

Dear Jon,

You have asked me several questions about the group (church) that I attend. I feel this subject is so important for you to understand that I am making it the total subject of this letter.

The first question you have asked is what is the name of the church. Because most people desire a name tagged to everything, this has been one of the most difficult questions to answer. The scripture states that in the Spirit we are to be one. We are to do nothing that will bring about division. One of the most rapid methods to bring about division is to tag a name to something. For instance, an automobile manufacturer makes several different classes of automobiles and puts them out under various names. They are basic in design, often with the same identical type of engine. Sometimes they do have a variation in the amount and type of accessories. You probably have heard of the advertisements telling how much better one named automobile is compared to another named automobile, even though they are almost identical and have been manufactured by the same company. **ONLY THE NAME CAUSES THE DIVISION!!!**

This same condition existed in the early church before the church was even 100 years old. The apostle Paul faced this problem at Corinth. He wrote a letter to the Corinthian church to encourage the believers to rectify the problem. In the first recorded letter to the church, the very first problem he tackled was the division that had sprung up. In I Corinthians 1:10-13 Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"

If Paul were writing this same letter today (and I'm positive he would write it), only the names would be changed. He could very well use the names of various denominations. In fact, he could write it to just those within certain denominations in this country, there are 27 distinct divisions. They have divided themselves by prefacing their common name with Southern, Northern, 1st, 2nd, etc., etc., etc.

In Acts 4:1-13, a question was asked of Peter. His answer to that question is the reason our part of the body of Christ (the body being the whole church) has not taken a name. In verse 7 Peter was asked, "...By what power, or by what name, have you done this?" His answer is found in verses 11 and 12, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the

head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." NO OTHER NAME!!!

The word "church" never appears in the original Greek text. Rather, the word assembly is used; it is also correctly translated "group" in speaking of a smaller meeting within the assembly. The apostles and others addressed the various groups in a certain area as "the church (assembly) at Corinth" or...greet the church (group) in their house," speaking of the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16: 1-5). The assembly feels no obligation to receive a name that could bring division, therefore, we simply call each group (or church) "an assembly of the body of Christ in". There could be a dozen groups in each city, and all are known simply by that name.

One question that many people have asked about the assembly is how its government operates. From your other question, I believe that you would be interested in knowing the answer to this also. From the time that the assembly first started with seven people in a Bible study, the believers have tried to keep as close to the scriptures as their knowledge of the scriptures would allow. This attitude applies to all aspects of their life in Christ including the government of the assembly. They have tried to maintain an open mind to all the scripture concerning doctrines and teachings found in both the Old and New Testaments. I, personally, have felt for many years that devotion to the truth begins by doubting what has been assumed in the past. This does not mean that one is to go about doubting his salvation or anything that has been established. It simply means that a person is to do as the scripture states, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves..." (II Corinthians 13:5). From time to time we are to check up on ourselves through the scripture and make sure that we line up with the scripture. If it is necessary to repent (that is, to change our mind) because additional understanding of the scripture has been given to us, then we are to live in that new understanding. We are not to so set our minds that we cannot be taught additional truth. The Bible calls people "stiff-necked" who are unteachable and unbending. We must be firm in our understanding of the scriptures but always ready to change if necessary.

Because of this attitude, the assembly has grown up and is still growing in knowledge of the scriptures as the Holy Spirit gives more understanding. This applies to individual and family spiritual growth as well as the growth of the assembly. For this reason, the government of the assembly has changed from time to time as the believers receive a clearer understanding of the truth. This does not mean that there is instability; all it means is that there is continued growth and flexibility to change when new truth is understood.

