

Practicing the One Another Church Life **(Fellowship from Minoru Chen on February 7, 2021)**

Prayer

Lord, continue to strengthen us. Even empower us, oh Lord, with Your Spirit, with Your fresh speaking. Those who know their God would show strength and take action. We pray these days would be days of action. Lord, grant us the courage, the boldness, and the faith that we need as we take Your recovery, Your churches, onward. We pray these days the move would be fresh, and the church life would be renewed. Lord, in every way, there would be a condition of revival, of newness. Lord, we believe now is the time. Gain from us our cooperation. Cover us still with Your precious blood. Fight against the enemy and defeat him. Lord, we give You this time today.

Introductory Word

Today, I want to conclude the fellowship that we had two weeks ago on the relational aspect or the mutuality in the God-ordained-way church life. We must pay attention to the relationships among the saints. Because the church is a community and is communal, the relationships of its constituents are extremely important. As a community, it is a place where you would have a sense of belonging, a sense of attachment. When that breaks down and when that is weak, this community will also become weak.

I want to use the first part of my sharing to drive this point home. I am actually very enlightened myself. In fact, I finished a mini conference with the church in Long Beach this morning. The church in Long Beach has become “kitchen” or my “laboratory” where I will be doing things, so I am not just talking theoretically here. I want to be in the trenches with the brothers to work something out, to renew and to revive an

older church. Some of your churches are in the same kind of a situation, except you have migrants and other saints moving in.

A One-Another Relationship

Now, brothers, I want to bring your attention to two words in the New Testament. These are throughout the Epistles of all three apostles John, Peter, and Paul. “One another” – just in these two words, we should be able to see this relational matter, the relationship between the brothers and sisters, the saints in the church, and the members in God's household, God's family. It is extremely enlightening. This phrase *one another* is derived from the Greek word *allilon*. It means one another, each other, mutually, or reciprocally. Reciprocally means it involves both sides, from me to you, and also from you to me. Anything that is unidirectional, anything that is just one way, is by definition not a one-another relationship because it is not mutual. I am talking about an attitude, feeling, even behavior and action, that is mutual. We will see this in plenty of scriptural references.

This phrase occurred one hundred times in the New Testament and, in sixty of those hundred times, it is in the form of an imperative. In other words, it is a commandment. It is not “maybe” or “depending.” It is “do this.” For example, love one another is a commandment. Even the Lord said, “A new commandment I give to you” (John 13:34). If it is a commandment, then it is an order, it is something that you ought to keep by definition. This commandment commands us how we ought to relate to one another. Our relationship in the church is dictated by this. In some cases, it commands us how not to relate to one another. This word in Galatians often comes to me which says, do not devour one another (5:15). It does happen, even in the church life, that Christians devour one another, fight and eat up one another. That is a case of a negative commandment, a commandment, nonetheless. Do not devour one another but love one another. Commandment requires obedience, so we all need to obey or keep this commandment. The Lord told us that.

John 13:34-35a says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one

another. By this mutual love, this love of the brothers, of the brotherhood, “shall all men know that you are My disciples.” Suddenly, brothers, this relationship becomes our testimony. Do you follow this? How we are with one another becomes a factor of persuasion, of testimony, of our identity, of who we are – the Lord’s disciples. How would people know we are believers or disciples? By the way we relate, by the way we are with one another, by the way we behave towards one another. This is not a small thing. Then the Lord said for the third time in two verses, “If you have love for one another” (v. 35b). Do you see how much this is in the Lord’s heart? This one-another relationship taught in the Scriptures by the Lord and the apostles forms the basis of our community, of our local church. Absent this positive relationship, we do not have a way to have a community. There may be a congregation, but there is no community. There may be a group of people affiliated together by the common faith. They may belong to the same group, associated in some way, but they would not be a true Christian community, a real church of God. This has direct impact even on our witnessing to the world. People would say, “I do not want to just hear you preaching. I want to see. I want to see what it is like. You people who preach such a good gospel, how do you live? How do you relate?” There are far too many instances where the reality, the real situation, does not match the teaching because this Christian relationship, this member relationship, in the Lord's Body is absent.

