

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Honor What is Holy

Jay Graham

In the Old Testament, Jehovah gave Israel a number of instructions including the tabernacle (and the various things inside of it), a law to live by (including its various applications), as well as other things. Israel was to value these teachings and instructions, primarily because they came from their God. They were holy and were to be treated as such. In the New Testament, the Lord has also given to His people instructions that are holy such as His church (and everything His church is to abide by such as its assemblies and its teachings). Another example is the principle of marriage as given by our Creator. For this reason, it is called “holy matrimony.”

With this as an introduction, consider the following: in my experience, I have found among the churches of Christ a number of congregations who practice what I call “mutual edification.” This is the principle in which it is the brothers’ responsibility to teach to the various congregations of the Lord’s people. Of these congregations, many are practicing this as a result of strong convictions. They are following the NT teachings in which this was practiced among the churches. These brethren recognize there are not any examples in the NT in which a congregation hired what today might be commonly called a “minister” to do the work of the average brothers in regard to teaching the congregations. The work of a man who is hired to do the work of the brothers is a modern invention among the churches.

There are also many congregations that are following this principle for various other reasons. Perhaps they cannot afford to hire a minister and they are doing the best they can. There are also cases in which a congregation may practice this principle in order to use funds for other works. I am finding more and more of these congregations scattered throughout, not only in the United States, but also throughout the world.

Of this latter group of congregations, it has been my experience to hear from them two very distinct responses. The first is very positive. I have heard brethren say how much they have learned to appreciate the great advantages of following this principle. They often point out that they are surprised and even pleased with the personal growth and maturity that being willing to teach the body has brought the individual brothers. Many will point out that they have been benefitted by this practice, and they are pleasantly surprised at the advantages of

taking this responsibility themselves.

There is another response that is not so pleasant to hear, and they are a minority of congregations in my experience, but they do exist. I have heard brethren actually sound very apologetic that they do not have a professional speaker or minister. They often talk of how they “hope” to one day do “better” by having a professional to teach the congregation. They lament that they are in such a “bad position” that the average brothers are “forced” by circumstance to do the teaching. I do not think that this is a good attitude.

Just as with everything the Lord has given to His people, the God-approved principle of mutual edification is something holy and right. It is something that should be valued and appreciated by brethren. And it is certainly nothing to be ashamed of. Yes, because the brothers are not necessarily trained speakers, they may not be as eloquent as others. Because many of the brothers have other responsibilities such as family and work that they must give attention to, they may be forced to get up a bit earlier or go to bed a bit later in order to spend time preparing to teach the brethren. To be sure, teaching the body is not to be taken lightly.

It is worth noting the apostle Paul was not in any way apologetic when he wrote to the brethren at Rome in **15:14**, “*Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*” Paul did not write for the brethren to do this until they could hire a man to take their responsibilities from them. When Paul wrote to the brethren at Corinth, he said in **1 Corinthians 14:3**, “*But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.*” He was not addressing this to the Corinthian minister, for there is certainly no hint of such a man. He was writing to the saints as noted in **1:2**. Paul was addressing the great good the brethren can do by speaking the word of the Lord to the church.

Paul was addressing these same saints in **1 Corinthians 14:26**, “*How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*” The brothers had important words for the congregation when it came together. These were words of value to the church, and they certainly should neither be ashamed nor apologetic of such! These words were given by the Lord and therefore were holy and right! Certainly, they were nothing to be apologetic of!

It is also worth noting when considering the value of these words the prophecy in **Malachi 3:16-18**. This prophecy was

continued on the next page...

specifically speaking of the words that jewels (Christians) in the coming church would speak to one another. These same words would help the jewels learn right and wrong and how to serve the Lord. Are these words to be ashamed of? Are these words to be apologized for? Absolutely NOT! These are words we should be thankful for and appreciate, for they ultimately come from the Lord!

