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Dear (*Brother in Christ*),

I wish I could put the Meeting's contentions on Matthew 18:20 to rest, but I realize they are impossible to positively disprove.

As for Vine's discussion of "Gather-#4863," it is obviously used for gathering things or people together like a man might gather gems. But I looked up all the references to #4863 and found many places where it is used in the sense of "Congregate" or "Come together." One could possibly infer that the Spirit was gathering folks together in the good cases, or that the Devil was gathering them together in the bad ones, but it is stretching it a mite to propose that a gatherer is implied in Matthew 24:28:

For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

The eagles simply convene on the carcass, as in Revelation 19:17:

*And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and **gather yourselves together** unto the supper of the great God.*

Acts 13:44 is one of the many examples of the "Congregate" sense. While Mr. Darby stays with the passive voice, "*Were gathered*," the King James translates it in the active voice, past tense:

*And the next Sabbath day **came** almost the whole city **together** to hear the word of God."*
The NASB and NIV use the active, "*Assembled*," and "*Gathered*."

Those that make so much of the passive phraseology of Matthew 18:20 should note the passive voice of "Gather" in Acts 4:26:

*The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers **were gathered** together against the Lord, and against his Christ.*

One could argue that the use of the passive voice here implies a special gatherer. I have no doubt that the Devil was behind the opposition in Peter's day and will be even more so at the final fulfillment of this prophecy. But Peter is quoting Psalms 2:2, which uses the active voice and specifically states that the rulers set themselves against the Lord:

*The kings of the earth set **themselves**, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed...*

If this argument disproves the necessity of a gatherer in Acts 4:26, it more or less negates it in Matthew 18:20 as well.

Although Mr. Darby translates Matthew 18:20 literally in the passive voice, his footnote on the passage says "...Where two or three **meet** to his name, there Christ is." This pretty well shows that he did not initially think the passage implied a special gatherer. Correct me if you can, but I think the whole issue was an attempt by the "Exclusives" to disqualify the "Opens" when they refused to relinquish all claims to Matthew 18:20. Frankly, I am not aware of any reference to the "One place" doctrine in the "Brethren" literature before the "Open" split. Was it not the divisions that raised issue of who held the franchise on the Lord's presence?

Those who insist that Matthew 18:20 proves that the Holy Spirit gathers them to Christ in opposition to those who only claim to gather in his name should realize that their presumption is based entirely on inferences that are largely translational. If God would "have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," (I Timothy 2:3 & 4) why would he hide the truth in such obscure inferences that the vast majority of Christians would never find it? Somehow I feel that ecclesiastical truth is more than a big Biblical game devised to manifest an approved class of Christians. Rest assured that the Lord does not want his Body divided into a few astute "Brethren" to whom the Spirit chooses to reveal the truth versus a vast body of Christians who are not meant to be included in that elite circle. I can't accept that any Christians could appropriate Christ's promise to be wherever two or three of them gather together in his name, and then find at the judgement seat that Christ had withheld his presence from them because they hadn't met up with the proper division of "Plymouth Brethren?" No way! The onus of proof for these biased inferences rests on those that promote them.

If there is anything that proves that the special status the Meeting derives from Matthew 18:20 is erroneous, it is what that assumption has done to the Meeting. It has completely reversed the non-sectarian stance of the Meeting, so that it has become more sectarian than the denominational sects the "Brethren" originally separated from. Paraphrasing Christ's words in John 10:38, If you don't believe these arguments on their own merit, believe them for the outcome of the alternative.

I know I haven't said anything new. It's just that I firmly believe that the "Exclusive's" exegesis of Matthew 18:20 is largely responsible for the demise of the "Brethren" movement. The Lord be with you in your struggles over these issues.

Yours in Christ,

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