

## *“The Communion of Saints”*

### **Holiness**

Don Maurer

Romans 12:9-18

September 25, 2015

**Don:** Okay, okay. All right, all right. Well now, I need to say a couple things here before I begin, a few introductory remarks.

For those of you who don't know, I do the transcripts of the lessons, and it's very interesting to me. Do you know how traumatic it is to translate my own material? *(Laughter.)* *Transcriber's Note:* Don is blind.

**Don:** It really is. *(Laughter.)* I mean, I have a hard enough time looking at myself in the mirror, you know? *(Laughter.)* You know, it's like that old poem I-- (Someone pounds on the piano.) *(Laughter.)*

It's like that old poem that I used to read when I was little:

“I hide myself behind myself. And then I try to find myself.” *(Laughter.)* You know, when I used to play “hide and seek,” they always wanted me to be “it.” *(Laughter.)*

Okay, now, and another thing. I've been coming here for around eight years, and I feel that now I can share just about anything with you. So, on the serious side of things, I would like to confess something to you brothers this morning. And I know that you'll be loving and understanding and open when I tell you this. But I used to be a guy trapped in a woman's body. *(Pause.)* Then I was born. *(Laughter and applause.)*

Well, Bruce always wants me to bring us to some sense of reverence and sanity. I can't do that now, not being at the piano. But let's have a word of prayer.

Father in heaven, it is truly a joy to be here this morning, to be in Your presence, and we always are. But to be here, Father, as the Brave Men, as people, Lord, who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we thank You that we can come with joy and laughter because we have Your joy. And we know what true joy is like. And dear Father, we pray that the Holy Spirit would, as always, illumine us and guide us into all truth. Father, we do pray for dear Bruce today, as he is at the VA hospital undergoing tests, Lord Jesus. We pray, Lord Jesus, that You would see fit to sustain him. And guide everyone, Lord, who is doing these procedures, Father, that everything will turn out well for him, for healing. We pray for Tom Hansz also, Lord, for his recuperation, and for Kathy Davis as well. And Father, now we pray, as Bruce so often says, that you would illumine our hearts, that we may see You more clearly, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

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**Don:** Okay. Last week, Bruce asked me to teach on the importance of healthy Christian relationships in the body of Christ. I kind of mulled that over. And so I thought, “Well, maybe I’ll come up with something a little more concrete.” And I chose a phrase that goes back to the early centuries of the New Testament church, which is *the communion of saints*, which is found in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, which many of you, if not most of you, are familiar with.

Now the communion of saints, of course, is referring to all those who are in Christ. And I’ll get into that in a couple of minutes. But let me, for our springboard—not necessarily a passage that I’m going to exegete exhaustively—but as our springboard, let’s read Romans 12, verses 9-18, which is found on your handout. Romans 12:9-18. This is the word of God.

*“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless, and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Don:** Amen. Okay, what do we mean by “the communion of saints?” Anybody want to venture a guess?

**Participant:** We received sainthood when we accepted Christ.

**Don:** Indeed, you know, not at some future time. That’s right, Stanley. When we accepted Christ, when Christ came into our lives, we received sainthood. I’m going to ask Bishop Rodgers. Can you give a classic definition of sainthood?

**Bishop Rodgers:** Those who have been separated unto God through Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

**Don:** Amen. Very, very good. It’s interesting that 1 Corinthians talks about saints. And then later on, in a couple of chapters, stop all this immorality! Stop all these divisions, all this heresy! But they’re saints nonetheless.

And I think that a very good summary of what being saints involves in the communion of saints is found in the Westminster Confession, chapter 26. And so I’m going to read those sections for us and comment.

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First of all, Section 1. “All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their Head by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory, and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”

Those people really knew how to write and condense things, didn’t they? They really did. There’s a whole lot of stuff in there.

But notice. Saints are united to Jesus Christ, their Head. And by His Spirit and by faith, we have fellowship with Him in His graces. All that belongs to Christ belongs to us, all right? Obviously, we’re not talking about His Deity or whatever. But everything that the Father has given Him in terms of all the benefits that He receives, we receive because we are united to Him.