To be sure, there are other passages in the Scriptures we could consider, but this article is somewhat restricted by time and space. The point is, we should never be apologetic nor ashamed of the average brothers who are willing to take time out of their lives to prepare lessons for the Lord's people. Conversely, those brothers who are fortunate enough to take these responsibilities must also know they are speaking of the holy word of God to the holy body of Christ. They are to prepare lessons by putting sufficient time and effort to present words that are edifying and worthy of the Christians they are speaking to as well.

Thanks to the Lord for giving us this privilege. Thanks to Him for giving us things that are holy and right that we can share with one another as we work at walking in His ways.

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Steadfast in Fellowship

Tad Morris

What were the first Christians like? What were they doing?

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

It's easy to look at this passage and notice only the reference to doctrine. The church was steadfastly following the doctrine of the apostles. They were carefully and diligently following the apostle's doctrine. That's what they were doing and that's what we should be doing. But doctrine was only one of the defining characteristics of the first Christians. They were also diligent to follow the apostles example of fellowship, breaking bread (a form of fellowship), and praying together (another form of fellowship).

It's certainly possible for a church to focus so much on one that we neglect the other. We may diligently follow the apostle's doctrine, but if we aren't equally zealous in following their example of fellowship, are we really Christ's Church? The Church is defined by doctrine and fellowship. Not just doctrine. Not just fellowship.

Fellowship in the 1st Century

Fellowship is a lot more than being friendly on Sundays. Sometimes we pat ourselves on the back if we make it to church three times in a week, but I think the first Christians would be surprised at how little time we spend with each other.

"Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:44-47).

The first church had all things in common. Obviously, this included spiritual things, but the first Church shared their physical things, too. They shared their money, their possessions, their food, and even their homes. Most importantly, they shared their TIME. There was no place they wanted to be more than with each other. They were together daily. They ate together daily. What was their attitude like? Gladness and simplicity of heart.

How do we become a church that looks like this? Does God even expect us to be a church like this? Maybe not completely, but surely there is room for improvement. Our time is precious to us. We're so busy that it's hard to make time for our church family. Our things are precious to us. We save money so we can spend it on things. When is the last time you saved money to invest it in the Church or someone in the Church?

Instructions on Fellowship

Our relationships in the Church are like the relationships we have in a family. For example, do you ask your children if they'd agree to having a new sibling? No? Neither does God. God doesn't ask you if you want a brother in Christ. He doesn't ask you if you want a sister in Christ. You've got them, whether you want them or not, and he's not asking us to have fellowship. We have fellowship with one another just by virtue of being Christians: **1 John 1:7**, *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."* We're a family, and God expects us to act like one.

The first step in Christian fellowship is simple. It's not always easy, but it is simple. Love each other and don't hate each other.

"He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:9-11).

How important is it that we love each other? **1 John 3:14-15**, *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death."*

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." As far as God is concerned, despising a brother (or sister) is like murder.

When we really (truly) love each other, fellowship comes naturally. We will want to share our possessions, our money, our food, our homes, and our time. The first Church did this, and they kept on doing it: **Acts 4:32**, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

The Cost of Fellowship

Fellowship isn't free. It requires some sacrifice. If I'm going to share my possessions and my money, that's less for me. If I'm going to share my home, that requires sacrificing some privacy. If I'm going to share my time, that means sacrificing some time I might have otherwise used for myself.

Fellowship does require sacrifice, but there is so much to be gained. If you're a part of Christ's church, you will never go hungry. You'll never need a place to stay. You'll never be without a friend. Someone will always have time for you. The friendships and fellowship we enjoy in the church is designed to be a well-spring of encouragement, comfort, and security. This is part of the essential identity of the Lord's church.

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Where is Your Confidence?