Love One Another

I do not have the time to give you all the New Testament references that say “one another,” but I want to give you examples. First of all, I already mentioned the Lord's word, and He was not the only one who said, “love one another.” All the apostles said to love one another. That is the chief of the one-another relationships. That means I love you and you love me. The first feature, the top feature, of the church should be mutual love. Everything; care, concern, forgiveness, all kinds of things, flows out of that. Every other kind of thing flows out of this singular “new commandment” of the New Testament that the Lord gave to us: Love one another.

Brothers, I have visited local churches where I did not detect this love. I would not say there was no love, but it was not powerful. It was not the feature, not obvious, not pronounced. Of course, we are not talking about the natural love or the natural affection. We know that, but, brothers, we are still human beings. When we talk about love, it should be divinely human. This is not angelic love. It is the love of God, but it is shown through humanity. When the Lord came to this earth, He came with the love of God. He was the embodiment of God as love, but in a very human way, a tenderhearted, compassionate, kind way. Sometimes I do not see that, even among us. I told you how a brother's daughter and her husband visited a local church on a Lord's Day, and from the time they showed up to the time they left, no one greeted them. No one – not one – in that church meeting of saints greeted them. How do we preach the gospel? How do we attract people? How do we retain people? There are saints that say, "It is so cold in the church life. We have all the doctrines, all the truth, everything so high. but this place is not warm, not attractive. The element of love is not there." Well, brothers, I think we should listen to that.

What I am touching here, brothers, is something very intrinsic. I am not talking about how to meet or how to preach the gospel. I am talking about this divinely human relationship that Jesus Himself has commanded that we should have. The local churches need more love between its members, between the saints, between the brothers and sisters. I know we do not speak too much along this line. But it is very real. The human heart responds to love. Every human heart responds to love. Today everyone in the world is seeking true love.

In Paul's word in Romans 12 on loving one another, he said, "love one another warmly" (v. 10a). The King James version uses the word "ardently." Paul was saying to not just love, but love with some temperature, love in an affectionate way, love in a warm way. Brothers, I am just reading you Scriptures. I have been to so many churches where the leading ones have a stone-face stature. They are good brothers, constituted, faithful, but not approachable, not warm, not attractive. Because the leading one is like this, the saints become

like him, cold, without emotion, not sociable. There may be love inside, but I am saying it is hardly warm. The church is not warm. The meetings are not warm. It may be good and proper, but there's no warmth there. The Lord said to Laodicea that He would rather that they be either hot or cold, but not lukewarm. Brothers, this lukewarmness is a feeling, an atmosphere. You can sense it. Even new ones can sense it. As long as you are human, you can sense it. You come into a group, a home, or a church meeting and you can sense it. Brothers, if we do not foster such a proper atmosphere, we can do all kinds of things in the church and they still will not work. Trust me.

Honor One Another

Paul also said in Romans 12, "Take the lead in showing honor to one another" (v. 10b). That means that honor is something you can show. If I honor you, there is some expression of that honor. If I go around criticizing you, surely, I am not honoring you. If I say something demeaning you, surely, I am not honoring you. Obviously, we are not talking about being political or becoming people pleasers who flatter one another. No, this is something in the Lord that we show honor. This is a member of Christ. This is a son of God. This is the brother of mine in the Lord that I need to show honor to. I do not kick him around. I do not care how unbecoming this person is. He is a member of the Body. Does it not say in 1 Corinthians that those less comely deserve more honor? We may honor some gifted brother, that is easy to do. How about showing honor to the unbecoming ones, the weak ones, the ones that do not have that much honor? We should show honor to one another. I think these things are necessary for us to reflect on, brothers.

Be of the Same Mind toward One Another

Another verse says to "be of the same mind toward one another" (Rom. 12:16a). That is still in Romans 12, a chapter on the Body life. Paul said, "Not setting your mind on the high things but going along with the lowly" (v. 16b). To have the same mind toward one another means you do not think highly of yourself. There is no superiority complex. As in the previous point, there is a mind that respects and appreciates the other member. That is the same mind that should be

in all of us. There should be no looking down and no despising but appreciating every member mutually. In Romans 15:5, Paul said, “Be of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus.”

Build Up One Another

In Romans 14, it says, “...let us pursue the things of peace and the things for building up one another” (v. 19). In 1 Thessalonians 5 it says, “Build up each one the other” (v. 11b). Brothers, there should be always a feeling of “I want to build up my brother. In what I say and in what I do, I want to build him up and not tear him down.” If there is such mutuality in the church life, you will sense it, you will feel it.

