

WHY DO WE FELLOWSHIP?

Brian Orchard, January 7, 2023

Today, what I'd like to do is to continue in a sense from where the Perspective of this week left because these are the things on my mind. Throughout the week the Father's Call Website received an email challenging us as to our existence. We have no right to exist because 'they' are the true church, and we are not! It does focus your mind when you need to think about some of these things

So, I sat down Sunday morning and as I usually do, and just scanned the headlines. I began to take note of what I was reading. The first one I read was: "The World Is Suffering a Famine Of Peace." That was Pope Francis. I thought that was a decent sort of a thought. I think the same source followed up with, "The Human Cost Of The Lack Of Peace." That certainly caught my attention because the human cost is horrendous!

Then this one: "Being The Leader Of The World Means Being The Leader Of Peace." Zelensky to our president saying, "You are the leader of the world so you should be the leader of peace."

"Love, Respect And Common Ground Would Be A Christian Miracle." Does that grab your attention? "Love, respect and common ground would be a Christian miracle." In other words, impossible without a miracle taking place. Then, just to top it all off to give the continuing flavor, "Missouri Teammates Fight Each Other On The Field After A Tiger Player Tries To Help The Opposing Quarterback" Love, ongoing concern.

All these things sort of tied together in my mind and help me start to formulate some ideas. There's one other piece of information that brings all of this together. Recently I had a meeting with the pastor of COGWA in this area where we are and talked to him about the idea of us combining services on the First Day of Unleavened Bread. We both have only one service that day and with the travel involved I thought that would be a good time to come together. He liked the idea, and he suggested yes, I have the venue and it is large enough. Let's do it.

Then I contacted the pastor of United also in this area and put the idea to him, telling him what the two of us had talked about and he likes the idea very much and would like to do it. We're in the process of trying to organize combined services with both COGWA and United. It may not happen, so I will say that. It's not a done deal because each one

of those ministers have to answer to hierarchy above them. I'm hoping but I'm not sure that will happen.

But the question arises, and it was posed directly to us this week as a challenge, "Why are we doing this?" Are you clear in your mind why we are doing this and why I would think it's a great thing to do! I think it's in line with the mind of Jesus Christ and I'll do what I can to make this come to pass.

Why are we doing this? I think it's important that we are all on the same page in understanding this. So, I base the sermon around one verse in the Bible. One verse: in 1 Peter 2:17. Peter makes four short statements but they're more or less a command. This is not a suggestion if we read carefully what Peter is writing.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

These are four requirements of converted members of the body of Christ, the Church. One 'honor' that is general, one 'honor' that is specific. To honor is to esteem, or to place a value on, to revere. In 'Love the brotherhood' the love here is agape. It's that love that rises above the human level and approaches the love of God. A very powerful love. These are very significant issues, but I'm going to place emphasis on 'love the brotherhood' because that plays right into what we are talking about here. They all come together but that one is spiritually significant.

I'm going to address that headline that I read to you earlier about, 'Love, Respect and Common Ground' because really brethren, that should be built into our spiritual DNA. The statement of verse 17 has context. Peter begins this with a clear discussion of the spiritual nature of the Church.

1 Peter 2:5 is about each one of us and the Church and our relationship to it:

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, (Peter is looking at the Church in spiritual terms, a spiritual house.) a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

What is being built here is very important to God and to Jesus Christ as far as the Church is concerned. It is spiritual. And the analogy is a good one, "living stones being built up a spiritual house." One stone on its own is not as effective as several or numerous stones. I thought of an analogy as I was thing about this.

Last week we had to go over to Steven's place, and we had to sandbag. One sandbag would not have prevented the flooding, so we had to have multiple sandbags. That's the Orchard version of verse 5. Peter's a little more spiritual. More stones together can make something strong and quite viable.

An important point is that to be welded into the body of Christ means that without contradiction, we are members of a community. I'm going to call it community because that's what it makes. All neatly tied together, we have the Father, we have Christ, and

we have the community. “A spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” All these things are tied together. The spiritual building is a community, and it ties into the Father, and it ties into Jesus Christ.

