

FELLOWSHIP AMONG THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

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We're on the same topic but I have a different title this morning. The title is: Fellowship Among the Local Assembly. And Lord willing, this morning I do plan to finish this.

What we've been looking at is: how the Holy Ghost works in our life. We know the entire *professing church world* claims to have the Holy Ghost. You can go to the Catholic Church and they'll say: we have the Holy Ghost. The Methodist and the Baptist Church say: we have the Holy Ghost. So we know that the claim is there that *all have the Holy Ghost*.

But we also know that Jesus said: *the Spirit would guide you into all truth*. [John 16:13] Amen. That begins to show us that *not all who claim to have the Holy Ghost do*.

Now when we make a statement like that, some will say: oh you're trying to take away my salvation. No, I'm not.

First of all, I didn't give you *your salvation*. I can't take it away. But what I can do is warn you that *not everybody who says they have the Holy Ghost has it*. We can prove that scripturally. We just did.

If *the Holy Ghost will guide the individual into all truth* and if everybody who claims to have the Holy Ghost has it, then we would all be looking at the same picture and believing the same thing. Praise the Lord.

So let's go back to the book of Acts. I know we've read this at the beginning of each sermon but it's kind of a basis for what we're looking at.

We're going to go to Acts chapter 2 and verse 41.

It says here:

Acts 2:41

Then they that gladly received his word

Well first of all, whose word was that? It was *Peter's word*. Peter was the one who stood and preached that day. He was the first one to preach the complete gospel message of Salvation by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

So first of all, the people had to *receive the Word*. That's what I was mentioning: *the sign of the Holy Ghost*. Once we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, Jesus said: *it will guide you into all truth* [John 16:13] not just *some* truth.

Again, we've mentioned how the Branham Following, yes, they have *some* truth. They have received a certain substance of the truth that Brother Branham brought and they say: praise the Lord, we have the truth!

Well I will say: they have *a portion of truth*.

I will also say: conditions have shown that it's actually an *intellectual understanding* that they have, *not a true revelation*. The way we can see *that* is: when Brother Jackson came on the scene, not only did they *not receive* what God brought through him but they *spoke against it*. And they're *still speaking against it today*.

So we have to say: have they been led into *all truth*? No, they have not.

Then we come to *our day*. Again, I look back especially in the late 80s and the 90s. Throughout the 90s, I went to convention in Indiana at Brother Jackson's church almost every year. In fact, pretty much up until he passed off the scene and even a little bit after that.

We can think back of the different ministers we were in fellowship with. We were talking about that last night with the brothers in Australia.

At that time, I thought: this is going to be the five-fold ministry. There were brothers, we *loved them*, but after Brother Jackson left the scene and when God began to shed *new light* on His Word, then it became: well, we haven't heard this. That's not what we've been established in. That's not what was confirmed to us.

I have to say: when we begin to speak like that, we sound just like the organizations. They say: we believe *this*, we believe *that*. If you stay within *that*, then you're a part of us but don't go outside of it.

That's exactly what the organizations do. They have their creed. They say: we believe in one God. And then they always have some way to say: manifest in three persons. Now that's the denominational world. Those of us who followed Brother Jackson, of course we're not going to believe in a trinity.

Still, when we get to a point: well, *this* is what our Brother taught us. It was precious to our heart, and *this* and *that* also, but we close the door where God is showing more light, I have to say: that's a dangerous place to be.

And that has even affected *fellowship* because I can't sit and listen to a ministry that's going to tell me: $2 + 2 = 5$.

This is just a little real-life example, sort of a type. If Brother Jackson had brought us *algebra*, and somebody else went further and they had *calculus*, we wouldn't say: well I don't want anything to do with that!

Now I know a lot of people might say: *I don't want calculus!* [Laugh] Okay, maybe we *don't* want to study *calculus*.

This is an example. In mathematics, first of all, there is *arithmetic*. Then one day you go beyond that, you get to *algebra*. And after you really comprehend that, there is another level: that's *calculus*.

But if you say: I'm just going to stick with *algebra*. Well yes, you're staying with *truth*, *algebra is true*, but there is *more beyond that*. If we refuse to go further, then we are *not* going into *all that is available*.

Jesus made it very clear. He said that *the Spirit would guide us into all truth*. [John 16:13] Praise the Lord.

Let's keep reading. Here it says:

Acts 2:41
they that gladly received his word

We still have to receive the Word *today*.

Acts 2:41
were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:42

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship,

Again, that's what I'm speaking about. That is *the glue* – we can say – that *holds the true body of Christ together*. Or that is *the vision* of the body of Christ.

