

Fellowship Should Not Hurt **7-28-13**

The wonderful Church of God is a family with the name of Christ.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

When a household is living together, sometimes family can be strained. Consider some of the families of the Bible: Cain and Able; Jacob and Esau; David's children. Just like a family, sometimes fellowship (to understand this word's meaning read I John 1; it refers to the relationship of Christians while we are being faithful) strains too.

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

1 Corinthians 6:8 No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

Let us be clear: sometimes brethren hurt each other in a local congregation. It is usually unintentional, caused by actions or behavior that we simply did not intend or believe to be hurtful. Many times it is because of sin. In this lessons, we are NOT talking about sinful conduct; Matthew 18 speaks to us as to how to handle sinful acts committed by brethren. We are speaking about inconsideration and gestures that cause hurt.

Let us consider four actions that we engage in that hurt our brethren. If we are honest, we will admit that we have all done some of these things.

Being absent from the Assembly (Hebrews 10:24-26). Not referring to being sick or travelling, here we mean that absence that was a choice. We may think we are not missed, but when we are gone without a cause, we hurt our brethren.

Judgments over liberty (Galatians 5:13-16; Romans 14:1-4). Scripture speaks to the liberty we have in Christ, but that same liberty can be used to hurt others. Specifically, when we make judgments of others over matters of opinion, or even when we are careless with our opinions, we hurt our brethren

Failing to give aid (Galatians 6:1-10). Part of the responsibility brethren have towards one another is to see that we are taken care of, whether it is physical or spiritual needs. We sometimes become callous in our ignorance, and that neglect can cause great harm. When a brother has a need or is hurting, we need to rush to help.

Fault finders (Mark 7:2; Titus 1:13-16). It is important that we prevent one another from sinning. However, the Bible tells us that such conduct should not descend to fault finding. The difference may be as simple as our attitude or intentions. Consider that when Apollos taught error (John the Baptist's baptism), he was privately corrected by Priscilla and Aquila (as opposed to Peter's public rebuke by Paul). Jude tells us that on some, we ought to have compassion, but on others, to rebuke with fear. That distinction is sometimes ignored, and hurt results.

As hard as it is to believe, the Bible reminds us that some things just don't matter. Paul to Timothy this in 2 Timothy 2:14-16. In Verse 23 he said "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife."

Now once we are prepared to admit we have hurt brethren, we are better equipped when Bwe ourselves are hurt by the brethren. This too is an important consideration. Sometimes we are overly sensitive to the remarks of our brethren; we ought to have the mind spoken of in I Corinthians 13:5, that is, we ought to believe the best of things when it comes to our brethren. As well, we cannot be people who hold a grudge. We are commanded on numerous occasions to forgive our brethren.

Our dwelling together in peace is a big deal. First, know that NO ONE will follow you here if you make this place a place of bitterness and rancor. It would be even worse if you did so merely by being careless. As well, if you make constant complaint of this place, you poison the well just as firmly. Not only will those in the world not come to hear the truth, but those who are here may soon leave from here. Remember that Jesus said "*Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!*" (Matthew 18:7)

In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul implored the congregation to aid two sisters in being of one mind, There was no doctrinal issue apparently present; they just needed to get along. We too need to do just that, realizing that getting along requires more attention that perhaps we consciously apply.