One reason that I personally have a problem with those who declare themselves to be independent as far as the Church is concerned is that one can be physically independent, but we cannot be spiritually independent. If we understand the nature of the Spirit, where it comes from, what it is, we cannot be spiritually independent. Mr. Armstrong addressed that quite strongly many, many years ago. I believe he wrote at the time that there is no such thing as an independent Christian. We need to think about that and pay attention to it.

Now, this is a part of the driving motivation for a combined service, and I hope that we’re all going to feel the importance of this. This is not just a casual thing. I like the pastor of COGWA, I like the pastor of United. But this is not about getting together and having a party. This is deeply, deeply spiritual.

Notice the four subjects that we have just looked at in verse 17. All people, brotherhood, God, and king. If you think about those four subjects it covers the whole gamut of human relationships from a very spiritual perspective. Then from community, having described this Church in clear terms as a community, Peter addresses the functioning of the community, why it is a community. In verse 9 he makes these clear statements again: a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. They are powerful descriptions of this community, the way the community is to be. The community hasn’t chosen these qualities. God says this is what He wants from this community, these qualities. Why?

9 ... that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

God has a reason. God has a purpose for creating a community, a spiritual community and that community plays a part in God’s development of the plan of salvation.

10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

What do these categories of being a chosen generation point to?

12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, (This is where each one of us has a finger pointed straight at us.)

The Gentile term is not a derogatory term. It is simply a definition between Israel, that God was married to, and the rest of the people that God was not married to. He will eventually bring into the plan of salvation. It’s just a distinguishing factor between those that God is working with at some point in time and those that He is not.

12 ...having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

That statement says a mouthful. I don't know about you, but I have had the tendency in the past to read that verse just simply focusing more on the first part of the verse then skipping the visitation thinking, "When Christ returns, and He becomes visible." That is not what it is referring to. That's not what this word means. It means when God involves Himself in a human life. He's going to involve Himself in the lives of the Gentiles because salvation is for them as well as anybody else.

The example that this community has set, will help the Gentile world come to accept and see God because they will see by our example what God's Spirit can do in a human life. You can't escape that. This is where Peter is going. That's our responsibility, to represent God in the way that we do our works, the way that we live. Just a simple representation of God so that others will see and know something is different. These people are different.

Acts 15:14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

Same word, 'visited'. There is the intent that Peter is trying to bring into what he is writing. Same basic premise that God had for raising up the physical nation of Israel. A living example of His law, His way, His being, and that was what Israel was supposed to do. They failed but that's what they were supposed to do. And I think this "visitation" word leads us to the familiar statement out of Isaiah, "the people I have formed for Myself." This is what Peter is building into his statements.

In Exodus 19, God is giving His law to Israel. He's entering into a covenant relationship with these people.

Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. (Why is God doing that?)

6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

What we're talking about is a covenant. When Peter speaks of a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, he's talking about a covenant people. People who have entered into an agreement with God. You did that at baptism. You entered into a covenant agreement with God. You basically, in effect said, "God, whatever You tell me to do, I will do." That's in its simplest form. We all did that at our baptism.

The covenant sets out how we are to live, honorable conduct in other words. We are to place a great deal of value on that and to revere it. So we see why Peter has two “honors” in his list that we’ve just read here.

We honor all people by our honorable conduct because:

1. It is a covenant obligation so God can fully support us. If we do our part of the covenant agreement God *will* do His. His word is absolutely certain. That’s going to produce something that people will see on the day of visitation. It will make sense when they begin to see it.
2. It is an example reflecting God’s marvelous light in a world of darkness. And this world is certainly dark. It needs some light.
3. It simply fulfills the law of God.

As I was working with this subject, I came across this statement by William Barclay which really rings bells in my mind. He has some decent insight into the technicalities of scripture:

“The strongest missionary force in the world is a Christian life.”

I thought that was a statement worthy of some thought. I’ll give you the Orchard version of the same statement.

“We must be living examples of the gospel to effectively preach the gospel.”

