

THE ERROR OF THE "ONE PLACE" DOCTRINE

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The notion that Christ cannot be present in differing groups of believers not in formal fellowship with each other is a serious misconception of the "Meeting" system. They insist that Christ's presence in more than one group would imply that He condones division in the church. This reasoning results in the "The Place," concept, which is not a Scriptural doctrine. The whole issue arises from the Meeting's misconstruction of Matthew 18:20.

Matthew 18:15-18 is the Lord's assurance that Heaven will ratify the assembly's just resolution of disputes between brethren. Then, in verse 19, the Lord further assures Christians that if even as few as two of them agree on anything they ask, He will do it. Other Scriptures qualify answers to prayer to things within the will of God. Finally, verse 20 gives the rationale for this assurance:

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. *Matthew 18:20*

Although verses 15-18 refer to the assembly, verse 19 may encompass a wider scope of any collective prayer, but with the same rationale of the Lord's presence wherever Christians rally around Him.

When the "Brethren" first began meeting, around 1830 AD, they took Matthew 18:20 at face value. They understood that Christians could count on and enjoy the Lord's presence **wherever** as few as two or three of them gathered to His name. (And Mr. Darby uses "**Wherever**" in his **Synopsis** on the verse.) But when the divisions occurred, the Meeting attempted to disqualify those who did not side with them. The ubiquitous concept of "**Wherever**" was inverted to a definitive "'**Where**' two or three are gathered together unto My name, '**there**' am I in the midst of them." Thus the simple meaning of this Scripture was erroneously conceptualized to mean very nearly the opposite of what it really says. This seems to be the fly in the ointment that has led to the officious claims and the resultant sectarian stance of the Meeting.

This private interpretation of Matthew 18:20 is rationalized from its passive phraseology. The Meeting asserts that "**Are gathered**" implies a special act of the Holy Spirit in gathering certain Christians to Christ. But this does not necessarily follow. The active voice of Psalms 2:2, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take council together, against the Lord..." is quoted in the passive voice in Acts 4:26, "The kings of the earth stood up, and were gathered against the Lord..." This reasoning has actually fabricated a sort of second blessing for certain Christians after they are saved. The Meeting speaks of those who are "Saved" and subsequently "Gathered." This is not a concept that can be documented from other Scriptures.

The resultant "One Place" doctrine is buttressed by inferences from other Scriptures, like Deuteronomy 12:13 & 14:

Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the Lord shall chose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee."

But even though the God's earthly people gathered to a **place** (which actually typified Christ), Matthew 18:20 makes it plain that Christians are to gather to the **person** of Christ Himself, instead of a place. The legitimate typical deduction to be drawn from Deuteronomy 12 is that Christians are to gather simply to the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than to any divisive principle or "Place".

The unique "Place" of the Lord's presence the Meeting assumes is implemented primarily through the application of their own peculiar interpretations of Old Testament types. The "Leprous House" type of Leviticus 14:33-53 is applied to exclude evil or unacceptable assemblies. Generally, the next closest assembly "Empties" the variant assembly for a period of investigation. If their eventual excommunication of those determined responsible for the variation does not resolve the problem, the whole assembly is ultimately declared a "Leprous House," and is no longer considered a valid assembly. The "Death in the Tent" type of Numbers 19:14-22 is applied to exclude Christians associated with other ecclesiastical systems. Fatal flaws which "Defile" their participants are assumed in virtually all other groups. Christians who refuse to "Purify" themselves from such associations by the application of the "Water of separation," are excluded from the Meeting.

But there is not a single instance in the New Testament where these Old Testament types were applied the way the Meeting construes them. The "Leprous House" type was not applied by the Apostles to shut down the assemblies at Corinth or Galatia, despite established immorality at Corinth and fundamentally bad doctrine Galatia. Neither was the "Death in the Tent" type used to excommunicate everyone who did not repudiate the unfaithful assemblies of Asia in Revelation 2 & 3. Even though the faithful in Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea were commended by the Lord, they would have been considered too "Defiled" to break bread at today's Meeting. Perhaps the Meeting is preempting Christ's own executive prerogatives when they implement their traditional renditions of these types. It was the Lord Himself Who personally threatened to remove the candlestick of Ephesus for less spectacular sin.

In II Timothy 1:15 the Apostle Paul states that "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me," but the Holy Spirit still addresses the seven Asian "Churches" of Revelation 2 and 3 as assemblies. Their refusal to fellowship, even with an Apostle, did not change the Lord's recognition of them as assemblies. In III John, Diotrophes had gotten such control of the assembly that he not only rejected the Apostle John, but he refused to receive other brethren, and cast out those who did. John did not excommunicate that assembly, nor did he enjoin Gaius to abide by their wrong assembly actions. He simply encouraged Gaius to behave in a non-sectarian Scriptural manner, and stated that he would personally straighten out the situation **"If"** he came there.

But these facts fall on deaf ears because they are so foreign to the "Place" dogma that they are considered irrelevant. The confidence that they can be explained within the Meeting's convictions is so strong that they aren't seriously considered. At best, more arbitrary interpretations of Old Testament types based on the assumption that the Meeting is analogous to the faithful in Israel while other Christians are analogous to the unfaithful, or even the heathen around them are offered. The simple interpretation of Matthew 18:20 should be Scriptural proof enough that Christ can recognize any earnest group of Christians whether or not they are in fellowship together. Only, let them obediently begin fellowshiping with each other. Christ promises to be wherever two or three Christians "Meet in His name". (Synopsis, footnote on Matthew 18:20.) If some make that claim outside of a pure heart, Christ can withhold His presence and other Christians can refuse to fellowship there. But Christ cannot be forced to take sides with His arguing children. And there is no group flawless enough to lay claim to an exclusive franchise on Matthew 18:20 because the others are flawed. This is not to say that Christians are not responsible to separate from evil, according to II Timothy 2:21 and many other Scriptures. But perhaps they should be willing to allow a little leeway for individual conscience on when and what others must separate from.

The practical results of the "One place" doctrine is what should dispel all doubts that it is

flawed. It has virtually destroyed the original non-sectarian stance of the Open side of the "Brethren" movement. Instead of the practical expression of the unity of the Body that the early "Brethren" strove for, the Meeting has become one of the most stringent of the sects that divide the Body. The bulk of the Body is denied access to the Lord's table in the name of the unity of the Spirit. The non-sectarian unity of the Body has been supplanted by the sectarian unity of the Meeting itself. The dubious "Visible" testimony to the unity of the Body that the Meeting professedly expresses by its blind loyalty to historical Assembly decisions simply ignores the majority of the Body. Anyone seriously investigating the Meeting soon finds that the Word of God alone is not sufficient for its ecclesiastical defence, which relies heavily on the tomes of "Brethren" history. Something must be amiss when the Meeting became the "Place" by its non-sectarian position, and then became sectarian because it was the "Place."

A sign on the gate of a neatly fenced yard in an Amish community reads, "**Beware of Dogma.**" The one place doctrine cannot be adequately supported from the Scriptures. Yet the Meeting tenaciously maintains the precarious premise that it alone is in the "Place" where Lord can rest His presence. Perhaps this is the major flaw in its ecclesiastical ointment.