

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

#02-0814

MARCH 7, 2008

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

[PART 5 — *Episunago*]

Part 4 of this series ended with Matthew 18.20 and Jesus' encouragement that when two or three gather together, He will show up and be with them. This speaks of the Lord's desire to simply meet with His people, even if there are only a handful gathered together in His name. This type of gathering does not require a building, membership in a church, the presence of a pastor, a form of worship, an agenda, music leaders, or any such thing. Interestingly, Jesus spoke these words in connection with the *ekklesia*, a word He used only three times, all recorded in Matthew. The first use was in reference to Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. With this statement, Jesus declared: **I will build My *ekklesia*** (see Matthew 16.16-18). Notice that Jesus defined the *ekklesia* as belonging to Him, which differentiates it from all other types of *ekklesias*. Later, through revelation given to him by the risen Christ, Paul defined **My *ekklesia*** as the body of Christ. The second and third uses of the word *ekklesia* are discovered in Matthew 18.17, only three verses before the verse quoted above. Jesus spoke of discipline in the *ekklesia* if a brother sins. Since there are witnesses involved, which requires two people, and the person in question is to be brought before the *ekklesia*, there must be more than two or three in the *ekklesia* for discipline to take place. However, it is safe to conclude that throughout this section of Scripture, Jesus was dealing with *His ekklesia*, which begins with two or three and increases from there. Simply, it takes more than one to be a body. Of course, the size of the spiritual body that Christ is building is beyond our knowing, but on our level, all we need is a few brethren who are holding to the Head.

The Greek word for "gathered together" is *sunago*, and its noun form is *sunagoge*. We derive the English noun *synagogue* from this word. *Sunago* is one of the more common verb forms meaning "to lead together, i.e., collect or convene, gather." *Sunagoge* means an "assemblage of persons." Both words come from the root word *sun*, which means "union, with or together." Again, the least common denominator for such a gathering is two or three. This is the word used for two or three gathered together. However, there is another Greek word that is an intensified form of *sunagoge*; it is *episunagoge*, which means "a complete collection." The prefix *epi* means "above or after," implying a more intensified meaning of the word; thus, it is a complete gathering, implying that it could be a rather large collection of people. In the New Testament, the noun *episunagoge* and its verb *episunago* are used eight times, and in each case it is clear that either a multitude (many thousands) or a complete collection of people (a whole city; the end-time gathering of His people) is in view.

Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together [*episunago*] that they were stepping on one another.... (Luke 12.1 NASB)

And the whole city had gathered [*episunago*] at the door. (Mark 1.33 NASB)

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather [*episunago*] your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." (Matthew 23.37 NASB; also Luke 13.34)

“And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together [episunago] His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” (Matthew 24.31 NASB; also Mark 13.27)

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together [episunagoge] to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (2 Thessalonians 2.1-2 NASB)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together [episunago], as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10.23-25 NASB)

As stated in part 1 of this series, this last verse is often used to preach to the so-called *unchurched* that they must “go to church.” Although not stated, it is often implied that if they do not, then something bad could happen to them. To me, this attitude is not much different from how the word *hell* is used by some to preach to the unbeliever: *Where are you going when you die; to heaven or to hell?* Of course, those who preach this way see *hell* as a grotesque torture chamber of fire and worms that the lost are thrown into to be tormented forever and ever and ever with no chance of rehabilitation, restitution, or reconciliation. This is a major topic in itself that is covered in my book *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons*, especially Volume 2. Just for the record, I believe that God is love and His love will ultimately reach the heart of the vilest sinner. He did it for Paul, and He will do it for all mankind, not all at once and all in the same way, but all eventually, and all through His Son, the Savior of the world. This is a bit of a diversion but an important one, nonetheless.

Now, in Hebrews 10.25, we discover that there is a call for the Lord’s people to assemble together in rather large gatherings, not just two or three. I have written an article titled ***Do Not Abandon The Hope*** in which I challenge the traditional interpretation of this verse. I believe that there is ample evidence that when Paul wrote this, he was not calling for big meetings but was expressing the hope of being gathered to the Lord Himself at His return, which he called *the day*. This is in keeping with his encouragement to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18). Space will not permit an explanation, so I leave this for the curious to read the article.

As this series is concluded, the point that needs to be made is that ***not forsaking our own assembling together*** is nestled between the hope of the Faithful and True One who is coming to gather us to Himself and the day, which refers to the future day at the end of our present eon when our Lord arrives to meet His body after being gone a long time. In other words, the assembling together is placed between the hope and the day, which are one and the same. The encouragement given by Paul is with this hope and day in view, which means that there is a purpose in view when we meet. It is not that we meet to do things but that we meet because there is something glorious set before us, and this hope is to cause us to encourage or to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We are to meet to encourage one another to love as our Lord Jesus has commanded us to love. **If you love Me, then love one another** is the word from our beloved Lord. This kind of love is God’s love, the sacrificial love that was displayed by the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

If in our assembling together we do not stimulate one another to love, then there is no purpose to our meeting. Are you assembling together on this ground? This is a vital question for all of us, especially as we see the day of our Lord approaching. When our Lord returns, what will He be looking for? **LOVE!** What will He express to His people? **LOVE!** What will His people express to Him? **LOVE!** What is the purpose of our assembling together as we wait for the day, especially as we see it approaching? **LOVE!** On what basis will He reward His people? **By how much we loved!**