I believe there’s no contradiction in those two statements. Israel was called to preach the gospel in word and deed! And so are we! That’s our covenant agreement. With that in mind Peter defines submission to government in secular and religious terms. He is quite strong about submission. Where does peace come from? True godly submission will produce peace. And he goes in some detail:

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,

Some of us need to spend some time to think about that and how we relate to every ordinance of man. There’s so much stupidity going on in higher levels of government in this world that it’s hard to maintain much respect. I do not have any respect for the man that occupies the position of president of this nation. But I do respect the office that he holds. And I believe there’s a correct distinction between those two things. But we:

13 ...submit [ourselves] to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,

14 or to governors,

I don’t know about you but living in California tests my attitude about reverence and submission to governors. Did you read this week that the Federal government is initiating a law that they own every drop of water on the ground at my place. If I have a

puddle in my driveway, by Federal law, they own it and I can't do anything with it unless I get permission from the Federal government, state government, county, city whatever. Now, I heard some time ago that this was coming but I just read it this week. It's going to become reality.

In the face of all of that, we must have respect because we're talking about peace, where peace comes from. We need to have respect in representing God in this world of injustice.

14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

15 For this is the will of God,

We keep coming back to that concept. This is all about the will of God, what God wants us to do and why He wants us to do it. It's bigger than ourselves.

15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men —

God wants an example of Himself in us. Another little personal here, but we live in a little community. They really operate as a community. We must walk on eggshells a little bit because two doors up from us and immediately across the road from them there are people who have flagpoles in their front yard. And on that flagpole they fly the American flag. But there is one flag that flies higher than the American flag and that's a blue flag with one word written on it. Trump! Further up the road my wife has made friends because the lady likes to walk up and down our road and they are died in the wool democrats! So, you can see, we're in a community but we're going to have to walk very carefully. Extrapolate that out into your areas. We've all got something like that we need to be very careful about.

16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

We have been freed from sin, we've been freed from the penalty of death, we've been brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and we are to use it for the intent that God called us to do.

17 Honor all people. (See where this has been coming to.) Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Christ said, "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and give to God that which is His." Christ was repeating the same thing. We are to be good citizens in this larger community we call the world. In the world of darkness, we are to be light within that community.

We have been called to be witnesses of God's way in a godless world. That's why Peter said what he said in verse 17. By our submission to kings and governors we are

contributing to peace, a peaceful community. We don't have to agree with their laws and their rules. If their laws require us to break God's law, then we're going to put God's law first. But in general, we try to be good citizens so there is peace in our communities. Come back to one of those statements that I read to you, being leaders of example to the world means we should be leaders of peace. We need to be a peaceful community, a spiritual community in order to do that.

Peter continues to make a very powerful connection of our example pointing to Jesus Christ. If you read on (we can't read it all) it's submission, submission, submission at all levels. He says:

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

Then he brings in our marriages and our families which are connected to God's family.

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands,

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, (Husbands are, in a sense to submit to their wives.

8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;

9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

"Don't return evil for evil or reviling for reviling" is a command that the Church of God communities as a whole need to pay attention to. If we don't get together in the manner that I'm hoping for the First Holy Day of Unleavened Bread it's going to be because members don't want to be with other members. The wounds are too fresh, so I've been told. There's animosity, bordering on hatred between some of the Church of God groups. God says here you don't return reviling for reviling. You are to have love. And that is what we're going to try very hard to do. You can read on all the way through this I Peter 3.18:

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,

This is what it's about. Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ over and over. Very important.

18 ...being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,

19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,

20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

21 There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (The new man, a new mind, a mind that thinks like Jesus Christ.)

22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

And He left behind, on earth, a community called by the Father, forgiven, cleaned up through Jesus Christ to represent Christ. Christ will come back and fully represent Himself but for now you and I have been called to represent Christ on this earth.

So, I'd like to turn our attention to "love the brotherhood". This is very Church specific. You could say 'honor all people' is very general. But when you come to 'love the brotherhood' you're talking about a very specific group of people. That's meant to be specific, the godly community:

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples..."