Again, when we look in the natural, maybe there's a chess club. Well, what's their purpose in coming together as a club? They have *something in common*: they love to play chess. That's their *focus*. That's their *purpose*.

The true Church, her focus is to *walk in the revealed Word of God*.

Again, not all churches really have that desire. For some, it's the *worship service*. I'll say: that's beautiful and wonderful. I rejoiced this morning with the songs I heard but that's *not* what's in first place. Praise the Lord. For others, it's a certain *social environment*.

Yes, we can say: all of those are benefits of what it is to be in the true Church. But at the end of the day, the true Church has a *desire to walk in the freshly revealed Word of God*.

That's why it says here:

Acts 2:42

they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine

So that's the *purpose*.

Acts 2:42

and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

My title this morning is: Fellowship in the Local Assembly. Now, does a lot of what I'm saying also apply outside of the assembly? Of course it does. But when we see this particular part here: *fellowship one with another*, the first and major place where that happens is *within the local assembly*. That's why this is my focus.

Let's go to Hebrews 10 and I'd like to start in verse 23.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

Notice here, he says: *without wavering*. [Hebrews 10:23]

We should be a stable people. We should know *where we are, what we believe, and why we believe it*. Amen.

Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Praise the Lord.

Paul is saying here that we are *to provoke one another*. Normally the word *provoke* has kind of a negative connotation, right? But it's kind of *to push somebody out of where they're comfortable*. He says: *provoke to love and to good works*. That shows he's looking at *each one of us* to be a part of that. Praise the Lord.

Hebrews 10:25

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;

So all the way back then, there were those who had a custom: well, I don't always have to go to church. No, you don't *have to* but the Lord *wants you to*. Again, I know there are conditions sometimes – we all have them – but it is part of what the Lord expects of us.

Sometimes people come up for prayer: Brother, pray for me that the Lord will lead me and I'll know His will in my life. Sometimes I almost want to say: well, I can tell you one thing He does want: *He wants you to come to church*.

I can tell you that *right now*. We don't need a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost outside of what's already written here to know that. But it's written so if we want a better spiritual walk with the Lord, I have to say: let's do what Paul is saying here. I'm not the one saying it, I'm just repeating what Paul said. Amen.

He even says more. He says:

Hebrews 10:25

but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

What *day* could that be? Well, I don't think there's any other *day* we could look at except *the coming of the Lord*.

When he says: *the day* [Hebrews 10:25] that's *the day* we've all been waiting for ever since *Jesus went up and the clouds took him out of their sight*. [Acts 1:9] Since that time, the Christians have been waiting for his return.

And I'll say this: *that day is approaching*.

Maybe there were some who had a bit of an excuse back then with Paul, but we don't have that now. *That day is approaching*.

Let's remember: our brothers and our sisters *rejoice*. It's not that we're trying to demand something hard of anybody but *we rejoice* when we see our brothers and sisters with us in the congregation. It is a *blessing*.

You may feel that you don't really have much to contribute but the very fact that *you are present* is a blessing to each and every one. And also, you will see that the Lord has a blessing for you as well. Praise the Lord.

Let's go to John 21. I mentioned this the other day but we didn't turn to it then. I'm just going to read one verse, John chapter 21 verse 15.

John 21:15

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

Up to this point in Peter's walk with the Lord, the Lord had been the one to bring the beautiful Word. The Lord was also, of course, the one who gave his life. Amen. So Peter had been *receiving* these things of the goodness of the Lord. Praise the Lord. But now Jesus was showing Peter: *you now have a responsibility to others*.

Until this point, Peter could just rejoice in the Word that was brought. He could say: you're the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He could see the opening of Scripture. He could see that Jesus Christ was his Saviour. But now, it was coming down to: *Peter, you have a job to do. You have a responsibility to your brothers and sisters*.

And really, we may not all be ministers, yet for every one of us it's not just: *me and the Lord*, but now *we all have a responsibility* as part of the body of Christ. We *all* help one another.

That's why Paul used the example of the body: *every part of the natural body has its function*. [1Corinthians 12:12-20] Praise the Lord.

Even on *the parts that are unseemly*, he says: *we bestow more honour*, right?
[1Corinthians 12:23]

I just think about – in the natural – *the foot*. I don't think *the foot* is the most beautiful part of the body. But I remember a couple years ago, I was cleaning up a little bit in our bedroom and there were some shoes in the bedroom that I was going to take to the closet. I took them and they were my wife's shoes. Then there were *more shoes*, and then there were *more shoes*, and then I thought: where am I going to put *all these shoes*? [Laugh]

So I know what Paul said was right, that *we bestow more honour*. Now that was just a natural example. But *the foot* – you all heard what I said last Sunday – I was so happy once I got a pair of shoes on my feet!

My point is: you may not feel that you have such an important part but I'll say: *yes, you do*. And we have to understand: every one of us has a responsibility to our brothers and our sisters, to be an encouragement and to be a help as the Lord leads in our lives. Praise the Lord.

Let's go to Matthew chapter 5. We're going to read a few things here that are somewhat – we might say – *basic* but I'll say: very important. We can start in verse 21.

Matthew 5:21

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

Matthew 5:22

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:

It's interesting, he says: *whosoever is angry without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement*. That's very strong.

Now, somebody may say: Brother, I have a reason! [Laugh] Well, I don't think anybody is going to get angry *without* a reason, right?

But what this is actually looking at is: something that would be *justified* according to *the way the Lord looks at it*. And even so, there's a *right way* to deal with that: it still has to be *with love*.

If we look at what the Lord is saying, he says: *if you get angry and it's not* – I'll put it in my own words – *if it's not a just anger that the Lord would support where there would be a purpose in it*, then he says: *you'll be in danger of the judgement*. [Matthew 5:22]

This begins to show *the level of care* that we should have for our brothers and sisters.

In another place – I'm not going to read it this morning – but when Paul was speaking about *meats*, of course we don't have that issue with *meats* today, but he said: *if eating meat causes your brother to offend, why would you make your brother to offend for whom Christ died?* [1Corinthians 8:11-13]

That's what we have to remember: *Christ died for our brothers and our sisters*. So we really have to take great care what *spirit* and what *attitude* we have.

The beautiful thing is: if we allow ourselves to be *led by the Holy Ghost*, it's not going to be a difficult thing because *the fruit of the Spirit* will produce this. [Galatians 5:22-23] We can use the Word as a *mirror* to reflect and look at our own heart.

He says:

Matthew 5:22

and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

So we see as the infraction gets stronger, he ends up saying that *one would be in danger of hell fire*. That's a serious thing to look at. Yet all of that – how can I say this? – all of that is just *what comes from our mouth*.

At the end of the day, *the mouth is reflecting what's in the heart*. We can try to hide it, but it's going to reflect it.

There was a man once, his wife would ask: where are you going? And his answer was: oh I'm going to see my girlfriend. He was joking. Well it *looked like* he was joking. But later on, we found out: some of those times he *really had been* going to see his girlfriend.

So listen to what people say. Sometimes when they say: oh it's a joke, it might *not* be a joke. It may actually be *what's in their heart*.

He says:

Matthew 5:23

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee;

In other words: *your brother has some grievance about something you've done wrong.*

He says here:

Matthew 5:24

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

It doesn't help for us to have our contribution to the church if there is something *in our heart*, or as the Lord is showing: *if we know that somebody else has something in their heart.*

I will say: whether it's in my heart or whether it's in my brother's heart, it's *more important to get beyond that* than to think: well, I still have my beautiful song, I have my beautiful sermon, or I have *this* or *that* to contribute.

First of all, we have get our heart in the right place. And if there's a situation that we are able to bring a resolution to, then *it's the will of the Lord that we do that*. Because that situation is going to impede the true communion we have one with another. Praise the Lord.

Let's jump down a little bit to verse 38.

Matthew 5:38

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

Matthew 5:39

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil:

Now just saying: *don't resist evil*, this might sound a little strange but as we continue to read, he clears it up.

Matthew 5:39

but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

I thank the Lord: as best I can remember, ever since I've been in middle school, I don't think anybody has smitten me on the cheek. And for most of us, that's not really something that we have an issue with. Thank the Lord: up until this point. We know violence is getting bad.

But we have to understand what the Lord is really talking about right here: there has to be a certain *flexibility in our spirit*. There may be something said or done and sometimes it can be our own brother or sister. And sometimes, they may not even realize it.

I have to say: so many times we *perceive* malice in others: oh, did you see what they did? Did you hear what they said? Many times, that was not in their heart or mind at all. But *we don't want to be hurt*.

So what the Lord is saying here is: *if somebody does hurt you, don't put up that wall*. Like: I'm going to – like the turtles do – I'm going to pull back in my shell. I'm going to protect myself. No! He says: *give them the opportunity to do it again*. [Matthew 5:39]

That's *not* our nature, right?

He tells us later on: *pray for them*. [Matthew 5:44] Right?