We’re united to Him in His sufferings. How many times has Bruce told us that? We have fellowship in His sufferings, so much so that we are united to Him in a very intimate and special way. It’s just absolutely mind-boggling to think about that.

We are united to Him in His death. When He died, we died with Him. It’s amazing! And, of course, it’s hard sometimes to work that out every single day in our lives, that we’re to die to self. And the life, as Galatians 2 says, that we live, we no longer live, but it’s Christ who lives in us by faith.

All right. We’re united to Him in His resurrection and glory! Oh, wow! What a tremendous thing that is to think about—that one day we, as He has been, are going to be raised up forever. We’re raised up with Him now spiritually, from spiritual death. But we’re going to be raised physically and in glory with Him. Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus!

And being united to one another in love, we have communion in each other’s gifts and graces. We’re united to one another in love. Do you know what that means? That means that you are obligated—and nobody likes that word *obligated* or *duty*, and it’s in the Confession—you’re to love me, bad jokes and all, right? (*Laughter.*) Whatever. Rabid Pirates fan, or whatever—you’re to love me, and vice versa. I’m obligated to love you. We’re obligated to love one another, even though we may get on each other’s nerves from time to time.

I think of our poet laureate, Dale here, who loves this particular poem and recited it way back. He said,

“To dwell above with saints in love,

Indeed, that will be glory.

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But to dwell below with saints I know,

Well, that’s another story.” (*Laughter.*)

Now, you know, hopefully we say that in jest. But, you know, sometimes it can be a little dicey. Mr. Melnyk over here said, when I told him that I’ll be spending this weekend with some mutual friends of ours. I’ll be spending the weekend with the family and Frank said, “Tell him that I’m praying for him,” because I’ll be there the whole time with him.

Anyway, we are bound to each other in love. We have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties. Oh, obliged, duties, don’t like that! It’s there, you know? We’re “obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.” There are all kinds of examples there that I can give, but I don’t have time, so I won’t. But apply that where it needs to be applied in your life.

And then Section 2. “Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God”—hence, church every week—“and in performing such other spiritual services which tend to their mutual edification, as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities, which communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.”

I’ll just say in passing that I can’t think of a better example of that and embodiment of that than this group. What you did, what we did with Tin, Bruce’s friend from Viet Nam, what you did for me to ensure that I’m able to continue doing the transcripts by purchasing JAWS. It’s just constant. I see this constantly with so many of you. And that is just a tremendous, tremendous thing.

So how does the communion of saints work itself out in the local assembly and in the church around the world? Well let’s talk about this right now.

Notice Number 1 on your handout. Sometimes, it’s the duty of men to state the obvious. Nothing new or original here. *We were never meant to go it alone as Christians.* That’s obvious, isn’t it, from the creation. Let’s see. Sig, would you read Genesis 2:18 on your handout, please?

**Sig:** Yes.

**Don:** Thank you.

**Sig:** Genesis 2:18. “*Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make for him a helper, fit for him.”*”

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**Don:** Okay. Isn't it interesting. It's the creation, and God says what? "It was good." And then we come to chapter two, and the very first thing that He says is not good is what? That the man should be alone. And of course the primary context there is the context of marriage. But even those of you who are not married know that we need each other. We really do.

For myself, you may not believe this, but I'm sometimes a kind of recluse at home. You know, I really am. Television puts me to sleep for the most part. It either puts me to sleep or riles me up, one of the two. My family likes to watch a lot of television, and I like to read or listen to music, or whatever. But I need fellowship. We all do. I'll be going away this weekend, as I said before, spending time with some dear Christian friends. We all need each other. We all need the body of Christ, to be with each other.

One of the worst punishments is what? Solitary confinement, right? We need each other to build each other up, to be with each other in times of joy and in times of sorrow.

Our Lord needed companionship, did He not, as a Man? Our God is relational. Our God is not just one Person, as false religions maintain. But our God is three Persons. One Being, yes, but three Persons. And so He has fellowship and love with and of and in Himself. But our Savior needed companionship. He was at the wedding at Cana and the dinner at the Pharisee's house, etc. And even the night before His crucifixion He asked for companionship with His disciples. Corky, would you read Matthew 26, verses 36-38, please?