Receive One Another

Another command is to receive one another. “Therefore receive one another, as Christ also received you to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). In this portion Paul spoke of how some ate meat and others were vegetarian. In the church life, we have all kinds of people. Do not try to unify them. Do not try to make them all like you, but receive one another. As long as one is not committing gross sins, worshipping idols, committing sins of immorality and not being divisive, we should receive him. As long as there is not any of that, we ought to receive one another, as Christ received us.

Sometimes, brothers, we outwardly receive one another because the Scriptures say so, but inwardly, we do not receive. Sometimes it is not even because of different beliefs, like eating meat or not eating meat, or keeping a day or not. It is just, “I don’t like this person. He rubs me the wrong way.” We just have different cultural backgrounds. There is not really a real inner receiving. Outwardly, we may say, “Praise the Lord. Amen,” but inwardly the doors are closed. We would not allow this one to come into your heart. Maybe he could not even come into your house. The real receiving is as Christ received all of us. Christ received all of us: the weird, the peculiar, the different. Christ received everybody. We really need another heart to do this, don't we, brothers?

Admonish One Another

Another verse in Romans 15 says to “admonish one another” (v. 14d). The only way we are qualified to admonish one another is if we have the care first. Please do not go to admonish someone that you do not care for. That is wrong and does not work. How will a person receive your admonition when you don't care really care for him? But when you really care, you can admonish this one in the Lord.

Greet One Another

In the last chapter of Romans Paul says to “greet one another.” This greeting is not just a formality or nicety. There is a deep sense of fraternity or brotherhood. 1 Peter 2:17 talks about loving the brotherhood. We are really brothers and sisters. 1 Corinthians 12 says that there should be no divisions in the Body and the members should have the same care for one another. I care for you and you care for me. That care is such an important word and sometimes more than love because care is the expression of love. If I love you, then I can say “I love you.” It could be just words. I need to care, and I must demonstrate my care for you by a phone call or by a visit. I am from China and it is not that common to say “I love you” even to those closest to you. I remember a story of a husband who finally said to his wife on her deathbed, “Dear, I love you.” His wife said, “Why didn't you say that earlier?” Brothers show some expression from the heart. Praise the Lord for the heart, but people cannot read or see your heart. When He was on the earth, the Lord had compassion. In one case, in Luke chapter 7, there was a widow with a dead son whom the Lord raised up. He went there and touched the boy. There was physical action on the Lord's part to demonstrate His compassion and tenderheartedness. Sometimes we may be too spiritual or angelic and not human anymore. The church is a divinely human place. People may not understand just plain spiritual words, but they understand when there is an expression or a demonstration. That is to live out Christ and not becoming a stern angelic person.

Serve One Another

Galatians chapter 5 tells us to serve one another as a slave. This means that we are slaves to each other. If this kind of relationship permeates

our church life, then who would not like to come and be a part of this family? Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ completely." We are all so self-absorbed, self-centered, self-occupied, and preoccupied. We do not have room for others' burden except our own. We always bear only our own burdens. As those who are taking care of the saints and who serve the Lord's people, we must be those who lay down our soul life, our own cares, our own concerns, and our own burdens. We need to leave room in our heart and soul to bear others' burdens. Everyone is looking for this. They may find they cannot bear their situation anymore and wonder if there is anyone who could bear it with them. You may say, "Go pray and cast your care on the Lord," but you are being too spiritual. Don't just say that in a gratuitous way. Rather, bear the saints' burden. This fulfills the law of Christ.

Forgive One Another

Another command in both Ephesians and Colossians is to forgive one another. The Lord spoke much about this in the gospels and Paul emphasizes this matter of forgiving one another in the epistles. Ephesians 4:32 says, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ also forgave you." We are in the church and we will step on each other's toes. We cannot escape this, so there needs to be plenty of forgiveness. We better fill up our pantry and our storage room with tons of forgiveness. The Lord said to forgive seventy times seven times, which means "unlimited". If there would be more forgiveness in the church, there will be much less problems. We need to be willing to be wronged, not insisting on our right, but willing to let things go and to say "never mind" from the heart. Remember how God in Christ forgave us. How can we not forgive one another?

Bearing One Another

Ephesians 4:2 speaks of bearing one another. It is related not to bearing one another's burdens, but to being forbearing. If someone wrongs you or mistreats you, then you bear it. You take the cross and out of love you bear it. You don't punch back, you don't scream, and you don't take revenge. You bear.