That's what's on Christ's mind. I want people in this world, the Gentiles that are going to be visited in the future in the visitation, to know certain things.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Do you ever ponder over this? It rolls off the lips easily. Love one another but it must be practiced.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

This fits perfectly with our understanding of godly examples in a community. "All will know..." What an example it would be (and this fills my heart and mind) what an example it would be if members from three different Church of God groups could come together in a Holy Day service, worshipping God together! I don't know what your thoughts were about the Feast of Tabernacles in Oxnard this year. You know what we tried to do. We opened it up to other groups, people from other groups to come and many did. There was a wide range of Church of God groups represented in Oxnard from Church of God Seventh Day all the way through. It was not a Father's Call Feast site in my mind.

What I genuinely felt, it was a body of Christ Feast. And spiritually speaking...we talk about the best Feast ever! I don't know how you rate those things. I don't know if it

was the best Feast ever, but it was a very good Feast because of its spiritual orientation. Not physically. It was a spiritual orientation. We're going to do the same thing this coming year. I look forward to that very much.

If we're thinking about these different groups being together worshipping God, it leads us to consider fellowship in the broader and the narrower sense. We can't address 'love the brotherhood' if we don't address fellowship because fellowship is a deeply spiritual matter. I hope you can appreciate that because it's very easy to let it slip into a more of a social context. It is a deeply spiritual matter and I want to define fellowship in that perspective.

Interestingly, where would you find most references to fellowship in the Bible? The New Testament. There's only two references that I can see in the Old Testament. The rest are in the New Testament where God's Spirit is made available to people. So when fellowship is addressed it's addressed with God's Spirit in the picture. Paul addresses fellowship in most in his writings.

Paul never used 'fellowship' in a secular sense but always in a religious one. That statement comes from the Dictionary of the New Testament Theology. He never references social fellowship. It's always the spiritual sense. Do we make such a distinction of fellowship? We're going to have fellowship after service. It will involve brownies and all other such good things. Is that what fellowship is about? No. That's just a part of it.

The Greek word means, in its simplest form, partner, companion, sharing, participation. So you can see, it's very easy for fellowship to degenerate into a social sense. Just getting together with people you like in situations you enjoy. That's not wrong but what's it going to promote? We are looking for the spiritual sense. So, I want to go through six references from Paul's writings where he references fellowship and I think it will leave an impression by linking them all together pretty quickly.

1 Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

That is a deep, intense meaning for fellowship – into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Now, the translators used the word communion. It's exactly the same word translated fellowship. "The love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." We've referenced Christ. We've referenced now the Holy Spirit as part of fellowship.

Philippians 1:5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,

Fellowship involves gospel, it involves the Holy Spirit, it's involving Jesus Christ.

In Philemon 6, sharing is the same word for fellowship:

“that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 2:9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

We're not just talking about a handshake. We're not just talking about a nice chat with a cup of coffee over a brownie.

Lastly, 1 Corinthians 10:16 gets to the heart of a spiritual implication of fellowship:

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? (The word communion is fellowship.) is it not the [fellowship] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the [fellowship] of the body of Christ?”

There's nothing social in this sense here. It is deeply spiritual. *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* also makes this statement which I think is very valid:

“It is not the elimination or fusion of personality, but a new relationship based on the forgiveness of sin.”

In fellowship on a social level, I think it's true to say there are certain people we like to fellowship with, spend time with because of their personality. There are some people we would prefer not to if we didn't have to because our personalities don't get along. That's true of human relationships. But this overrides all of that. It's not about people you get along with or don't get along with. It's about conversion! It's about the forgiveness of sin. That other person, regardless of their personality is a son of God, a potential member of the God family for eternity. That's how God's looking at it. We're not seeking out relationships on the basis of what pleases us. It's what pleases God. That's the bottom line here.

Our fellowship is based on our spiritual relationship with God, created by Christ's sacrifice. In other words, the new man. When you enter into a fellowship situation you should be taking the new man into that relationship. If we do that and everybody is trying to do that there's going to be peace. There's going to be love of the brotherhood if we will attempt to do that. Paul provides some very rich substantiation to Peter's statement in Romans 12. I will try to tie this together because this is a very important section of scripture. It begins with 'we have to become a living sacrifice'. So it starts with our baptism, our submission of our will and our life to God.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is (simply) your reasonable service.