**Corky:** *“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane. And He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”,”*

*“Taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. And then He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here, and watch with Me.”,”*

**Don:** Okay. Poignant! A poignant passage, where the very God-Man Himself needed, at that time, fellowship. And of course the disciples forsook Him, didn't they? But wow! And if He did, in His earthly ministry, how much more do we?

You know, as Bruce so well expressed it last week, one of Satan's most effective and dangerous strategies is to get Christians to believe that they can go it alone, and particularly us men, right? We pride ourselves on the John Wayne American individualistic mentality, which is unfortunately so prevalent in the church today—individualism. We've lost the sense in many churches of solidarity, the corporate nature of worship. The polls say it, don't they? So many people who claim the name of Christ say, "Well, I don't need to go to church. I don't need church. I can worship God on the golf course, or in my home, or whatever." But that is such a foreign concept to Scripture.

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We need each other, that’s for sure. Okay, any questions or comments before I go on to the next section?

All right. *The communion of saints is a theme throughout Scripture.* I’m going to ask some more people to read some Scriptures for us. Bishop Rodgers, would you read Psalm 16:3 on your handout?

**Bishop Rodgers:** *“As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight.”*

**Don:** Okay. The saints are to be a delight to us, right? Do we delight in one another? Not just put up with one another.

I can remember when I was growing up that my church experience was something that was a duty. It was an obligation that I had to pay my dues as it were, and do my thing on Sunday. And then people just couldn’t wait to get home afterwards.

At the church that I belong to now, and have for about thirty-six years, man, we stay about half an hour, forty-five minutes afterward—talking, finding out how we’re doing. I’ve been to the church here—Christ Church. Same thing. And hopefully, your churches are the same way. We want to be with each other. The saints are “my delight.”

Now on December 19 of last year, Bartholomew over here, better known to most of you as Rich Clark, when he was giving his tribute to Bruce, alluded to the next passage, Psalm 133. So Rich Clark, would you please once again read Psalm 133:1-3 for us?

**Rich:** Yes, sir. *“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. It is like precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”*

**Don:** Amen, Amen! Now frankly, I don’t understand the significance or the joy of oil dripping down my beard or my face. *(Laughter.)* I’m sure there is something. Stanley, do you have any insight into that?

**Stanley:** No.

**Don:** No? Okay, thank you. *(Laughter)* There’s an honest man; all right. *(Laughter)*

**Stanley:** I wanted to bring you someplace, but I didn’t want to go there.

**Don:** What?

**Stanley:** That’s okay. *(Laughter.)*

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**Don:** All right, okay. (*Laughter.*) Nevertheless, though, the joy, the blessing. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.” This fellowship is a great example of that. And I hope that you know that first hand.

**Participant:** Hey, Don?

**Don:** Yes, Rich?

**Rich:** The oil in those days was highly perfumed, was it not? Maybe that has some—

**Don:** Yeah! Good! Oh, that’s great insight, brother! Thank you! The sweet fragrance, right? The sweet aroma. Very good, very good.

All right. Now here’s a Scripture that Bruce has been fond of quoting to us many times. And let’s see. Bill McCoy, would you read John 13:34-35, please?

**Bill:** *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

**Don:** These are the words, of course, of Jesus, the night before His crucifixion. And what does He say? Notice that He does not say, “All men will know that you are My disciples if you can show how much Scripture you know.” And He doesn’t say, “All men will know that you are My disciples if you can expound great doctrines.” Paul said that it is possible to do all of those things. It’s possible to give your body to be burned, to give to the poor, and not have love. Jesus said that “all men will know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

What was the defense? What was one of the great defenses of the early church against those who were persecuting it? Behold, how they love one another! Oh, that’s so very, very important—vitaly important! And wow, we need to take that to heart. And we’re going to get into this a little more concretely in a couple minutes, of how that works itself out, or how it should work itself out in the body of Christ and in our own individual lives.

And finally, 1 John 3:16-18. Would someone read 1 John 3:16-18?

