

Why I Chose to Disassociate Myself from those “Gathered to the Lord’s Name” (or the Brethren)

Gavin J. Hurlbut
Originally written July 8, 1992

September 11, 2002

Contents

I	Original Reasons	1
1	Introduction	1
2	One Place Doctrine	1
3	Legalism	3
3.1	Translations & Prayer	4
3.2	Music	5
II	Further Concerns After I Left	8
4	Introduction	8
5	Reception at the Lord’s Table	9
6	Scriptural Basis for Remembering the Lord	10
7	Witness in the World & Separation	11
8	Limiting the Lord	11

Part I

Original Reasons

1 Introduction

When I went to Camp Barakel in December 1991, I was in turmoil inside as to what the Lord wanted me to do. As I had plenty of time to myself that week, I studied my Bible extensively in every free moment. After only a few hours alone with a coffee, my Bible and the Lord, it became obvious to me that He wanted me to follow Him wherever he may lead me, and at that particular time, the first step was to dissociate myself with the religious system that I was a member of at the time, which was the Brethren. As I had been in that system for quite some time, it was incredibly hard for me to follow Him in this step, but he gave me the courage and the strength to do so. The following is a fair amount of what He showed me during that week of solitude. These are the basic reasons that I left the meeting.

All Scripture quotations will be from the New International Version, 1984 revision, unless otherwise indicated.

2 One Place Doctrine

One of the most major problems I have with the group that I have known since I was a child is the doctrine that the Lord is only in the midst at one place, and that they were the place. This was sometimes said blatantly, and sometimes only alluded to, but nevertheless it was held to by almost every one of the Brethren to a person.

This doctrine (which I see as unscriptural and *very* sectarian) is based wholly on the Mosaic Law as given in the Old Testament. The verses that were quoted to me most often were:

Then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there.

Deuteronomy 12:11 (KJV)

Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the Lord will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you.

Deuteronomy 12:13

This is obviously directed to the Israelites. But we know that the Christian today is no longer under the Law (most of us as Gentiles never were). We can see this from the following:

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Galatians 3:25

Going back to the idea of the “One Place” is going back to the Law.

How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Galatians 4:9

Another reason that I do not believe that the “One Place” is the thought of the Lord is that a Samaritan woman tried to entrap him with that in John 4. This is how he replied to her.

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

John 4:21

There are over 3500 sects in Christendom today. Of these many sects, one of the most exclusive I have heard of is the Brethren. Most groups recognize the truth that the Lord is in the midst elsewhere. Saying that “the Lord is only here” or some variation of that is one of the most sectarian views that a group can have. And one of the most incorrect.

3 Legalism

“Everything is permissible” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible” but not everything is constructive.

1 Corinthians 10:23

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17

It is my feeling (and that of many others) that there is little liberty among the Brethren. The scripture clearly shows that there is to be freedom wherever the Lord is. Among the Brethren, however, there is often the feeling, even if not spoken, that what the “Older Brethren” say is to be followed blindly without any consideration as to the correctness thereof. The liberty that we are to have has degenerated to following the thoughts of others simply because they are older.

There is no liberty in the area of association with other Christians elsewhere. It has been “decreed” that those in the Meeting just do not associate with those of other denominations. Within recent memory, a brother at Hamer Bay told a group of the young people that he would rather have his children hanging around unsaved people than with Christians of other denominations. As I see it from scripture, we are to associate with the Church of Christ which includes *every* Christian on the face of the earth. This may only be association in the way of friendship, but it could be extended to association with regards to fellowship. Both Christ and the world sees Christianity as a whole, so why shouldn’t we?

There are very few Brethren young people who have not been told that dancing, television, and rock music are evil and of the devil. This is a good example of the dogmatic teachings that I do not believe for a moment.

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Colossians 1:16

As for dancing, we know that David at least once indulged in this “evil” practice...

And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

2 Samuel 6:16

Also, when David killed Goliath...

The women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes.

1 Samuel 1:6

And in the Book of Psalms...

Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.

Psalms 149:3

Praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute.

Psalm 150:4

It is not necessarily the dancing itself that is evil, it is the reason for doing so that can be. We should never lose sight of the fact that dancing, when used properly, brings glory to the Lord.

Television, being just a medium of transporting pictures is no more evil than a newspaper or radio. The evil is not in the instrument. Again it is in the use of it. There are plenty of TV shows that are suitable for anyone to watch, but sadly there are also many which are not “suitable for human or animal consumption”. If a person cannot censor what he watches, it is wise to avoid it completely, as can be said for reading books, or newspapers, or listening to the radio, and is not restricted to television.