That's what we've gone through at baptism. And we did give our lives to God. It's a matter of whether we are continuing to give our lives to God. In that state it tells us to:

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, (That's the mind that you fellowship with. That's the mind you bring to the table in terms of fellowship.) **that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

This is submission. This is the practical side of submission. Not to think of ourselves more highly. Why do we have an issue over "what is the true Church"? Because people want to say, "We are the true Church, and you are not!" And that has been said to me. "We are preaching the gospel and you are not!" "And if you're not over here with us, you are hindering the preaching of the gospel" said to me in my own home to my face! That is not going to bring about a deeply converted community that loves and works together and pulls together to honor God, to uphold God. That causes separation and division!

4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Is that difficult to understand? It might be difficult to put into practice. Everything I'm talking about today is going to be difficult to put into practice. We need God's help to do it. But is that concept difficult for the Church, the overall Church?

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;

Whatever God's gift to you is. We all have different strengths and weaknesses. But we all combine to make this one community! We're not all the same. And that's great! We draw upon some of the strengths of other people.

Somebody drew my attention to the latest article that was published on Leading to Life Website. I hardly recognize it although my name was at the bottom. Somebody edited it and made me sound good. I'm grateful they have that skill and that ability. It's

not easy to make me sound good. But we are people with those skills. I can't edit. I don't edit the Perspective. I write it. My wife makes me a little bit better. Then it goes on to the Veals who have that skill and that ability. I don't have that. But whatever your skill and ability is contribute to the whole.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

We are still in the same context as verse 1 where we are to be a living sacrifice. And if we are a living sacrifice then we'll be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.

11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

These are very deep emotional attachments here. I was struck recently (to drive some of these points home) I sat and watched the video that had been prepared by one of the Churches of God for their Feast video. It was totally concerning the work in Africa. Now, I have some attachment to the work in Africa because at one point, as a senior student at college I oversaw the African, mail reading section. Any mail that came from Africa went through our department and was processed. So, I got a little familiar with Africa, so I was interested that they put the whole focus of this year's Feast video on Africa. And they're doing a great work in Africa! They have the ability to do things we can't do. And I was very, very pleased to see that.

Now, I might not agree with the organizational structure that's doing that but if they're bringing people to the truth of God, great! Let them have at it. If there's any tweaking need to be done, spiritually, Christ will do it as we go on down the road. But for now, something good is being done. And I uphold them for that. The same group of people don't want anything to do with us in fellowship at the level we're talking about today. So, go figure.

16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

This is all a part of that submissive mind where you have submitted your mind to Christ and to the Father.

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Promote peace by the way you live and attach yourselves to God the Father. I hope we all share the same sense of importance that this is not a social thing we're talking about! It's a deeply spiritual activity.

Fellowship requires a serious commitment on our part to be more representative of Christ. Fellowship brings two minds together. In Philippians it says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." That's what we are to bring to the table.

16 Be of the same mind toward one another... (That's the mind we want and it's the mind of Jesus Christ.)

In working with this I thought of our current situation. We live in a particular time in human history, Church history. I'd like to address a situation that is quite current as far as we're concerned and something that can interrupt fellowship. Fellowship stands on agreed values. We understand God's law to be that agreed value. Hook back into our covenant obligations. God sets the values, and we agree to live by them. That's the example.

These values create a community. If we all are accepting these values and we all come together there's a community that is created. When we fellowship, we bring those values to the table and they unite us because they're the standard values, across the board standard and it brings us together. In 1 John 1, verses 6 and 7:

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (If we say we have fellowship with Christ and we're not doing what Christ wants us to do it's vain.)

7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

There's a good context for fellowship, the new man through Jesus Christ. That's what comes together. Fellowship involves the Father, the Son, God's Spirit, faith as we saw. It's "a new relationship based on the forgiveness of sin." With that in mind, let's think about our environment, let's think about where we spend most of our time, the other six days of the week.

