

Session IV

How Then Should We Fellowship

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As we begin this last session, I pray that God has done a work in your heart, your mind and your will by His Spirit through the study of His Word in view of the end times. You see His word always changes us. That is why the enemy will do everything to convince you, that it is a waste of time, or somehow that you are the exception and the same rules don't apply to you or to anyone anymore. Satan erodes our faith a little at a time through distraction, confusion, busyness, the cares of this life, riches, worry and fear and it takes time in His Word to build it back up again. His Word lasts forever and as it says in Isa 55:11, His Word never returns void, but accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent. His Word is meant to attach to us like glue, that it would be written in our hearts and carry us into eternity.

When we look into the Scriptures, it is like looking into a mirror and it begins as we hide the truth inside, to change us from the inside out. It is so different from the religious mindset, that causes us to think that by following rules, we will somehow become better or find purpose or significance by a form of godliness. There is such a hunger rising for the relationship that will change us, for authentic Christianity, for connection to the God who is power and who is love and who is totally relevant to our lives. As Carter shared this past Sunday, it is the Person of the Holy Spirit that guides us into all truth, and guides us into understanding of the Scriptures as it applies to here and now for our lives. The Holy Spirit arrests us and draws us into prayer, engages us in worship and teaches us the Word. The Spirit of God in one another is what attracts us to be in fellowship, to be in union and communion with God and with one another all at the same time. That is what we want to study this week-the importance of fellowship in view of the time in which we live.

We read in Acts 2:42-47 about the New Testament church where the power of God was experienced when they met together. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone in need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." There are a couple of words I want to pull out from these verses that demonstrate characteristics that I believe will be true of the end-time church. There will be devotion, affection that is expressed to one another, it will be felt, and it will be tangible in

words and actions. It will be devotion toward God and also toward those who bring the presence and word of God. It will be marked by fellowship- a koinonia, with the love of God being expressed toward one another. I experience that sense of fellowship to varying degrees with different saints in the city, but there is one group where I connect in prayer and fellowship in the city that is different than in a church-sponsored event. The Spirit of God is what draws us together to pray for the Richmond area and for one another. What started as a prayer meeting in City Hall for city government has become a time of sharing and earnest, fervent prayer. Henry and I are in the minority there as to race, and I must say that we have come to know one another after the Spirit of God. We come with no agenda, but to pray for the city. No one is competing for the limelight, to be heard, but we come to bring what God has impressed on our hearts and to hear together how we might pray in agreement. On Monday mornings, with MCC intercessors, there is a koinonia, a Spirit-filled relationship with one another before God. It causes us to seek one another out at other times, for meals and to work together in ministries. God knits us together in the place of fellowship and as it says in this Scripture in the breaking of bread which infers both meals and communion. The commentary refers us back to Matt 14:19 where Jesus broke the bread and offered thanks and fed over 5000 people.

Why I believe these characteristics will accompany the end time church is because we know that Christ is returning for a bride, not body parts, but the Beautiful Body of Christ that has been knit together as one. This is the answer to the prayer by Jesus, the great High Priest in John 17 and it says when that happens, His glory will rest upon His Bride. Jesus is returning for His Glorious Bride as well as to pronounce judgment on those who have rejected Him and His love and His sacrifice.

Another characteristic of the early and end time church is worship which we discussed in the second week of this series and also joy that comes from God's favor. God has a joy that is reserved for us when we enter that place of communion and it is a joy like no other, because it is the same joy that is enjoyed by the Godhead, the three in one, the Trinity. Just like we anticipate the joy of marriage and coming together in union at so many levels, until we experience marriage, we cannot receive the joy of uniting together. As the Body comes together, as local churches and ministries partner together which I believe this hour will require and is already happening indifferent places. I heard in Texas, I believe it was in Houston, I read in Breaking Christian News online that a large church was helping 3 smaller churches in the area pay their mortgages. You see when one suffers we all suffer, but when one rejoices we all find a place of rejoicing. I believe in the days ahead we will be partnering much more than just in Niger or a few local ministries, because this is in God's heart, a joy He wants us to experience. Can a nation be saved in a day-absolutely

with God's people in unity. It is the reason that Satan works overtime to keep us divided.

This is what is supposed to happen. Revival will come to the church, we know that because it says in Haggai 2:6-9, "This is what the Lord Almighty says, 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house (referring to the present construction of the temple) will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this house I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty.'" Who is the Desired of all Nations? It is Jesus, our coming King. Let's look in the New Testament, in Hebrews 12:26-27: "At that time, His voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more will I shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.' The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-that is created things-so that what cannot be shaken may remain."