As for rock music... I know this will come as a shock to many, but I believe that the music itself is not evil. The lyrics may be (and with secular music, often are) evil or insipid, ranging from fluff to stuff that is downright Satanically inspired. However, in the realm of Christian Rock music (yes it does exist... more on that later) the lyrics are no more evil than a hymn in the Little Flock hymn book.

The two areas in which the legalism of the Brethren is most obvious are those of translations of the Bible, and the manner in which we pray.

3.1 Translations & Prayer

This issue should not really be an issue. If the liberty we should have was present, not many people would even care what translation of God’s word is read (notice, translation, not *version*) in the Church, or how a brother prays. This is a matter of personal exercise.

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

1 Corinthians 14:33

Whereas there should not be confusion in the Church, there is no solid reason why one person should insist that another read (or pray) in a language other than his native language. Anywhere I’ve been where more than one translation was used, there was no confusion of any kind to be noticed.

I personally believe that I (and others) should be able to speak and read in their own native language (subject to the guidelines as laid down in 1 Corinthians 14:27) in the Church. This means for myself, I use the New International Version, as I can say it is in my own language and it does not confuse me by the wording used (as does the King James Version). I realize that some of the older Brethren feel very comfortable with the KJV, and I would not even think of denying them the right to read it. The only thing is, they have been routinely denying the younger generation and any others who do not know Elizabethan

English the right to read what they understand. Also, when considering reaching out to those who are not saved, does it not only make logical sense to use language that the masses would understand?

3.2 Music

Throughout the years, I have been told that Rock music of all sorts is intrinsically evil, and up to a few years ago, I believed it. But now, I know that that is not true. For almost any style of music in the western world, there are Christian musicians performing to the glory of God. Through the music that they produce, thousands have been saved every year. I understand that many do not appreciate the style of music, but despite this, they should not just arbitrarily say that it is evil. Take a look at the song in figure 1 and see how scripturally sound it is.

This song was written in 1990 by Bob Hartman, the brother in Christ who founded, and until recently was a member of the Christian Rock group Petra. I would challenge anyone to show me how this song (and others like it) could be construed as evil and of the devil himself as I have been taught for all those years. Musically, this song may not appeal to many in the older generation. This group sings hard, powerful Rock music, but *all* of it is to the glory of God, and I believe that none of it could honestly be considered evil by anyone.

The Brethren, however, would not see it this way. If it is not a hymn (preferably in the Little Flock), or a worship tune, it is often labelled as “trash” or evil. I have nothing against the kind of music that they favour, only it is not my style of music. I respect their tastes, but unfortunately, on the whole, they do not even recognize mine.

My next concern in regards to music has to do with the hymns as sung in the meeting, or rather *how* they are sung. I enjoy the hymns in the Little Flock, but often in the meetings, my enjoyment is shattered because of the manner in which these hymns are sung.

As I am a music lover (and love to sing), I can not see the merit in singing some of these hymns at a tempo which is slow enough that most people could walk to the beat. My point is that when singing a song that is supposed to be upbeat and a bit lively, the Brethren have a tendency to slow it right down to a crawl. I find it next to impossible to concentrate on what I am singing when it is so drawn out. To take 5 minutes to sing “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, is in my mind, absurd (and yes, I have timed it).

This brings up another thing that bothers me about the Brethren. In making the Little Flock, the editor (who hid behind a screen of anonymity) changed many hymns to “Brethrenize” them. A good example would be the aforementioned “When Survey the Wondrous Cross”. This hymn was changed from a song which was deeply reflective and personal (as remembering the Lord’s death really is meant to be) to one which is still beautiful, but has lost much of its meaning. How does one “pour contempt on all our pride”? I can not rid someone else of their pride, only myself of mine. Many good hymns were dealt with like this for no apparent reason.

Figure 1: Creed

I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth
And in Jesus Christ His only Son
I believe in the virgin birth
I believe in the Man of Sorrows bruised for iniquities
I believe in the Lamb who was crucified and hung between two thieves
I believe in the resurrection on the third and glorious day
And I believe in the empty tomb and the stone that the angel rolled away
He descended to set the captives free
And now he sits at God's right hand and prepares a place for me

Chorus

This is my creed, the witness I have heard
The faith that has endured
This truth is assured
That through the darkest ages past
Though persecuted, it will last
And I will hold steadfast to this creed

I believe He sent His Spirit to comfort and to reveal
To lead us into truth and light, to baptize and to seal
I believe that He will come back the way he went away
And receive us all unto himself, but no man knows the day

Chorus

I believe He is the Judge of all men, small and great
The resurrected souls of men receive from Him their fate
Some to death and some to life, some to their reward
Some to sing eternal praise forever to our Lord

Chorus

Another problem with how the hymns are sung is that, often, there seems to be no reality in the singing. To be blunt, it seems that often we do not at all feel what we are singing. For instance, I have seen far too many occasions when as we sang “Oh, Lord, we adore Thee...” most of the people in the room had glum faces and were likely thinking of what they were going to do the next day. What is the use of going through the motions of singing a hymn when you (and likely everyone else) do not even believe what you are singing? It is a shame to all of us, and I dare say to the Lord himself.