Jared Groves

Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit" (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

One thing that I consistently find is that, when it comes down to it, we don't truly believe what we tell ourselves we believe. It seems that a day does not pass when I do not hear myself or others express concern over the state of the government or the stock market's latest bearish move. I consistently hear about the rapid decline of our society and the systematic erosion of morality in the church. What I believe I am hearing is an expression of fear. Do we trust the Lord when he asks us to "consider the lilies of the field" (**Luke 12:16-35**)? Do we believe Him when He says, "I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (**Isaiah 41:10**)? Do we not have faith that "all things work together for good to those who

love God" (**Romans 8:26-32**)? Sometimes, for me, the answer is no.

A few days ago, I visited the Walmart nearest the stadiums in Independence, MO. It didn't take long for me to realize that this bumpkin was not going to be fitting in. I must admit I became a little edgy. Fifteen minutes into my visit, I heard the sound of breaking glass; I looked up to see a man running down the aisle, knocking merchandise off the shelves, with a cop hot on his heels. If I had a little dog, and I was a young girl from Kansas... well, the line writes itself. I began to sweat some. How could I ever be okay with someone I loved shopping here? Fear started welling up inside me as I considered the dangers that my loved ones face when I'm not around. To my shame, it took every bit of thirty minutes for me to realize that I was going to have to put my trust in God on this matter. To further my shame, it took at least another five minutes for me to realize that it was God who protected my loved ones even in my presence.

Where does trust come from? I can't say that I know, but it seems that love has something to do with it. As love is demonstrated, trust is validated. The Father loves us beyond our comprehension. The longer I'm alive and the more I experience, the more I am persuaded,

"that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

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Blessed Are the Dead

Margie Hildenbrand, 83, of the **Stull, KS Church of Christ** departed this earthly life on February 12th to be with her Lord. She was a life long member and had an excellent singing voice, known for her music abilities.

Marian Louise Parrish (Welcher, Felton), 102, of Lady Lakes, FL, formerly of **Fayette, MO**, passed away peacefully surrounded by family on February 8th, 2018 at the home of daughter Dellois Camp. Also surviving are Connie Meinke of Fayette, MO and Carol McGowan of Rockford, IL. Marian's long life was blessed by 6 generations. She will be missed by family and those who shared her faith!

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

~ **Revelation 14:13**



Please check your expiration date!

Special Meetings

Please make plans to visit the church on **Grant Street in Unionville, MO** for their weekend meeting with **John Lee** on April 14-15. Services will be at 7 p.m. on Saturday, 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on Sunday with a basket dinner at noon.

The church in **Kirksville, MO** will be hosting a **Ladies Day, May 5, 9:30 AM till 2 PM** with lunch provided. This year's theme is "*Daughters of the King*." Teachers will be **Maddie Hermon, Heather Lockhart, Cindy Stephens, Lois Williams**. Please RSVP for either Friday or Saturday night housing to **Gaylene Green 816-304-5201 or Cathy Poyner 660-216-0766**.

The church in **Martensdale, IA** plans a **Ladies Day** for June 2. **Trinity Davis, LuAnn Woody, and Callie Barringer** will be relating Esther, Ruth, and Hannah/Abigail to the Proverbs 31 woman. **Sarah Morris, Bethany Morris, and Megan Stevens** will offer small devotions before each speaker on "What does a godly woman look like to you?" More details will follow in future issues.

2018 Meetings

May 5.....Ladies' Day, Kirksville, MO
May 5-6.....Lawrence, KS
June 2.....Ladies' Day, Martensdale, IA
June 9-10.....Vandalia, IA
June 16-17...Young People's Meeting, Excelsior Springs, MO
June 18-23.....Shaver Lake, CA
July 2-6.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 21-27.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO

Here and There

On February 11, the **Church of Christ on Jefferson Avenue (formerly Jay Street), Lakewood, CO** met for the last time. There are contents from the meeting place currently available for any interested parties including Bibles, song books, spiritual books, and assorted furniture. If your congregation has a need for any of these, or other items, please contact your **editor**.

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