We know the natural man's response is: well, I'm putting up a wall. I don't want to talk to you now. I don't want to have communion with you. You might hurt me again. But we might actually learn: that was never even really their intention in the first place.

At the end of the day, if we will do what the Lord says, that will give an opportunity for the Lord to begin to work. And it will even provide an opportunity for an understanding between the two.

I have to say: one of the things that irritates me the most – even just from a natural standpoint – is if there's a problem and neither side wants to speak to the other. They just want to close up, or even if one side says: I'm not going to talk. Well then, they have pretty much cemented the problem because they've completely closed down any opportunity there could've actually been for an understanding.

You see: from the human side, we probably *fear*.

Our thoughts may be: well, I don't think we're going to be able to work past this. Or: it's clear how they feel about me, so I don't want to deal with this.

But the Lord is telling us something different: *keep that fellowship open*.

And *know that the Lord is watching over it all*.

At the end of the day, if we're truly brothers and sisters and we have been hurt, we're going to be able to come to a point *to get beyond that* and then it will be something far behind us.

But we can't hold that inside. Paul spoke about a *root of bitterness*, right? [Hebrews 12:15] And that's what it's going to become if we don't keep that door *open* to still be able to talk and fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

In fact, the Lord said in another place: *if it really gets to a certain point, go and tell them what their fault is*. Tell them: *you did this*. [Matthew 18:15]

Now I know there's *step two* and there's *step three* [Matthew 18:16-17] but in all my time as a Christian, I've never seen it get beyond *step one*. And I pray I never do. But I think many times we're afraid to even bring it to *step one*. Well that's fine, you can just forgive them and move on. Amen.

But what we *must not do* is say: well, they did this to me. I don't want to talk. They can be over there and I'm over here.

How many can see what I'm saying?

The Lord speaks against that. He does.

He says: *if they've hurt you, give them the opportunity to hurt you again*.

So again, if the situation is at a certain level, if it's something we can forgive but we feel there needs to be a change, then we can go and talk with the brother or the sister and tell them their fault *in love*.

I'll say this: if we're going to do that, we should pray about it, prepare ourselves, and ask the Lord to be the One to lead in that. He can help resolve the situation.

Matthew 5:39

whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

We can read all the way down how we are to be like our Heavenly Father.

He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. [Matthew 5:45] Right?

I have to say: I thank the Lord for that because over the last few years, our government has not been just. But God in His Grace still brings a little bit of rain.

So let us be able to treat everyone like that.

Let's go to First John chapter 3.

It's interesting to me that this is also John 3:16 but it's First John 3:16. Here he speaks about what the Lord did. He says in verse 16:

1 John 3:16

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us:

Now when we read this, we notice that the words '*of God*' are in italics. We probably know this but anytime something is italicized in the King James Version, the original manuscripts do not have those words. They put them in there for clarity, and most of the time it's really helpful that they've done that. In other words, they believe *it's implied* in the original texts. And like I said, most of the time it's really helpful and we just read right through it.

But here, it's saying that God laid down His life. And we know: God did *not* lay down His life. God never died. God *cannot die*. Some say: God gave His life on the cross. No, *He didn't*. It was *Jesus Christ* who gave his life. He's the example. That's who John is speaking of.

Now let's keep reading.

1 John 3:16

and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

That's a strong statement. Does this mean we're going to be martyred for the sake of our brethren? That's *not* what he's saying.

But what he's saying is: *we should be willing to sacrifice our life for the benefit of our brethren, or our brothers and sisters*. Praise the Lord.

So we can't just have a feeling: well, this is me and the Lord. That's very convenient but according to this Word – you and I – *we all have a responsibility to one another as we are part of one body*. [1Corinthians 12:12] Praise the Lord.

We are *growing together* and however God has enabled me to be an encouragement to my brother or my sister, I have to work in that capacity according to His leading. Praise the Lord.

So we must each lay down our lives for one another. [1John 3:16]

And we can even ask ourselves: how am I doing that? Or we can ask the Lord: Lord, show me how You want me to do that. I want to do Your will.

In closing, I'll say: the first thing we can do is *look at our own heart*. Do I have a fully transparent – as David said: *create a right spirit in me* [Psalm 51:10] – do I really have that heart? Praise the Lord. That's the beginning.

And if we can allow the Holy Ghost to work on our heart – first of all: knowing that *we have the Holy Ghost* and that the Holy Ghost works in our heart – then we can *all grow together in the Lord, a body in Christ*. Praise the Lord. Amen.

So let's go ahead and ask the Lord for his help.