

CONTROL

There is a tremendous need to consider the matter of control in the church, both in the assembly and over the lives of individual members. Control is defined as: "To govern, direct, have under command, or have authority over."

First, in the assembly of believers, no matter how small or large, the Lord Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20 KJV). And what is the word "For" therefore? In context He was talking about being together for prayer. He said, "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:19-20).

We must see that Jesus is in our midst as Head, not an idle onlooker, or nominal monarchial king with no real authority, but as the very active Head, the source of all activity, who has absolutely all authority in heaven and in earth! That means He is to be in CONTROL! He is to be looked to for all direction, activity, ministry, for any and all manifestations of His Spirit, for all ministry of His word.

A major reason that we see so little of the moving of His Spirit in most congregations is because we come together mostly with preplanned agendas, maybe even printed out as to who is going to speak, and in what order, and the specific message to be given, and what else is going to be allowed before we close the meeting. There is absolutely no justification for this type of man-made controlled meeting anywhere in the New Testament.

Even when Paul had an apostolic meeting in the school of Tyrannus, it was a robust open discussion and reasonings concerning the kingdom of God, not a closed, controlled meeting with little or no participation from others with legitimate questions or input (Acts 19:9). And when Paul described a usual meeting when the church came together (1 Cor. 11-14), he gave instructions for divine order for men and women in prayer or ministry, the Love Feast, the manifestations of the Holy Spirit where all might prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24-25), and then said, "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" (1 Cor. 14:26). And all this activity to be done in the attitude of building up one another in love, as energized, initiated, and controlled by the Spirit of God – the spontaneous activity of the Lord as He moves through godly men and women who wait upon Him.

There can be a place for the preplanned exposition of scripture, but for it to be effective, there must first be the meetings for prayer, whether in twos, threes, dozens, or hundreds.

How well I remember in my lifetime, the usual preplanned meetings on Sunday mornings and evenings, with prayer meetings either on Wednesday nights, or Tuesday and Thursday nights for those more spiritually inclined. But then the midweek prayer meeting was interjected with some teaching. Then prayer became less and less until it became a teaching meeting. And then the meetings were left off, and then the Sunday night meetings were left off, and then the Sunday morning has become little more than superficial worship in the form of entertainment, and the preaching has become so ineffective and often filled with such false teaching that destruction has come to the body, not construction. What a shame!

An additional word about prayer meetings and control. We must have prayer meetings, but they are to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. We must allow and encourage each and every one that feels led to pray to do so, not only the leadership to pray. There are times when teaching the immature to pray, that they should be asked to pray, possibly out loud with just yourself in learning, before praying in a group, but always there should be freedom for all the members of the body to function in divine order as He leads. Amen!

Beloved, let us return to meetings with the Lord Jesus Christ who is there as Head, in control, and directing by His Spirit in everything that is done! Let us return to Him in prayer, seeking His face for revival, and the moving of His Spirit to meet the need for whatever the needs are at the time. Amen!

Now, let us consider another aspect of control, particularly of leadership over individual members of the body. One of the most profound experiences that I've ever had demonstrates a truth that every leader in the body of Christ needs to know, understand, and practice.

It happened many years ago when I was being called into the ministry. I had recently returned from a 5 months mission trip after giving my life full time for God's service. I had gone down to the Caribbean as a dentist, but on my return was brought into the supernatural giftings of the Lord and was healed of three physical conditions and given a prophetic word that I was called as "an end-time preacher."

After returning to live with my parents and wait on the Lord for direction with fasting and prayer, an aunt wanted to finance my way through seminary, but the Lord spoke to me and said, "No. I'm going to put you through My own seminary." (I have found this to mean that He would direct what to read and study, who to listen to, what to do, and what experiences in "on-the-job-training" I should have.)

It was while there in my home town that I was invited to speak to a couple of congregations, and during several meetings in one I went up to Detroit to visit dear

friends, a brother who had been my roommate in college and my first convert to Christ, and his wife.

Now, during my mission trip I had read two books that I had taken along, one was the life story of George Mueller, the other I believe was on prayer. His testimony of "living by faith," supporting what amounted to thousands of orphans, and all without ever asking for money or support from anyone, is a testimony that has inspired the faith of thousands, and I recommend every one called to ministry to read and apply.

