlook sin, as many think, but deals with it. He is not afraid to point it out and give the remedy, so that there may be a testimony of holiness. We are to be a people sanctified (set aside) unto the Lord, so that His purpose may be worked and that we may grow up into the fullness of our relationship with the Father and the Son (Eph. 4:15).

"...As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:16b, 18). We must keep in mind that God is all-knowing, that He is a searcher of hearts, and that in the midst of all this, He is our Father who loves us with a pure love. It is not the emotions of mankind, but His divine love that He now sheds abroad in our hearts by the Spirit. He makes us partakers of His divine nature, which is love (II Peter 1:4).

God knows each individual need and the church's need. He knows those who are not going on in their relationship with Him, and gives instruction because of His love. God does not bring judgment without giving us the opportunity to repent, turn to Him, and be restored in the outworking of the body of Christ. As God chastens us, it may be grievous, but it will have meaning for eternity. His discipline will prepare us and adorn us with His righteousness.

There are many things being done today by those that desire the people of God to be holy. Much of it is done under the power of the flesh rather than by the Spirit of God. Our response must not be to man, to his desires, commandments or traditions, but to God in our midst as He speaks to us. He is faithful to reveal who He is, who we are, what is right in our lives and what pleases Him, or what is wrong and what to do about it.

Peter says, *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter 4:17,18).* In John 17, Jesus prays that His Father will sanctify the believer. Just as Jesus' life was set aside for the will of the Father, our lives too must be sanctified, set aside for the purpose of God. There must be an expression of holiness coming out of our lives, a moral excellence that has its foundation in our relationship and fellowship

with the Father and with the Son, in the power and anointing of the Spirit.

"Unto the Messenger of the Church"

Jesus says in Revelation 1:18-20, *"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels [literally, messengers] of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."*

There is much said in our time about meeting with the Lord, letting Him have the control and minister to our hearts by the many gifts He has given to the church. This must be more than a theory; it must be real in our midst as we come together. We do gather unto the Lord. We must believe He is in our midst, and if that is true, we must reverence Him and give Him proper fear and honor as the Head of the church. God's messengers are "in His right hand"--in other words, they are under His control, under His authority.

God's "messengers" are those that are used to bring a manifestation of the Spirit to the church. There must be vessels in each local gathering that are open to God's Spirit, set aside for His use, ready and able to move. This can only be accomplished if each one is in fellowship with God personally. We cannot hope to be used by God in the midst if we personally are not in fellowship with the Father and Son. Through these vessels, manifestations of the Spirit can come in the midst.

When God manifests Himself in the midst, He does it for our edification--that we may be built up, a container of all that God is, and that His will may be accomplished. He will exhort us, stimulate us, move us on with enthusiasm, bring us to the place where we are excited because the Holy Spirit is working in us. It will bring joy to our lives. God will be with us by His Spirit to comfort us and lead us on. He will bring correction and instruction to those that are in disobedience or sin. They must respond to it and be "overcomers" in the power that He gives.

Our natural minds cannot comprehend what God is doing, but the spiritual mind that is being exercised by the Spirit of God can start to comprehend it and move in it. We can start to know the ways of God, and move by the power of the Spirit that indwells us. We should be lively stones, alive unto God, moving as the Lord moved when He was here on this earth, in union with the Father. This was the prayer of our Lord to His Father: *"Make them one as we are one"* (John 17). This is the oneness God has brought us into by putting His Spirit within us. He has brought us into fellowship with the Father and the Son, so that we now can move together in oneness.

The account in the first three chapters of Revelation can give us great insight and a practical example of the working of God--what He is doing today in local churches and how He is doing it. When the Spirit spoke to the seven churches in Revelation, we see two expressions used as the Lord revealed their condition. One is *"he that overcometh,"* and the second is *"he that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying unto the churches."* Individually and collectively, we are responsible in these two areas. When God reveals, we must be those that obey, going on to abide in Him and let His Word do its perfect work in and through our lives--becoming "overcomers." Do we have ears to hear? Do we put value on what is being said to us? Do we believe God is speaking? Do we sense that our dealing must be with God, not just with man? When we realize that God is our heavenly Father, mindful of everything in our lives individually and together, it should give us a proper reverence and love in our hearts for Him. We will start to see how God in His love and mercy meets with each gathering.

Notice how specifically and directly Christ ministered to the needs of the churches in Revelation. He always began by commending them for what was right in their midst, and then went on to reveal what He had against them. He then gave the remedy, what they needed to do to respond to His word. He told them *when* to repent, and He told them what He would do if they did not repent.