The last area (in the way of music) in which I disagree with the Brethren is in the use of instrumental music. Whenever I have asked why there is no instrumental music in *any* of the meetings (from Sunday School to the Breaking of Bread), the answer was always the same, and always insufficient. The only replies I received were:

- “That would be too much like the ‘Worldly’ denominations. [or alternatively: the Jewish system]”
- “That would hinder the leading of the Holy Spirit in the meetings”
- “There is no mention of instruments being used in the New Testament”

As for the first of those responses, I once or twice pointed out that there is scriptural basis for the use of instruments, but I was told that “That is under the Law and doesn’t apply anymore”. It seems that the Brethren like to apply parts of the Law to the Church, but don’t want to apply principles given outside the Mosaic Law to it. This apparent duplicity continues to confuse me.

As for the second of the responses, it is pure nonsense as I see it. As long as the individual playing the instrument knows the hymns and knows the tunes or can play by ear, there is no reason why it could be considered as hindering the Spirit. A hymn could be given out, and the player could play along perfectly fine. And if he/she doesn’t know the hymn, then the song could be sung à cappella. There is something to be said about à cappella singing sounding beautiful, but often, in my experience, this has not been the case in the meetings. The singers get farther and farther off key, the key changes with the singers, and finally someone has to pitch the key up again so that others can sing. Singing to an instrument would incredibly ameliorate the singing. And it would sound just as good, if not better.

As for scriptural reasons to have instrumentation, I have looked through a fair amount of the Old Testament and have noticed a great number of references to how much the Lord enjoys instrumental music. Throughout the Book of Psalms, there is a recurring theme of praising the Lord with music of all sorts. The entire book, of course, consists of songs; 150 of them. The ones that specifically mentioned instrumentation were:

- Psalms 33:2-3, 47, 68:25, 92:1-3, 144:9, 149:3, 150
- the introductions to Psalms 4, 5, 6, 54, 55, 67

- as well as many that were 'To the tune of'... (which were likely accompanied by instruments)

In addition to these psalms, there was another reference to praising the Lord with instruments in Habakkuk 3:19. With all of these mentions of praising the Lord with instruments, how can one not conclude that this is a scriptural principle that would carry over into the Church of the New Testament even though there is no mention of it there?

As to the third of the responses, I realize that there is no specific mention of instruments in the New Testament. This does not really pose a problem in my mind, as there is also no mention of Sunday School, Young People's classes or Gospel Meetings in the New Testament either. It has been pointed out to me that using instruments is a ritual. I agree, but also the fact that the Brethren do not use instruments is also a ritual (or tradition if you will). I can see from the Scripture that the Lord loves music, instruments included. I see it as a principle that is repeated over and over, and I believe that there should be the liberty to follow this principle. I am not exactly advocating that we *must* use instruments in our worship, but I do believe that we should use them, or at least, should have the freedom to do so.

Part II

Further Concerns After I Left

4 Introduction

After leaving the Brethren, I continued to study the Lord's word, and have come across a few other points that strengthened my conviction that I had done the correct thing in leaving family and friends to follow the Lord's will. It turns out now, that my family (most of my immediate family) and many of my friends have gone through the same process, and I haven't really left them, but at the time I had.

5 Reception at the Lord's Table

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.

1 Corinthians 12:13

As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1 Corinthians 12:20

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks or the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 Corinthians 11:28

You must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

1 Corinthians 5:11

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

1 Corinthians 5:12

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

2 John 9

From the above Scriptures, I saw several things:

- There is one body. This includes all those who are saved, regardless of affiliations, denominations or doctrines.
- If a person does not recognize this fact as such (in practice), that person should not be remembering the Lord in His death.
- It is up to the individual to do the judging. Scripture says nothing about the Church judging those who wish to join it. The person is to judge himself.
- If a person is living in *known* moral sin, the Church is to disallow him from remembering the Lord until he repents. It is not for the Church to dig through his life to find sin, though.
- If a person is *teaching* bad doctrine, he is to be put out. A person coming to remember the Lord does not have to believe exactly what everyone else believes, but if he starts teaching that which is anti-Scriptural, he is to be put out. Again, we are not to search through his Spiritual baggage like a Customs Officer as he comes in.