**Participant:** *“By this we know love: that He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.”*

**Don:** Thank you, Dale. Boy, I’ll tell you what, that’s pretty convicting, isn’t it?

**Participant:** Amen.

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**Don:** It’s really easy to say, “I love you.” It is really easy to say, “Yes, I’ll pray for you. I’ll do this. I’ll do that.” But the crunch comes when? When it involves sacrifice. And how many times has Bruce said that the Christian life is a life of self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission? It isn’t always easy to do that, is it? And we’re going to be talking about that a little bit more in detail here when I get into that love must be genuine. But those Scriptures really tell us what it is to minister to and love each other in the body of Christ, and how important that is. Okay, does anybody have any other comments, observations or questions before we go on to the next section?

**Participant:** Yes. Going back to 1 John, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples.” I remember Francis Schaefer’s book. I think it was “*How Then Shall We Live*”?

**Don:** Yes.

**Participant:** The world has a right to judge Christ and his holiness on the basis of our love for each other. That’s how important it is. It’s a reflection of the love of Christ by the way we love each other.

**Don:** Yes. Thanks, Don. Wasn’t it Mahatma Gandhi who once said, “I would become a Christian if Christ’s followers were more like Him.”

**Participant:** Amen.

**Don:** Yes. Wow! That really hurts, doesn’t it, to hear something like that.

**Participant:** Don, the conviction that I have in this (*unclear*), we in the United States really don’t have a whole lot of needs, because even those who are supposedly in poverty live better than the majority of those in the world.

**Don:** Yes.

**Participant:** So it’s really easy for us not to live sacrificially for each other in Christ in the U.S. However, you know, what are we doing for the Syrians?

**Don:** Oh, yes.

**Participant:** What are we doing for the Christians being killed over there—those who are truly in dire need?

**Don:** Oh, yes!

**Participant:** And that’s extremely convicting. I don’t have an answer for that.

**Don:** I don’t, either.

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**Participant:** It’s something I’ve been praying about and working through, because I’ve been blessed with comforts. What am I going to do with them?

**Don:** And see, that underscores the importance that the communion of saints does not just involve our own local assemblies or denominations, but the worldwide church of Christ, extending of course to those who are persecuted. I mean, think of this. I can’t imagine being deprived of Christian fellowship, being deprived of the joy of Christian fellowship. And yet we need to remember that there are brothers and sisters in China, in the Middle East, who don’t have any of that—who don’t have the Bible that we simply take for granted and just put on our shelves and collect dust, who don’t have the means of grace that Bruce talked about last week, and one of the most precious—fellowship. And so your point is well taken, sir. Thank you very much.

All right. Let’s go to the third section—*the quality of Christian relationships*. And this is where our text comes in. Like I said, I’m not going to exegete the whole passage—that is, go through it all, verse by verse. But let me just make a few observations and some of you can chime in.

*“Let love be genuine.”* That is the foundation, isn’t it? Other translations say let it be *“without hypocrisy,”*—without a mask, without pretense, not phony.

Unlike so much of the world—and we know this—the business world, right? Politics. You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. What’s in it for me? What can I do to get the most votes? What will I get in return? What will I get out of it if I do something?

No, that’s the opposite of the kind of genuine love that is to be heartfelt. It’s to be genuine, sincere—not phony and not self-centered.

Now all of us know, if we are born again, the difference—and Bruce alluded to this last week—between the friendship of the world and genuine Christian fellowship. Let me just ask someone just to describe that. I mean, if someone were to come along and ask you, “Well, what is the difference? I mean, you have close friends. I have close friends. But what’s the difference between close friendship with someone outside the body of Christ and Christian fellowship?”

It’s kind of hard to describe in words, isn’t it? You know, it’s something that only Christians can know. I can say this for many of you here. Let me just pick on my brother Rich over here. You know, I remember four years ago when he introduced himself to me. Automatically, I felt that kinship, that bond, that Christian bond. I didn’t even know the guy! And many of you can relate to that, where you’ve met someone—a missionary, or just someone who comes up and introduces himself at church, and it’s like you’ve known that person all your life and you’ve only known him for five minutes. Why? Because of that genuine Christian fellowship. It’s hard to put your finger on. But there is that camaraderie that you just don’t have in the world.

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I have some friends. I’m thinking of one friend in particular who is not a believer. I call him and talk to him sometimes. We talk about sports. We talk about music. He’s really into music. He has a guitar collection and a stereo collection that would just blow your mind. And it’s really neat. We joke and everything. But it’s not Christian fellowship. It’s totally different.

You know, this weekend, as I said before, I’ll be spending time with dear friends in Christ. And I’m sure that we’ll talk about sports. I’m sure that we’ll talk about a lot of things. We’ll joke and do a lot of different activities together. But there is always that underlying Christian fellowship, where we’ll worship. We’ll pray together. We’ll worship at church on Sunday. I can talk about things of the Lord—that *koinonia*, the Greek word for *fellowship*.

So often, when we think of fellowship, we think of getting together and watching the Steelers or the Pirates. There’s nothing wrong with that. As a matter of fact, if I can pick on my brother Sig here, we’ve been doing that after every Pirate game or even during Pirate games. We’ll call each other and analyze every play and lament, or rejoice, or whatever.

And I want to quote one of our famous (or infamous) Presidents. “Let me make one thing perfectly clear.” When we call each other, it’s not just when the Pirates are winning, okay? It’s when they’re winning or losing. There are some people—one in particular—who can’t seem to fathom that.

Anyway, all joking aside, those things are fun—to talk about sports and everything like that. But the fellowship of believers, where we can talk about the things of the Lord! Brother, how are things going on in your life? What’s the Lord doing in your life? To talk about a passage of Scripture, or to be there when someone is hurting, or rejoice when they’re rejoicing. That is a precious, precious thing. And so love must be genuine, all right? That’s for sure.

Now genuine love may require us to say the hard things, not necessarily what we want to hear. You know, you who are parents or were parents, you know how difficult it was to tell your kids what they were doing wrong. But you had to do it. Sometimes you even had to –it’s not politically correct to say this now—but sometimes you had to administer corporal punishment to get that message across.

You know, I remember when I was growing up and I was doing things I wasn’t supposed to do, that my mom and dad would say either one of two things. They’d say, “I’m doing this for your own good,” or “If I don’t tell you, who will?” I didn’t want to hear either of those things. (*Laughter.*) But, you know, it’s true!

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And there are some times in the body of Christ when, as it says in Galatians, “*You who are spiritual ought to restore one who is fallen,*” right? And, of course, remember to do that with sobriety, “*lest you yourself be tempted.*”

Let’s look up a couple Scriptures here in that regard. Let’s see. Don Bishop. Proverbs 17:17, please?

**Don:** “*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*”

**Don:** Okay. “*A friend loves at all times.*” Not just sometimes, but at all times. “*And a brother is born for adversity.*” How many times did the apostle Paul have to put up with people who said things to him that were very hurtful? A brother is born for adversity. And Sig, would you read Proverbs 27 verse 6?

**Sig:** “*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*”

**Don:** How about that! We’re all familiar with those who flatter us and butter us up, and yet there’s an ulterior motive in their hearts. Sometimes, “*Faithful are the wounds of a friend.*”

I have sometimes been rebuked by fellow believers. Did it sting initially? Yes. But later on, it was the best thing that they could have done for me. It’s not easy to be rebuked. It’s not easy to be transparent. And of course, discernment is called upon for that. But we need to be that way in order to minister to one another and to be ministered to.

Sometimes, genuine love requires the ability to receive as well as to give. I remember a couple months ago when Bruce retired, the day he retired from PNC, and he was able to go to breakfast with us afterwards. And one of our dear brothers paid his way. And immediately, he said, “Oh, why did he do that? He didn’t have to do that?”

Then I reminded him of what he said that day to us. “Now, Bruce, remember. You said to do everything without grumbling or complaining.” (*Laughter.*) So hey! Sometimes we need to be able to receive. It takes as much grace and genuine love to receive something from someone as to give, doesn’t it?

And of course, Jesus is the ultimate Example of this kind of love, isn’t He? He was tender toward the repentant woman who wept at His feet and wiped His feet with her hair. He affectionately called the disciples His little children. And yet He was bold when the occasion called for it. He confronted the woman at the well. “You have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband.” He loved Peter too much not to point his sin out to him. So what did He say? “Get thee behind me, Satan!” He did that. And of course, He did it perfectly. We do it very, very miserably. But we’re supposed to do it nonetheless. Love must be genuine.