Jesus said that where two or three come together in His name, He would be there with them (Matthew 18:20). In a sense, this is the very basic assembly and needs no government as does the larger assembly that requires order. According to I Corinthians 12:28 there is a definite order of government that God has set: apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those that have the gift to heal, helpers (those whose ministry it is to lift others spiritually), governments (those who guide, not rule), diversities of tongues. These are set ministries; they have been set by God, not man, just as times and seasons have been set. They are unchangeable because God is unchangeable. No ministries can be remove from this list, but others can be added. Ephesians 4:11 gives a list of the public type of ministries. In this second list, two other ministries are added. These five public ministries are: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

When lists like these are given in the English language, we who speak and understand the language have a tendency to assume the first person on the list is of greater importance or authority than the next on the list, and so on. In the Hellenistic Greek language (the original language of the New Testament), this is not the case. When a list was given in the Greek language, the reader visualized a table at which all those on the list were sitting and sharing the same work load on an equal basis. One, because of his age and/or wisdom and knowledge, may have been designated by the others to be the moderator or governor of the work being done, but all were equal in the work. These five ministries listed have a ninefold purpose that is explained in Ephesians 4:12-16. It is: (1) For the perfecting of the saints (believers), (2) for the work of the ministry, (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ, (4) to bring about the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, (5) so that all would come to maturity, (6) that the individual would measure up to the fullness of Christ, (7) that the assembly be established in doctrine, (8) that those witnessing and ministering would do so in truth and love, (9) that all would grow up in all things in Christ. These ministries have guidance over the teaching of the whole of the assembly. Each believer has his individual ministry but at the same time works together as a whole to fulfill the purpose of the combined ministries.

At the present time every group has at least one elder (also called bishop in the New Testament), who is the overseer or shepherd of that individual group. The ideal and scriptural arrangement, however, is that each individual group should have at least two men selected by an apostle or his representative (Titus 1:5). Though at the present time all of the groups are not operating with a plurality of elders, the assembly is working to that end. There are over twenty to be effective in the guidance of the group to whom he is an elder (I Timothy 3).

Besides guiding the group, he also works side by side with the other ministries. Just as the set ministries are on an equal basis, the elders are on an equal basis with those set ministries,

as well as with the people within the individual group. I Peter 5:2-4 admonishes the elders to feed the flock (group) "among" them. They are not to be lords over the flock. The one thing that Jesus said He hated was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:15). Not only did these Nicolaitans practice and teach that it is correct to do immoral things, but their very name they ruled over the people. The word Nicolaitan comes from two Greek words, "Nico" + "laitan." "Nico" means "conqueror over" and "laitan" means "the people." The thing that Jesus hated was the type of government that took authority over and ruled the people, spiritually, mentally and physically, with an iron fist through permissiveness, fear and force.

As I stated before, the assembly tries to practice the governing of itself as closely to the scripture as has been seen. As truth that is not being practiced is brought to the attention of the assembly, the necessary adjustments are made. By the same token, if it is seen that something is being practiced in error, it is dropped. At the present time, all of the ministries are in operation to meet the needs of the assembly as a whole and the individuals within each group.

I feel that I should also inform you of the basic teachings of the assembly. As I have told you before, the believers maintain the attitude that they are to derive all teachings from the Bible and not from the traditions of men. I also mentioned that the assembly began with seven people in a Bible study. They had determined that they were going to study what has now become known as the "foundation truths." One of the safeguards to keep from falsehood, or man's traditions and thoughts, is to study the scriptures by using the context method rather than trying to study verse by verse. By studying a verse here and a verse there, a man can make the Bible say whatever he desires it to say. This is almost impossible to do if a person studies the complete "context" that the verse or verses under scrutiny are a part of. In this manner, the Holy Spirit is allowed to bring forth the thoughts and intentions of God. I wish to impress upon you that by the study of contexts, as opposed to verse by verse, a person adds a formidable safeguard against error.

From the very beginning of this assembly, it was resolved that the "context by context" method of study would be employed. Because this method has been utilized, many have developed into believers who are exceedingly firm in the Spirit. An example of what I mean by "context" is found in the scripture concerning the "foundation truths." You will find these verses in Hebrews 6:1-2. The "context" of these is imperative to correctly understand the whole meaning of the verses within the context.