Therefore, I see the Scriptural way of receiving people is as follows. A brother (or sister) comes in and identifies himself as a Christian and asks to remember the Lord with us. We take his claim at face value, and as long as there is no *known* moral evil in his life, he remembers the Lord with us. No interrogation session, no 2 week (or longer) wait. If moral evil shows up in his life, or if he begins to teach bad doctrine, he is then dealt with.

The table where we remember the Lord is to be the Lord's table, not our table. If this is to be true, then we have no right to tell another Christian that he cannot be there unless we have a *scriptural* reason for doing so. If we begin to do so, it becomes Man's Table rather than the Lord's Table.

6 Scriptural Basis for Remembering the Lord

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Luke 22:19

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”

Matthew 18:20

The only reason we are remembering the Lord is simply because he asked us to. Not because of the one body, not because of the fact he died, but because he asked us to. Plain and simple. I believe that we should honour His request of us. Not only that, but I believe we should do this as closely to the way He asked us to as possible.

The second verse quoted above has been cited for *years* as the grounds for gathering as we do. I disagree with that stand for several reasons.

The context of the verse is not that of the Church as such. It is in connection with the disciplining of a brother, and the prayer that goes on during the process.

The way it is used by the Brethren is that “where two or three gather together in my name [and only my name] , there am I in the midst of them” (KJV with the Brethren stand inserted). The stand taken is that the Lord is only where people are gathered *only* to the name of the Lord. There is no scriptural backing for this stand. Besides, they themselves go under several names, not just the name of the Lord (the Lord Jesus Christ). For example “the Brethren”, “Those Gathered to the Name of the Lord”, “Plymouth Brethren”, etc... Those who go elsewhere are just as much gathered in the Lord's name as anyone. When a Baptist, for instance, goes to remember the Lord, he is not gathering to be a “Baptist” but to remember the Lord.

The verse, if it applies to the Brethren, applies to every congregation of believers everywhere. Remember that to the Lord, the body is whole and complete, not in 3500+ different pieces. We have no right to say that the Lord is here, but not elsewhere.

Basically then, the only reason that I remember the Lord is that he asked me to. And I go to do so under that authority only, and no other. The only ground of gathering that I see as scriptural is “Do this in remembrance of me.”

7 Witness in the World & Separation

There is only one body. The Lord sees it that way. The world sees it that way. We should see it that way. There is no sane reason that we, as Christians,

should refuse to associate with Christians from other denominations.

When the world looks at Christianity, it sees a group of Christians, and that is the extent of it usually. If they see one group of Christians who hate another group of Christians (or appear to), they are confused. I have been asked before why I (a Christian) did not associate with other Christians, but associate with those who were not Christians. I didn't (and don't) have an answer to that question which holds any water. The one factor that ruins the testimony of Christians the most is the intense backbiting and fighting there is among us.

During the last 2 years of High School, I have been meeting with Christians of all strains at school about once a week. I have rarely had such encouraging times in the Meeting (except at camps such as Barakel and Red Pine). As a group, we decided that we would not focus on our differences, but on our similarities and encourage each other. Doctrine rarely got mentioned, and when it was, it was in a constructive way rather than in a destructive one. Through these meetings I gained many good Christian friends and a lot of insight into how other Christians live. I have no qualms in saying that many of the friends I made there (Baptists, Pentecostals, Anglicans, those from the United Church and Salvation Army) are more real in their Christianity than many in the Brethren. This is to the shame of the Brethren and myself as well.

Those ICF meetings were refreshing to us and I believe were a good testimony to the others in the school. By going to ICF, we were identifying ourselves as Christians and were showing the school that we were a unified front. Basically, we showed out the truth of the one body. And I was doing something that was denounced as evil by the Brethren. I was associating myself with other Christians. And I'm glad that I did as it has helped me in my walk here on earth.

8 Limiting the Lord

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Matthew 19:26

It has often been said: “How can the Lord tell one person something about a subject, and another person something different?” I cannot answer this question, but I will say something about it. This type of question (usually rhetorical and used to prove a point) need not be asked. The Lord *can* do exactly that. He *can* lead two people in opposite directions. Quit limiting God. “With God all things are possible”!

This limiting of God is often used as an excuse for the Brethren to push the “party line”. If someone has a different interpretation of the Scripture, the question above is asked. The Brethren, by default, *must* be right and the other person wrong. Both people can be right. Both can be wrong. When we start to limit God, God starts to limit our credibility and our usefulness.

The relationship with God is a personal relationship, not a corporate one. God deals with me separately from my parents. He deals with me separately

from any group of Christians I may associate with. He may lead me in a way totally different from how he leads my father or my mother or anyone else. I refuse to limit God in his dealings with me.