Speak Truth

Ephesians 4:25 says, "...speak truth each one with his neighbor...." There's too much speaking about unprofitable things, about those things that don't build up. We should speak truth, speak what is real. That doesn't mean we give messages to one another, but it does mean we say something that is real, something of Christ, and something that builds up.

Be Kind

Ephesians 4:32 tells us to be kind to one another. I'm going to expose myself a little bit here. My wife and I have dogs. I have never kicked the dogs, but I've gotten upset with them when they've done something bad. One time my wife asked me, "Did you read Leviticus or Deuteronomy? The ordinances say you must be kind to the animals. Jehovah commanded you should be kind to animals." From that day I learned to be kind to little birds and to my dogs even when I'm upset. I cannot be unkind even towards an animal. Towards human beings, many times we are simply unkind. We may not be rude or mean, but in dealing with people there is no fundamental human kindness there.

Speak To One Another

Speak to one another. Our church life is a mutual one. I speak to you and you speak to me with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). What a church life! I sing to you and you sing to me. The traditional Christianity meeting is one direction with one speaker or one pastor or even a few speaking to the congregation. It is of one direction. That is not the church; that is a system and a degradation. The church life is multiple directional. It is sitting around a roundtable and it is mutual. I speak to you and you speak to me. I minister Christ to you, and you minister Christ to me in songs and hymns. This speaking includes admonition and exhortation. Today we practice the prophesying meeting which is a mutual meeting where we all speak something of Christ to one another for building up one another. This is a "one another" meeting. That's why people ask, "Who's your pastor?" They don't understand what is going on because they say you just talk to each other. Well, this is the Christian meeting. Conferences

and trainings are another matter; those are ministry meetings. But I'm talking about the church meetings.

Be Subject To One Another

Another one is to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Peter first talks about younger men being subject to elders. Eventually he says that we should be subject one to another (1 Peter 5:5). "One to another" means I am subject to you and you are subject to me. We submit to one another. This is precious and beautiful. Even in an eldership, this is beautiful.

Consider Others Better Than Yourself

Philippians 2:3 says, "...considering one another more excellent than yourselves." I always think you're better than me, and you are always thinking I am better than you. This is a mindset. The natural fallen mind always thinks, "I'm better." It takes another mind to think that others are better than yourself, but that's the apostles' teaching.

Regard Each Other's Virtue

Philippians 2:4 says, "Not regarding each his own virtues, but each the virtues of others also." Appreciate the other brothers. We shouldn't appreciate ourselves too much, but the virtues of the other brothers.

Teach One Another

In Colossians chapter 3, along the line of admonition and exhortation, we teach one another.

Comfort One Another

1 Thessalonians 4:18 says, "therefore comfort one another with these words," regarding the Lord's second coming. We all need comfort from one another.

Encourage One Another

Give hope to the other person. I also need encouragement. When a brother says something encouraging, it just uplifts me so much. This is a "one another" life. I covered exhorting one another already. Hebrews 3:13 says, "but exhort one another each day, as long as it is

called “today....” Sometimes we forget and get distracted, so we need some reminders and exhortations from one another.

Incite One Another

Hebrews 10:24 says, “and let us consider one another so as to incite one another to love and good works.” This means to stir up and to stimulate one another. “Brother! Let's go! Let's pray. Let's meet. Let's go visit. Let's preach the gospel.” Considering one another and stirring up one another. We need a lot of stirring up in the church. Some are cold and some are backslidden. They need some stirring up and some incitement.

Be Hospitable To One Another

1 Peter 4:9 says to “be hospitable to one another...”

Humility toward One Another

Peter also charges us to “gird ourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5). Peter said to clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, not having pride or arrogance.

Pray for One Another and Confess To One Another

James 5:16 says, “...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another....”

Members of One Another

One of the key verses that makes this matter of “one another” so important and prominent is this phrase “we are members one of another.” Romans 12:5 says, “So we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” It is very interesting, brothers. Paul did not just say we are members of Christ or we are members of Christ's body, both of which are true. But here he says we are members even of each other, so I am your member, and you are my member. We have that kind of a relationship. Then in Ephesians 4:25 the same thing is said, “...We are members one of another.” These are just scriptures, and I think it's very rich and practical. These are really the human virtues of Christ.