In Hebrews 5:11-6:8, we discern that the scripture is referring to the written word of God and that individuals who are experienced will be able to discern both the good and evil. Because the context up to Hebrews 5:14 has primarily been about the written word of God, it follows that the discerning of good and evil is in

reference to the same written word. The mature, experienced believer is able to detect how the word of God is being explained, whether it is being handled in a good or an evil manner. The indication is that the immature (babes) do not have the capacity to perceive these things. Another place in the scripture suggests that the inexperienced believer can be led about by every wind of doctrine. The writer of Hebrews then says that the believers are to go on to perfection. Perfection, in this place, does not mean without fault. It simply means "maturity." The writer also states that the person who has not reached spiritual maturity should check out his foundations. Once he has understood the "basic principles" of Christ, he can go on to maturity, but not until then.

By continuing in verses 1 and 2 of Hebrews 6, we find what the writer understood to be the very fundamental or foundational precepts of Christ. They are: "repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." Though there are six separate subjects listed here, the word baptisms indicates that there are actually more than six subjects. In studying the New Testament, we find that there are three baptisms mentioned. One is the baptism of John the Baptizer (for example, Jesus' baptism). Another type of baptism is the immersion into water, and the last is the baptism into the Holy Spirit. These subjects are taught one night each week by the various groups in the assembly. Most of the studying is done by the individual in private. The method used is simple, yet it allows the person to be taught and led by the Holy Spirit without the intrusion of any man or any particular doctrine.

An interesting feature about the foundation truths is they are listed in the same order in which a person must complete them to become a true, Spirit-filled believer. First a person must "repent from dead works"; then God gives him "faith toward God." This is such that the individual believes and acts upon that belief (faith) and is "baptized" by immersion in water. When he comes up out of the water, God will have filled him with the Holy Spirit as promised in Acts 2:38. Immediately after the baptism, he is to allow the "laying on of hands," in order to acquire the authority to partake in what is called the "rest or refreshing of the Lord (Acts 3:19)." The effect then is that he has been spiritually "raised from the dead" (physical resurrection comes to pass later), and God's "eternal judgment" upon him is that, in Christ, he is perfect in God's eyes and what he lacks spiritually, faith in Christ and His sacrifice makes up the difference. From this point on, the individual is to move forward toward maturity.

To strive to be mature (perfect) in Christ is the objective of each believer. He is responsible for his own salvation. This includes advancing toward maturity to eventually be just like Jesus by the time we see him face to face, as He is (I John 3:2). Our perfection shall be complete and we shall be like Jesus not

only in spirit and soul, but we shall also have a new fleshly body that will be parallel to His body.

In order to realize this eventuality, God the Father has provided all things for us pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). These things include the history of God's dealing with mankind from the time of Adam until just before prophecy of things to come and physical guidelines are known as "the Law." This book of history and laws with its many authors and chapters is known as the "Old Testament." The laws of the Old Testament were called, "the law of righteousness" (Deuteronomy 4:8), "the perfect law" (Psalms 17:7), and "the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). When the time came for these Old Testament laws to be fulfilled or satisfied, Jesus fulfilled them through His own baptism (Matthew 3:13-15), and ultimately three years later, He became our God-required sacrifice through His death on the cross. It is now our responsibility, to ourselves and God, to die to ourselves and satisfy the Law by following the example of Jesus, being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

After His work on earth was finished, Jesus left the work and the assembly that followed Him (called the body of Christ), to the responsibility of the Holy Spirit. He now instructs us through the words written at the hands of various men that were inspired by Him. The cumulative documents of these inspired men is known as the "New Testament." As the Old Testament teaches the physical things of God, the New Testament teaches the spiritual fulfillment of the physical things. An understanding of both the Old and New Testaments is essential to mature in God. That is the reason God has given the ministries, gifts and promises described in the Old and New Testaments. With these ministries, gifts and promises, our task to accomplish the desire of God in our lives is lightened, and the burden is carried by all the brethren.

There are many more sides to the whole picture of the assembly, groups, and individual believer, that I could go into, but this letter should be enough to give you the basic information you asked about. Over the years, the Lord had permitted some informative booklets and books to be written. Two that I know would be helpful for you are "17 Ways?" and "The Three Rests." They explain a lot of what I have written but go into much greater detail. There are also many teaching and music cassette tapes available. For more information contact

I hope and pray that this letter has answered your questions adequately.

May God bless you,

Ramon A. Haas