We have some specific direction as to how to conduct ourselves with one another. In I Thes 5:8-11 it says, "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up just as in fact you are doing." In I Thes 5:23-24 we read a prayer of Paul to the saints at Thessalonica: "May the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it."

We are to live a life of love towards one another. The cross is also horizontal as well as vertical. We must be able to walk in love. So how do we do that? In Eph 4 starting in verse 29 through 5:2 it says: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for the building up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ in God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

I Peter 1:13 starts, "Therefore prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance, but just as he who called you is

holy; so be holy in all you do for it is written, "Be holy, because I am holy." Read from verse 22, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." In chapter 2 of I Peter: 17 it says, "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God and honor the king." And this next verse I really love in I Peter 4:7-10, "The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." This was all written by Peter to Christians and with the emphasis, I have an idea that they were having some difficulty loving one another.

This verse summarizes the whole point of covering this idea of hospitality so well in Heb 10:24-25, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Look at I Cor 3:12-13 as it speaks of this Day of the Lord's coming: "If any man builds on foundation (which is Christ) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss, he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." From every people group will a remnant be saved and in Zeph 3:11-13 even as Jerusalem believers in the day of judgment. I found it interesting to study the characteristics of a saved remnant because I believe this will apply to believers whenever judgment is upon their city or nation.

God is doing a sifting work even now among believers in cities and nations in preparation for His return. These attributes will be characteristic of them. They will be humble and meek, trusting in the name of the Lord. They will do no wrong-obedience is a clear earmark. They will be no lying among them, but transparency and honesty. They will love the truth and despise deception of any kind. They will have no fear and enjoy God's peace. Does not this describe the kind of person you want to be as a Christ-follower?

I would like us to look at a few Scriptures on the practice of hospitality. Let's look at Rom 12:9-13 Because here are some keys as to how we are going to get through the days ahead. Whenever everyone else is hoarding, the Christian will be giving, sowing, and investing in one another's lives. "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but

keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Speaking of widows who were to be cared for by the church, we see in I Tim 5:10 that they were to be over 60 years of age, faithful to one husband and well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds."

III John vs 8 says, "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men that we may work together for the truth." Heb 13:1-2 reads, "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." There is already accelerated angelic activity and we are told that The harvesters at the end of the age are angels in Matt 13:39. We are also told in verse 49 of the same chapter that "the angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will weeping and gnashing of teeth." There will much activity by the angels who are warring in heavenly places even now. Some will be blowing trumpets, others carrying scrolls, and some carrying bowls of wrath and judgment. Along with increased angelic activity, there will also be released increased spiritual revelation with dreams and visions as we read in Joel 2. I have a book, Miracles Among Muslims written by Christine Darg, a friend of mine, about how Muslims in hard to reach nations are having dreams and visions where Jesus Himself is appearing and revealing Himself to them.

So in all, I would say that we are living in very exciting times-sometimes it will be a rough ride. I remember a day when there had been threatening weather and we went to Kings' Dominion anyway, and because of the dark clouds, many people stayed away. In that environment there were no lines so Shari and I rode the Anaconda roller coaster 10 times in a row-unheard of in a normal day at the park. That's a picture, I think, of the Body of Christ doing exploits in a day of ominous clouds. For us the day will dawn and there will be no dark clouds. Will we have the testimony of others about our lives, testimonies that will glorify Jesus, and of how we were there for some person that made a difference in their eternal destiny? Maybe we gave them a drink of cold water. Maybe we had a new family over for a meal. Maybe we took care of some children so a couple could have some time together making all the difference in the survival of their marriage. Maybe we baked a cake for a new neighbor. Maybe we helped a family make their mortgage payment. Maybe we ministered to the homeless on a cold day when a person there had reached the end of the line, and they were going to give up.

When it comes to hospitality, just think kindness. Is there a kindness you can do for someone? I believe that when we

are in heaven together, or ruling the nations with Christ, we will be amazed at how the little things done out of obedience to the Father's prompting will bring Him glory. It says in Dan 11:32 That those who know their God will be strong and do exploits. In John 9:4 "As long as it is day we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming when no man can work." In John 14:12-14 "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask Me for anything in My name and I will do it."

I believe we will have communion together as part of the application of this lesson. After we celebrate the communion together we will pray for one another. I Cor 10:23-32-read it through once and they share the bread and juice as the memorial of His Body broken for us and His blood shed for the remission of our sins. Then I want you to pray for one another that we would have the grace to apply our devotion in prayer, in worship, to the study and sharing of God's Word and to one another in fellowship, kindness and hospitality.