When Christ spoke to the church at Ephesus, he first recognized the good things they had done, and then He said, *"You have left your first love."* We begin in God when we partake of His love, His very nature. He loved us and gave Himself for us. Now we are able to move in love, giving ourselves for others. God sees what is the motivating force in our lives, and if it is not love, He says, "Repent--and if you don't repent, I will come and remove your candlestick." We can go a long way in doing things for God, having certain attributes, but we can miss what God counts most important, and that is our first love. A church may still be religious, but not spiritual. If it is not a testimony to the Lord, God will remove it.

To the church at Smyrna, God said, *"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer [this is a word of comfort]: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:9,10). We will suffer for the name of Christ, maybe even to the laying down of our lives. But God will be in our midst, giving us words of comfort, encouraging us to be faithful, as a father would to his sons and daughters.

To the church at Sardis, God said, *"...I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee"* (Rev. 3:1-3) Then he goes on to encourage the few, *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."* (Rev. 3:4) This is not a worthiness within ourselves, but a worthiness because we have walked in faith. Our testimony and righteousness flows out from experiencing all that God is, and moving in union with Him.

To the Laodicean church He says, *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"* (Rev. 3:19-22) Here we find that Jesus was on the outside, but God was still offering them His hand of mercy.

God wants to come and work in this personal way in the midst of every church. If God is who He says He is, doing what He said He would do, then wherever they may live, God's people are meeting with Him, gathering together unto the Lord. The emphasis should be on communing with God, then with each other. John lays this out very clearly in his first epistle, *"...If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..."*

When God is meeting with us and we are meeting with God, when we are open and giving Him His proper place, He will keep our testimony pure. He is the one that searches the hearts. He is the one that

cares for us and disciplines us properly. This does not take away from the responsibility of the local oversight God has set forth, or the responsibility of the church to deal with sin. But many things cannot be seen on the surface, and that is why we need God revealing our hearts. When we are dealing with God, we cannot hide. He is all-knowing. This is what we *should* be doing--dealing with God, not hiding from Him. Our lives should be open not only to God, but to each other, so that we can speak the truth in love to each other and grow up into Him, into all fullness.

We must always remember that God has not called us to be in the judge's seat. He will manifest Himself and reveal what is wrong. He will also commend us for what is right according to His purpose, as He did for these seven churches. If we individually try to judge, and work the things of God in our own strength, according to our own understanding, we will miss the things of God. But if we have a proper reverence for God, and we are allowing God to deal with us as our heavenly Father, we will know the outworking.

Christ Walks in the Midst of the Golden Candlesticks

Having God in our midst, walking amongst us, is not something to experience only now and then. It should be normal. Every time we come together to meet with the Lord, we should expect God to meet with us and speak to our hearts, that His word might become life to us, and that we may move in faith together. Our desire as a gathering should be to apprehend that which we have been apprehended for (Phil. 3:12). There must be no sin in our midst, and our hearts must be wholly set aside unto the Lord. Our lives are not our own, but we now have been brought into the family of God. We belong to Him. We are here to do one thing: the will of the Father. We come with simplicity to know the Lord--to sit at His feet, to learn of Him, and to partake of His word.

To the "overcomers," there were many promises. God says, "I will give thee to eat of the tree of life...give thee a crown of life...not to be hurt of the second death..." and so on. (You can read them all in Revelation 2-4.) These are God's words of comfort, His rewards--what He will do for us in eternity. As we ponder them in our hearts, we want God to be in our midst, speaking these words of comfort to us. We need to be comforted. That is why Jesus said a number of times before He went back to His Father (John 14-16), *"I will send you the Comforter. When He comes, He will lead you into all truth. He will not speak of Himself, but Me. He will glorify Me..."*

This is a glorious working! It will climax in completeness when we are one with Christ, but what God is doing now, step by step, is causing us to be disciplined and ordered in Him. We do not move separate from Him, but actively abide in Him by faith. If we are living in the Spirit, we need to walk in the Spirit and gather in the Spirit. Day by day, the Holy Spirit must direct us in the steps we take and lead us in our times of prayer, so that we may pray in the will of the Father and allow these manifestations to be in our lives. We are not given a "gift" to use independent from Him. The Spirit works them *"severally as He will."* As we are in union with God, ready and set aside for His purpose, God can speak through different vessels to the body.

There is nothing that can substitute for God's presence in our midst in power. The manifestations of the Spirit in our midst are necessary to direct us, to instruct us, to bring judgment when our hearts are wrong, and to comfort us when we need encouragement. Only God can do this by the Spirit. He has given His gifts or manifestations to the church so that all may profit by them.

May we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying unto the churches. May we have hearts that desire to meet with God on a regular basis, not just once in a while. It may mean a whole renewing of our minds and change in the direction we are going. We must "think in God," having minds that are spiritual, set on those things which are eternal. We must take steps of obedience unto the Lord, which will cleanse and set us aside for His purpose. Then God will be in our midst, meeting with us in power, demonstrating His testimony to the world for His glory and praise.