So being with my friends in Detroit and determining to live a life of faith, I had also read that when anyone asked you if you need anything, to just reply that "It is well," like the woman whose son had died and she sent for Elisha, and he had his servant ask if all was all right (2 Kings 4:8-37).

I was in my bedroom praying in the morning before planning to return to Fremont. I wanted to purchase some Christian books that I could share with the congregation that I was preaching to, and since I was just learning "living by faith," I had only enough money for daily needs, and asked the Lord for \$20. (That was when you could buy a good paperback for 75 cents.)

As I was praying, Phil, my dear brother, called to me and asked if I needed any money. Of course, I had just asked the Lord for \$20, and here is where many people, from their testimonies, would have jumped for joy and told him yes, and he would then have given them some money and they would share this testimony of God's answer to prayer. But that is not what I did. I believed that I was not to say that I had a need, and so I asked the Lord, "What do I tell him?" And the Lord spoke a word that I shall never forget, and that I have lived by for over these last 45 years. God said to me in answer to my question: "Nothing. I have not called you to be the Holy Spirit for anybody."

Well, now what do I do? I needed some money, Phil was undoubtedly offering some, but God said not to say anything. When Phil asked me again, of course I realized God was impressing upon him that I had a need, and that he should help with it. I was learning obedience and faith, so I said nothing, and Phil went on to work that morning. I fellowshiped a little with his wife, and then started home to Fremont in the afternoon. But first, I told the Lord He could allow me to find a \$20 bill on the road, if necessary, or somehow meet my need, and so I departed and drove across Detroit to a Christian bookstore that I knew about to get some books that I believed God was going to provide. When I arrived, there was Phil standing in front of the store. I was amazed. I asked him what he was doing there, and he said, "I just left the bank, and I should have turned one way but turned the other, and found myself in front of this bookstore," and then I arrived. He asked, "Do you need some money?" I laughed and explained my walk of faith and why I had said nothing that morning, and what the Lord had told me, and therefore why I had not told him I needed some money. He asked, "How much

do you need?" I said, "I can't tell you that, remember, God had said, 'I haven't called you to be the Holy Spirit for anybody' so you must ask the Lord and He will tell you." We both went into the store, and I proceeded to pick out the books I felt the Lord would have me buy, and Phil walked around the store praying and asking the Lord what he should give me. Before long Phil came to me and said the Lord spoke to him though the title of a book he saw, which was "Love is a spendthrift." He then told me that since he loved me, I should buy whatever I felt led to buy, and he would pay for it. When we got to the counter with my stack of books, it came to \$23 and some cents. He had gone to the bank that morning after leaving home and had cashed a check for \$25.00 He said that would leave him \$1.50 for lunch the next day, just what he needed. (You could buy a good lunch for \$1.50 in those days.)

The stack of books included some study reference works that I still use regularly, the "Interlinear Greek-English New Testament" and "Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament," along with some paperbacks I wanted for the revival meetings.

Beloved, I hope you read and reread this testimony until it gets down in your spirit like it has mine. It has never left me, and it completely contradicts the type of advice by example and teaching that most Christians live by. We are not to be the Holy Spirit for anyone! We are not to control them or what they do. We are to teach them to look to the Lord, and expect Him to direct their paths, and obviously at times this includes how to do this. We must learn how to share wisdom and advice without control. Christians must grow up and learn to hear from God for themselves. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). And a scripture that jumped out at me as a young Christian that I shall never forget, so I memorized it: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Pro. 3:5-6).

Oh beloved, we need to realize that the Lord is with us all the time, that whether we are alone, or meeting with others, just two or three or dozens or hundreds, He is there in our midst as the Head of the church. The head is where direction is to come from. Not our carnal minds, but as we wait upon the Lord, He will give direction, anointing, and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, whatever is needed for that time, and all will be wonderful!

Let us have meetings that are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Let us be Christians that are controlled by the Holy Spirit. If we are, we will change the world around us – our families, our fellowships, our surroundings, our culture.

May God bless you all as we seek together to enjoy the Lord as He functions in our lives and in our midst as the only true Head of His church. Amen and Amen.