

The Importance of Fellowship

- John 15
- The Arranging Board felt that it would be helpful for our Members to share a lesson on the responsibilities of being a member of an Ecclesia
- They have asked me to spend a few minutes this morning talking about this subject
- I felt that John 15 was a good place for us to start this discussion:
- John 15:4-6 KJV
 - 4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
 - 5) I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.
 - 6) If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.
- God never intended for us to be alone
 - In the beginning, God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone"*
- Why would God design our lives this way?
- Wouldn't it be easier sometimes to not have to deal with the dynamics of being part of a group?
- Wouldn't it be easier to avoid some of the personalities and the politics?
- God wants us to live together in Ecclesias for one very important reason:
 - *Love cannot be learned in isolation*
- God wants you to be in regular, close fellowship with other believers so that you can develop your skills of loving
 - God wants you to have fellowship with people just like you... Imperfect, sinful, frustrating people

- That is why Jesus is very clear about this in John 15
- *I am the vine and you are the branches*
- We are collectively referred to as this plant that is bound and connected together by Christ
- The main purpose is for us to learn how to love each other
- John 15:12-14 KJV
 - 12) This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
 - 13) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
 - 14) Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.
- There is a reason that we are asked to meet together with one another
- There is a reason that God has put us into Ecclesias
- For us to avoid putting ourselves in contact with the Ecclesia is to circumvent the purpose and goal of our Heavenly Father
- The importance of Fellowship isn't only because your Ecclesia has asked it of you
- The importance of Fellowship isn't only because God has commanded it of you
- The importance of Fellowship is that it is vital to your development into the person that God wants you to be
- If we are to follow Christ's commandment to Love One Another, then we have to BE AROUND one another
- The Arranging Board pay attention to people's attendance and contact you when we are concerned...
 - Not because we like checking boxes on a list...
 - Not because we have control or power issues...
 - And, certainly not because we enjoy making uncomfortable phone calls...
- But, because we are concerned about you...
- Because we firmly believe that God has instructed us all that this is best for us

- Paul continues this same discussion in 1st Corinthians 12

- 1st Corinthians 12:12 KJV

12) For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ.

- Chris is not divided

- Likewise, we are not to split apart, but to stay together as much as possible

- 1st Corinthians 12:14-21 KJV

14) For the body is not one member, but many.

15) If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16) And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17) If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling?

18) But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19) And if they *were* all one member, where *were* the body?

20) But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.

21) And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

- If an organ is severed from it's body, it will shrivel up and die

- Imagine, if you will, the grotesque picture of a severed limb

- The first thing that comes to mind is NOT a picture of healthy happiness

- A severed limb cannot exist on it's own, and neither can you

- Spiritually disconnected from the lifeblood of your body, your spiritual life will wither and eventually cease to exist

- That is why the first symptom of spiritual decline is usually inconsistent attendance at Memorial Service and other gatherings of the body

- When you become careless of fellowship, other things often begin to slide also

- No one here is immature enough to think that attendance at Memorial Service is the only arbiter of Spiritual Health

- Everyone realizes and understands that there could be circumstances that could hinder your attendance
- But, membership in the Family of God is neither inconsequential nor something to be casually ignored
 - You have to BE HERE in order to participate in it
- Romans 12 also speaks to this idea of us all being members of the same body
- Romans 12:4-5 KJV
 - 4) For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:
 - 5) So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.
- We're introduced here to the idea of MUTUALITY
- The Ecclesia is responsible to do whatever it can to help you in your walk toward the Kingdom
 - You are responsible to be open to that process
- AND, you as collectively a member of the Ecclesia, are responsible to do whatever you can to help others in their walk
 - And, they are responsible to be open to that process
- Even if the process is sometimes, awkward, uncomfortable, or not pulled off in the most mature, experienced or compassionate way as possible
- None of us are good at good at having those uncomfortable discussions with each other
- But, we should all remember how important they are!
 - And, not to avoid our responsibility to each other just because of our anxiety about having to bring up something that no one really wants to talk about
- And, as Brother and Sisters, members one of another, and members of the Body of Christ, we should make it our goal to try to be as open and accepting as possible of the person who loves us enough to take the time to talk to us about this area where they feel concerned about our Spiritual Life

- Give them the benefit of the doubt
 - They don't WANT to have to bring this up to you
 - They feel COMPELLED by their Love of Christ to talk to you
- Mutuality means that we ALL are in the same position, and each share the same responsibilities to one another
- I have no more responsibility as the Recording Brother, as you do as a Member to reach out and connect with someone who we feel needs our help
- And, you are just as responsible to help me
- At the last Arranging Board Meeting I got upset about something, and said things that I shouldn't have said and felt bad about them later
- A Brother that I love and respect very much had the courage to call me on that
- I'm sure that he didn't WANT to do that
 - He didn't get some perverse pleasure in calling out the Recording Brother
- But, he loved me enough to be concerned about my Spiritual well-being, and he wanted to attempt to help me
 - And help me he did!
 - His call allowed me an simple and easy way for me to release my guilt and bad feelings about what I had said, and to make a few apologies to people that I had hurt
- THAT is Fellowship
- THAT is the reason why God wants us together
- THAT is why God wants us to be a member of an Ecclesia
- When you got baptized you said "I DO" to a lot of things...
- You were washing away your sins and entering into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus

- But, you were also joining an Ecclesia
- You agreed to come – You agreed to meet together with your Brothers and Sisters every week and remember the death and resurrection of our Lord
- You agreed to pursue a life of self-improvement by spending as much time around the Bible as your schedule allows – And that means attending the Bible Studies sponsored by the Ecclesia
- You agreed to be a part of a Fellowship – And that means committing yourself to attending as many Ecclesial Activities as you can so that you can develop your relationships with your Brothers and Sisters
- You agreed to MUTUALITY – And that means making yourself open to the loving suggestions and concerns of your Brothers and Sisters whose only goal is for you to grow in your relationship with Christ
- Before I close, let me share a few thoughts about the Arranging Board
- You are blessed to have this group of individuals working hard to help with the growth and development of your Ecclesia
 - Working to help with YOUR spiritual growth and development
- Few Ecclesias are blessed with such a well rounded group of Brethren who share such positive and Christlike attitudes about their service
- Hebrews 13 gives us all some good advice about our relationship to the Arranging Board
- Hebrews 13:7 NIV
 - 7) Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
- You couldn't do much better than imitating the faith of Gordon, David, Kim, Russell, Brad and Ken
- You can help make their lives even better...
- Hebrews 13:17 KJV
 - 17) Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

- Be open and eager to work towards the mutual improvement of yourselves and every member of this Ecclesia
- Submit your own personal prejudices and desires to that which benefits the group
- Remembering that you are a part of a larger Body...
- Hebrews 13:20-22 NIV

- 20) May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
- 21) equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
- 22) Brethren, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation...