

The Watering Can

FELLOWSHIP PART 2

Introduction

In part 1, I considered some aspects of fellowship. In this letter I would like to deal with letters of Commendation.

Question answered

Before I commence on that, however, I have a question to answer. I have been asked if I can make these letters shorter to make them easier to read. Since this question was asked, I have been burdened with a couple of verses that I would like to share with you.

Both of them are in Hebrews. The first is in Hebrews 5 v 12 to v 14. *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* I have been studying the book of Hebrews recently and when I came across this verse I stopped to consider the true meaning of it. The writer is saying that the people he is writing to have a need to be taught the basics when they should be teachers because they have heard the message before. When I started these letters, there was (and still is) a need for the young people to be taught the basics. However, there may be some that read these words and know them already, but have not taken them to heart. These things are written that all who read may be challenged (and of course, this does not exclude the writer) to continue and live on a spiritual diet of Strong Meat. I have looked into this phrase, and it can be translated as solid food. However, if you were served strong meat to eat physically, you would have to chew and chew and chew before you could swallow it and digest it. This is the essence of Bible Study. To chew and chew and chew before finally swallowing and digesting what the Word of God is telling us. For my studies I use the Authorized (King James) Version, not because I believe it is a better version (after all, it is a translation) but because you really have to study it in order to understand it. The more we study the Word of God, the clearer the Holy Spirit is able to speak into our hearts. With the modern translations, the words can be easily understood; therefore deeper study rarely takes place to understand the meaning. It is with these verses in mind, that I am seeking to present strong meat and not milk, so that these letters will provoke a studying habit within each and every single reader. I pray that you will all seek to *"study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (2 Tim 2 v 15)

My second verse regarding the length of these letters, is found in Hebrews 13 v 22 *"And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words."* The writer here is asking for his readers to suffer the exhortation. As you know, Hebrews is not a short letter. I am sure that Paul, who it is commonly believed wrote the letter to the Hebrews (it is not certain whether he did or not), wrote many a letter to many a place that we do not have recorded in our Bibles. I expect that some of his letters were not short. I am asking you also to suffer this word of exhortation for if read in a right spirit, then all of these letters will help you greatly. I pray for each person who receives it that they may be blessed. If you notice from the way that each letter is finished, each letter is intended to glorify the Father God and not mere mortal man.

Responsibilities

First of all, I would like you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12 v 12 to v 21. *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”* These words should have an effect upon our hearts. They remind us that we are not a collective group of robots. We each have our own individual purpose for being a part of the assembly. This also means that we have a responsibility to the assembly, to make sure that we support it and help it. For we are all part of one body. Let us consider this in detail. It may be that person x is considered to be a hand. Person y is considered to be an eye. Person x cannot say to person y “I don’t need you.” Person y also cannot say to person x “I can manage on my own. I don’t need you.” While we need Christ, He has placed each of us into an assembly that loves us, and can help us. We are all a vital part of the assembly. These verses also tell us that we cannot say; “I am not like him. I am not a part of the body.” Each of us is a part of the body. We cannot all be hands, ears, eyes and feet. But, what we can be is what we are. The assembly will not work efficiently if the eyes decided not to help. Also, what if the feet gave up walking? In our own bodies, either of these events would cause severe difficulties. So it is in our Spiritual Bodies. Our Spiritual body is more important than our physical body, for the physical will decay and will stop working. Our Spiritual body will continue to eternal life. It is therefore important for us to look after our Spiritual body and to help it to grow by feeding it the Word of God. This way, we will be in a position to help the assembly of which we are part. We cannot help our brothers and sisters in the Lord if we are the one in need of help. While studying my Bible in order to feed myself, I discovered the Words of Christ in John 10 v 14-16 *“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”* Let us look at these verses in detail.

V14. This verse brings before us the good shepherd. Jesus Christ is the good shepherd. We are His sheep. Therefore, providing we do not stray from the fold, He will look after us and make sure that the pasture is green. However, as with sheep, we have a tendency to wander off thinking that the pasture on the other side of the fence is better than what we have. It is only when we experience these things that we realise we were better off where we were, with the shepherd to look after us and keep us safe. For you see, the Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name, and His sheep know His voice. He calls and we answer because He is our shepherd. I would urge you all to continue in the pasture where He has placed you. Observant readers will notice that my address has changed, yet the Lord has called me to Crawley (Hampshire), and it is there that I will stay until the Lord calls me on.

V15. This verse gives the credentials of the Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for His sheep. The Lord Jesus Christ gave up His life when He died on Calvary, but He did not do it because He had to. He did it so that we can draw nigh to God. You will recall that upon His death, the temple veil was *“rent in twain from the top to the bottom.”* (Matthew 27 v 51). It was from top to bottom, not bottom to top. The temple veil was a huge curtain that prevented those on the outside from viewing the holiest place in the temple. No man was able to tear it in two from the top. This is symbolic, in that we can draw into the holiest of all because the blood of Christ allows us to. Imagine the surprise on the priests’ faces when they saw this huge veil tearing right down the middle from the top in front of their very eyes. I am sure that they would have rushed to replace it. But this does not

negate the fact that we, through the blood of Christ, can draw nigh to God. *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”*

Also, in V15. we have the recommendation of the Son. The Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father. The Jews at this time would have known exactly what Christ was saying. He was, in essence, saying, “I am the Son of God” but without actually saying those words. To the Pharisees, this was blasphemy. Remember that when Jesus healed the paralyzed man who was lowered into the house by his friends He said, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” The Pharisees said, “Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” Jesus simply answered by asking them if it was easier to say, “thy sins be forgiven thee” than to say “rise up and walk.” He then proceeds to heal the man. “Arise, take up thy couch, and go into thine house.” Jesus proved by this one simple act, that He is the Son of God. For, if He has power to heal, He has power to forgive sins. This is what made the Pharisees seek to destroy Him. They could see that if Jesus continued to preach and teach and do wondrous signs, then they would lose their seat of power and influence over the people. Also, to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, without question, turn to Luke 3 v 21-22. *“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.”* God the Father testified from Heaven that Jesus is His Son.

V16. brings before us the other sheep. Jesus is here talking to the Jews and telling them that He is going to call the Gentiles (i.e. you and me) and we shall all be one fold. By the same token, there is only one Shepherd. Many people will tell you that all religions believe the same thing and they all end up in the same result. Let me disperse this error with this one verse *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* (John 14 v 6, emphasis mine). Here Jesus is confirming that all religions are not the same. It is important where and whom you worship. My advice is very simply this: Study the Word of God (the Bible) to see if where you worship follows the scriptural principles laid down very clearly for us. If it does not, then consider carefully if that is where you should be. The Lord will guide your heart, if you let Him. God does not and will not bully His Will onto you, but if we are willing to let our hearts be guided by His Spirit, then He will show us where He wants us. If we go our own way, then do not be surprised if the result is failure.

Letter of commendation

Letters of commendation are important letters, required if you leave your home assembly to visit another. They pass on greetings from one assembly to another, news of how you are progressing spiritually, and also are letters of approval, to show that you are in assembly fellowship and able to take part in the meetings. It is therefore important that you have one whenever you go from one assembly to another. Let us consider some verses of Scripture together.

1). Approval – 1 Corinthians 16 v 3 *“...whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.”* The Apostle Paul is writing here to the Corinthian Believers. The verses before this one talk about the collection to be held. Verse 2 says that as God has prospered each believer, so we are to give back to God. In those days, the collection would have been for needy believers in Jerusalem. Paul asks the Believers to choose some among them that they would be happy to send to Jerusalem with the money and letters of approval. Therefore we should also seek the approval of our home assemblies when we travel and take a letter with us.

2). Greeting – 1 Corinthians 16 v 19 *“The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”* 2 Corinthians 13 v 13 *“All the saints salute you.”* These two verses highlight the greetings that Paul is passing on from the various saints. When Paul was writing these letters, he would be in contact with local believers and would inform them as to whom he was writing to. They would then ask for their greetings to be passed on. When we visit assemblies, whether

we have been there before or not, it is good to have a letter that passes greetings from your home assembly.

3). Commendation – A) Ephesians 6 v 21-22 *“But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.”* Although these verses do not contain reference to receiving Tychicus, however we can see that this letter would be sent with Tychicus so that the Ephesians would know how Paul is. Paul calls Tychicus a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord. This is a high commendation in itself, but Paul continues to say that he sent Tychicus to tell them all things. Tychicus was an obedient servant, for he did as he was told. We need to obey when we are asked to complete a task, no matter how small that task may be. Tychicus was sent to comfort their hearts. Do we comfort the hearts of fellow believers, whenever we meet them?

B) Romans 16 v 1-2 *“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”* Here, we find Phebe being commended to the saints at Rome. Phebe was a servant of the Church of Cenchrea, which is near to Corinth. The Romans were commanded to receive her as becometh saints, in the Lord. Paul was reminding them that they were servants of the Lord, as was Phebe. It is always good to receive those that labour for the Lord. Also, they were commanded to assist Phebe because she had been a succourer of many. That word succourer means “a protectress” (Vine) and gives the idea that she may have been used by the Lord to protect spiritually the saints (including Paul.) This presents an important challenge to our hearts. Do we protect the saints?

C) Colossians 4 v 7-9 *“All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.”* Once again, Tychicus is being commended by Paul. Once again, the purpose of the visit is to comfort the saints, this time at Colosse. We too need to comfort one another, maybe not by travelling to different assemblies but where we are. In these days of great trials, it is important to comfort each other. We are also introduced to Onesimus, a slave of Philemon. Onesimus ran away and met Paul. He then became saved and was persuaded to return to Colosse. Tychicus travels with him in order to get a report from the Colossians as to how they are progressing. We should also be interested in how other assemblies are progressing, but not to the deficit of our own. I have a great interest in a number of assemblies, but the village of Crawley is where my burden for the Lord is. I would like to see every member of that village saved. Where is your burden? There are a lot of missionary conferences in the course of the year, but if we do not have a burden for the local area, why will the Lord give a burden for a different country?

D) Philemon (read all of the book). The letter of Paul the Apostle to Philemon was written to inform Philemon that his rebellious slave is returning, and has been saved. Philemon is requested to accept Onesimus back without question. Philemon is told that Onesimus was once unprofitable to him, but was now profitable not only to Philemon but to Paul as well. How profitable to others are we? Are we rebellious and unprofitable or are we profitable and usable for the work of the Lord in our assemblies?

So you can see from the above that letters of commendation are a vital part of our fellowship. However, this is not all that the Scriptures has to say on the subject, but I would urge you to study this for yourselves.

What is my role in the assembly?

I want to look now at our roles within the assemblies:

A) **Worker** – Colossians 1 v 7 “*As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.*” I have chosen this verse to illustrate our role as worker because Epaphras was a dear fellowservant and faithful minister of Christ. Fellowservant means “Servant of the same Divine Lord”. Epaphras recognised that he was also a servant of Christ, just like Paul, and entered into the Labour with that in mind. Paul calls him a dear fellowservant. How many of us could also be called a dear fellowservant? Epaphras was also a faithful minister of Christ. This means that he served Christ and was faithful to Him. In these days of trials we too need to be faithful to Christ. Minister has the idea of “running small errands” which I find interesting. Epaphras was prepared to serve Christ in completing small tasks, rather than looking for the bigger tasks. He did what he could, is another way of putting it. Do we do what we can? We are unable to do anything unless God is with us. (Psalm 127) Let us labour for Him instead of going our own way.

B) **Love the Saints** – 1 John 4 v 7 “*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*” I know that I have mentioned this in a previous newsletter, but it is important to realise that we need to love one another. 1 John 4 v 20-21 says “*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*” This means that if we love God, then we must love fellow believers who we see constantly. The Bible reminds us that “no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Therefore, if we say we love God, it should be evident in our lives that we have love for the saints.

C) **To Study the Scriptures** – John 5 v 39 “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*” Jesus is here speaking to the Pharisees, who would have known the Old Testament. It is good to remind ourselves that the Scriptures, from start to finish, are they which testify of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Paul writes in Timothy to “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” I would again urge each one of you to study the Scriptures so that you may know for yourselves the truth of these words.

D) **To Walk Worthy** – Colossians 1 v 10 “*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.*” Here Paul is concerned with the way that the believers at Colosse walk. We too should be concerned as to how we walk. Each one of us should take account of how we are walking in our Spiritual life. Everything we do should please the Lord, but further than this, everything we do should be worthy of the Lord. This means that we must consider “What would the Lord do?” in every aspect of our life. So before we partake in any activity, consider carefully whether it will improve or damage our walk.

Closing remarks

As I close this newsletter, I would like to bring before you some verses found in Romans 12. “*I Beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be ye not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*” These verses remind that it is our reasonable service to acceptable unto God. What does this mean? It means that every action should please the Father God. I would like to examine these verses a little closer.

“*by the mercies of God*” This statement stood out to me. Think about the mercies of God in your life. Each one of us deserves death and judgement but God has spared us because of His Son. God is merciful to us, in that He provides for our every need,

although we do not deserve this. We fail and fall and turn our backs to God, yet just the like father figure in Luke 15, He is patiently watching for our return.

“present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” The sacrifice would have been given by the offerer to the priest. The priest would then have taken the sacrifice and would have slain it upon the altar. However, it was still alive when it was given. Jesus is our great high priest (Hebrews 4 v 14) and we must give our bodies as a sacrifice to Him. He is then able to take our sacrifice and use it. However, when we sacrifice something, it is given up for good. It is no use giving to the Lord a little bit as a sacrifice. We cannot sacrifice part; it is all or nothing. The idea of having a living sacrifice is that we are then able to serve. Turn with me to Samuel 1. Here we have the story of Hannah. There was a man who had two wives. One was called Peninnah and the other Hannah. Hannah was unable to have children because the Lord had shut her womb (v5) and Peninnah had many sons and she teased Hannah about it. So what did Hannah do? Every year this whole family went up to Shiloh, where the temple of the Lord was at that time. Hannah prayed the following prayer. *“O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”* Notice here how Hannah says that if the Lord granted her request, she would give her child back to the Lord. This is a practical example of a living sacrifice. Hannah was prepared to sacrifice her only child, for she recognised that unless the Lord granted her request, she would not have any children anyway. The Lord granted her request, and Samuel became her first child. Samuel became a prophet of the Lord of course. This sacrifice was acceptable unto God and He spoke to Samuel. Samuel served all of His life on earth for the Lord. He became the last judge of the people and tried to steer them towards the Lord. This is what we should be like. We should also serve the Lord all the days of our lives and try to steer the people around us towards the Lord our God.

“be not conformed to this world” This verse is difficult to accept. It shows that we are to stand out from the world. This includes going to the places where the World is. I would urge each of you that as you venture out with friends, to keep your minds pure. If where you are going to be conflicts with the teaching in the Bible, then that place is not where a believer should be found. Also, the younger Christians may watch where the older Christians go and follow them, saying to themselves that if they can go, so can I. This should make each of us consider carefully our actions.

“be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” On top of what I have said above, this verse makes it clear that our minds should be thinking of God and what His will is for our lives. This is important as it reminds us that God is watching our every action. We will all have to give an account of what we do and why we do it (Romans 14 v 12).

Be careful, my friends. The enemy is always looking to catch those who are weak. Let us help one another to be strong.

May God be glorified, not man.