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We are to be “*kindly affectionate toward one another in brotherly love.*” And some translations say, “*devoted to one another.*”

Now what does it mean to be *devoted*? Does it mean just a casual kind of thing? I’ve pointed this out before that in our language there are words that just say so many things. We have one word for the word *know*. If you meet someone one time, you say, “I know him. I know her.” But you really don’t.

The word *knowledge* is such an intimate kind of thing, so much so in Scripture that Adam *knew* his wife. And we all know that “*Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain*” and Abel. And we all know there what Adam and Eve did. It wasn’t just a matter of a handshake or something. It’s the closeness, the intimacy of knowledge.

We are to be devoted to one another. I think of Acts 2:42. It’s not on your handout, but it says that the early Christians “*devoted themselves*” to the following things. “*To the apostles’ teaching*” or doctrine, right? To “*prayers,*” or “*the prayers,*” and to “*the breaking of bread*”—the Lord’s Supper and getting together and eating, but also to “*fellowship*”—*koinonia*.

As I’ve said before, fellowship means sharing the things of the Lord with one another. And that is a big difference between the conversation of the world and what our conversation should be, right? I don’t mean to be legalistic, but so many times, when I’m with people of the world, it’s just sports, or the latest TV program, or whatever. But it should be different with us. It should be not only those things, but everything from a Christian perspective, and the joy of the Lord, and what the Lord is doing in your life. It’s a wonderful, wonderful thing to share—Christian fellowship.

As Pilgrim, later called Christian, in *Pilgrim’s Progress* needed Faithful and Hopeful to help him, so we need one another. It’s so wonderful to get on the phone with fellow brothers here, or at church, and just say, “Hey, how are you doing?”—to pray with one another. It’s a tremendous, tremendous thing. It really is.

And then there are other qualities here that I don’t have time to go through in detail. But we’re to “*outdo one another in showing honor.*” What can I do for you? What can I do to help you? That’s the kind of attitude that we’re supposed to have.

Then we’re to “*rejoice in hope.*” We’re to rejoice in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, in the glory that we’re going to experience one day. We’re the only ones who have hope. The rest of the world doesn’t have hope. I have to turn the news off at times because it gets so depressing!

Patience in tribulation, “*constant in prayer.*” And you can’t be patient in tribulation very well alone, can you? That’s why we have to come alongside one another, and

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sometimes hold each other accountable, to hold our hands as it were and just be with one another. And it’s so much easier to do those things if we’re together.

We’re to “*rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,*” whether it’s going to a funeral home or a hospital, or calling someone in times of distress, or rejoicing when things are going well. It’s a great kind of thing when we’re accountable to one another.

We’re to “*live in harmony*” with each other. And of course the evil one wants to do what? He wants to prevent us from doing those things. “Oh, I’m too tired! Oh, it’s just not convenient! Oh, I have so many other things to do today!” But by the grace of God—and of course He is the One who has to give us the strength to do that; Philippians 2:12-13—we’re to do it. We’re to express love to one another.

And this is not on your handout. But Number 4. *This fellowship is not temporal, but eternal.* It is something that is going to be eternal. You know, those of you who have experienced the death of a loved one know the agony of separation. But do you know what? That’s temporal. Those tears are temporary, brothers. The fellowship that we enjoy now is just a microcosm of the fellowship that we’re going to be enjoying forever at that great divine banquet.

And I just can’t imagine it! Yes, the most wonderful thing is that we’re going to be with Jesus. But wow! To be able to talk to Adam! To be able to talk to the apostle Paul, Elijah, Jeremiah! How did you do all those things, Elijah? What must it have been like for the Red Sea to be parted? Or to be united with your loved ones, to be able to say to Mr. Clouser, “See, I told you so! I told you I was right all along about the Pirates!” I’m just kidding! (*Laughter.*) We can think of all kinds of examples. But just to be with each other in perfection, without sin, without any kind of ulterior motives—perfectly loving Christ, perfectly worshiping God, perfectly loving one another. Oh, hasten that day, Lord, hasten that day! I can’t wait!