In Philippians chapter 4 Paul said that whatever is praiseworthy and pure, all these virtuous things, we should think on these things and practice these things (Philippians 4:8-9). How do we have this kind of “one another” relationship? Let us consider and practice. We should take the lead brothers to practice these things, and the God of peace will be with us. I'm talking about something that has to do with the heart, with our attitude, and with our behavior and actions.

Mutuality

Eventually, it has to do with an atmosphere, a spirit in the church life. Everywhere you go, the saints have this kind of mutual relationship. This relationship is very important because it signifies a number of things and builds up and facilitates a number of things. When we say “one another,” this mutuality means a feeling that is directed by each toward the other. For example, let's say the feeling of love is directed by me towards you, and then it is directed back at me. That's mutual. If it's all coming just from me, then that's not mutual, but if it's both sides then that is mutual. This mutuality speaks to the fact that we are just all joined together and attached together as members and therefore needing one another. It does not say anywhere that we need one another, but as members in the same family and members of the same body, we need one another. Unless you live on an island and unless you're not in this community then you don't need anyone. But a community means we are attached, we are joined, and we're related. We have a need for one another. This is why we are a community.

Fellowship with One Another

That sense of need is in every saint, in every member. Frankly, that sense of need is in every human being. There is a need for another human being, another person, in so many ways. The church life fulfills that need. When we are practicing the proper church life, our needs of love, forbearance, care, prayer, forgiveness are met. Mutuality also means you are sharing something in common. “One another” implies fellowship where I love you and you love me, I speak to you and you speak to me, I submit to you and you submit to me, and I'm kind to you and you are kind to me. Fellowship is something shared and needs

to be strengthened. We often talk about fellowship, but sometimes there is no actual fellowship. Fellowship is not just coming together and talking about some project or some business affairs. Fellowship is enjoying something in common. What is common among us is Christ. When Christ flows from me to you in a human way through His human virtues, and Christ flows from you to me in the same way, we are enjoying Christ. This is true fellowship. When we have this kind of “one another” relationship, the spirit of fellowship in the church will be there. It will grow and it will be rich.

A Complimentary Aspect of “One Another”

This “one another” also has another aspect. When there is this relationship going on, there is something complimentary, a kind of mutual support. There is the advantage of a kind of synergy; there's something synergistic, and that is the Body in function and in action. In other words, this relationship facilitates coordination amongst the believers and between brothers. This atmosphere of fellowship and mutuality in the church life among saints forms the basis for the building up a local church. We want to build up the services, the meeting life, and the gospel. We also want to build up the shepherding and the home life of all the families. These matters apply between husbands and wives. All these apply to “one another.” I think that if couples would take this to heart, they would have a better marriage.

Concluding Word

I will stop here. Today, I wanted to really get into the “twos and threes” with you using Matthew 18. I feel that the “twos and threes” is a kind of touchstone of our new practice of the church life, according to the God ordained way. We are not giving up the “small groups.” However, I do want to get into the structure of the church with the primary and initial emphasis on the “twos and threes.” That is the Lord's teaching. It is a very clear teaching in Matthew 18 that is both practicable and applicable. Brother Lee devoted the last three years of his life to train the saints on the vital groups. But I don't want to use that term because it could be confusing. One may ask, “what is the vital group?” I would like to use the phrase “twos and threes” because that is the Lord's word.

Brothers, we need to look to the Lord for a revived, renewed, and even in some ways, revolutionized church life. Our church life has become old over time. Over time, anything gets old. It is not that it is wrong or bad; it is just old. I gave a word to the Long Beach saints in the first meeting of this weekend's conference speaking of the new wine and the fresh wine skin. The wine has to be new but the wine skin also has to be fresh. Otherwise, putting new wine in an old wine skin will cause it to burst and the wine not be contained. The new wine is the divine life, which is God embodied in Christ as the Spirit. What is the new wine skin, the fresh wine skin? Well, the Lord's people, the church. But alas, the church got old over these last 2,000 years. Even among us, after one hundred years in the Lord's recovery, we have become old. Even with us in the United States, our church life has become old with certain forms and a certain way of doing things, certain habits. Even we ourselves may not be too satisfied. Brothers, we should not fear. The Lord may be using this GTCA as a small way for us, or at least these ten churches to take the lead to truly enter into a new church life according to the God ordained way. This will bring in a new container, that is, a fresh wine skin, that can receive the new wine, which is the Spirit, the Spirits moving, stirring, and working.