So that is fellowship. That is the communion of saints. The communion of saints stretches out from Adam to the last believer, living and dead. We have “mystic sweet communion.” Let me just wrap up with this quote from the great hymn that so many of us love, “The Church’s One Foundation.”

“Yet she on earth hath union With God, the Three in One, And mystic sweet communion With those whose rest is won.”

We have communion with Abraham, with Isaac, with Elijah, Moses, Jeremiah, the apostle Paul, Peter, whoever else you may think of in heaven—Augustine, Calvin, whoever. Not that we pray to them or anything like that, but there is a real union and communion of saints living and dead. And we will all be reunited, as we are united with Christ one day. Praise God! Hallelujah!

## *“The Communion of Saints”*

**Men:** Amen.

**Don:** Amen. Any questions or comments?

**Participant:** Don, this is Bob.

**Don:** Yes, Bob?

**Bob:** I have one.

**Don:** Sure.

**Bob:** By your understanding, can there be genuine love between a man and his wife, or a man and his son, or a man and his male partner, if they are not born again? I forgot to add that little piece.

**Participant:** You can't shack up with an unbeliever.

**Don:** Yes. I would say no, not in the genuine Biblical sense. Yes, we have the love between a man and his wife, or a man and his son. There is familial love. There is *fileo*, right, the Greek word for genuine or brotherly love, the love of the world. But when you're talking about genuine love, *agape*, no, there can't.

**Participant:** Don?

**Don:** Yes?

**Participant:** I would say that maybe the nonbeliever couldn't reciprocate with *agape* love. But husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church with *agape* love, whether they are believers or not.

**Don:** That's true.

**Participant:** Whether they are believers or not, if you're married to an unbeliever.

**Don:** That's true. But I don't believe that the unbeliever can reciprocate.

**Participant:** Right.

**Don:** The husband is called to love his wife, absolutely.

**Participant:** But that doesn't relieve us of our obligation.

**Don:** Definitely. You're right, Jim. Thank you for pointing that out.

**Participant:** I'd like to go back to Genesis 2:18.

***“The Communion of Saints”***

**Don:** Yes.

**Participant:** Where it says that the LORD will find a helper fit for you?

**Don:** Yes.

**Participant:** Well, after going through four helpers, *(laughter)*, I’ve come to the realization that the helper I’m looking for is a good Jewish doctor. *(Laughter.)*  
*(Humorous musical response.) (Laughter.)*

**Don:** I don’t know how I’m going to transcribe that. *(Laughter.)*

**Participant:** You’ll figure it out.

**Don:** Okay. Yes?

**Participant:** One more comment. I want to make a comment on John 13:34-35.

**Don:** Mm-hmm.

**Participant:** And it only dawned on me in the last year and I can’t believe it took so long. It starts with the phrase “*a new commandment.*” And I was wondering why it’s a new commandment, because we’re called to love each other. But, you know, the first commandment is to “*love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.*”

**Don:** Yes.

**Participant:** The second commandment is to “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” But this is a new commandment because we’re not called to love believers as we love ourselves, but at a higher level, at the level that Christ loved us.

**Don:** Amen.

**Participant:** Which meant that He gave His life.

**Don:** And that’s what’s new about it. That’s what makes it new, absolutely. Very, very good.

**Participant:** Don?

**Don:** Yes?

**Participant:** Can we give and not expect in return?

**Don:** By the grace of God, yes, not in and of ourselves.

## *“The Communion of Saints”*

**Participant:** If you know my children, it’s no problem. (*Laughter.*)

**Don:** Okay. Well, brothers, may God give us the grace to be able to implement these truths that we’ve learned this morning from this stumbling and bumbling servant here. But let’s pray, shall we?

Our Father and our God, we do thank You for the opportunity to gather here together this morning to learn from Your word. Father, the things that You have commanded us to do are absolutely impossible for us to do in and of ourselves. And we fail miserably, Lord. We confess that to You. But Father, we pray that You would give us the grace by which to put these things into practice, to truly love one another as You have loved us, Lord Jesus Christ, so that all men will know that we are Your disciples. For we ask it in Jesus’ name. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” (*Applause.*)