We have a situation in this environment that is built upon the concept that 'God is dead'. That has seeped into our societies in a very large way. the current dominant leftist/liberal attitudes (I'm sorry to use these terms, but I think they're descriptive) simply are to reject any core values established by religion. 'God is dead' so we have to destroy anything that flows from the world to us. That doesn't mean they've got it all wrong. I don't mean that. There are still some decent values out here in the Western world in particular. The rule of law in the Western world has within it some aspects of

God's law whether they understood what they're doing or not it does. The values that underpin Western civilization are trying to be destroyed.

In other words, that which builds community is to be destroyed. Biblical values are taboo. That's the pressure coming on us from out here in this world. We are trying to go in a completely opposite direction, upstream against the main flow. And it's not easy. It's difficult! Therefore, if you follow through this reasoning there is no real basis for fellowship and you're going to get a fragmented community. Do we have fragmented communities out here in our world? Certainly, we do. Obviously, we do because Christ said, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will wax cold." This society produces coldness, not love. Not an outgoing concern. We look out for ourselves. And if we can get on top of the other guy and dig the spurs in all the better! That's what we see going on in the world around us, a lack of love.

As love grows cold the sense of community diminishes. The sense of community diminishes when love grows cold! In the face of this reality, we are commanded to love the brotherhood. It flies right in the face of what this world is doing. What does agape love look like in this regard? That's the love of the brotherhood.

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, (We're being told we can understand love perfectly.) **because He laid down His life for us.** (It goes right back to Christ's sacrifice and the reason that He did it was love.) **And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

And in fellowship, when you're coming up against people or the personality that you find difficult to get along with you might want to think about this, so you're prepared to lay down your life in order to make the bond with that person that you really, deep down don't like or don't really want to spend time with. I'm being a bit blunt about that. Are we prepared to give up our life and what makes us happy, what we like to do, how we like to feel in order to make the body of Christ more united?

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

If I say, "I don't want anything to do with that person over there because they're not in my group" how does the love of God abide in me?

18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because (and here is the qualifying part of that statement.) **because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.** (We've submitted our lives to God in order for this to happen.)

23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

It's a command. It's not a suggestion. There is no ambiguity presented here by John!

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (It takes the Holy Spirit being part of the human mind.)

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (Pure and simple.)

Everything that flows from God is love. Somebody asked me this week. I had a conversation. They're grieving over a younger family member that had died unexpectedly. And why did God allow that? Of course, I had another conversation with somebody that's visiting the Philippines. His grandchildren are in dire situations and may end up dying. Why did God allow that? Well, God is love. Everything that flows from God is love. If He allows somebody to die, even a child, there is a reason that He has done that, and it will be determined to be good when we fully understand all of God's reasoning to allow that to happen. That's the type of God He is. He is love!

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. (This is where the love comes from.)

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

It's pretty direct, isn't it? It's pretty pointed as to what is required of us. Continuing in verse 20:

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (If we can't show love then we're not attached to God the way we should be.)

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

1 John 1:3 bundles all of this altogether:

1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

When we fellowship that's what each of us should bring to the table. Our fellowship with the Father and the Son, then we bring that into the fellowship with each other. To have fellowship with Christ and one another, as we look at the scriptures, we see that it is about knowing Him, to really know God, to abide in Him, to have a strong personal relationship with God.

And gospel it tells us that we will have life, that we will have peace, and that we will have light. All that flows from the fellowship we have with Jesus Christ and the Father. That's what we project. I'll sum up these qualities in John 13.

John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

34 A new commandment I give to you, (It's a commandment. It's something God requires of us.) that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

And in that people will know that you are My disciples. Who are these people? They are children of God, and the glory will go back to God, not to us. It will go back to God because we not producing this. It's the Holy Spirit within us that's doing it. We should realize and be humble enough to accept that. But we are doing God's work if we do that.

As Christ's disciples we are extensions of the God family, as he says here. Working through the Father and the Son we become extensions of the Elohim family, spiritual family. Hopefully, we can promote love, respect, and common ground within the body of Christ to build and strengthen that. What does being an extension of the Elohim family mean in reality? The description of the Elohim family as far as we are concerned is:

Ephesians 4:3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

There can be no better description to my mind of the Elohim family than that. That should be describing us. It's an undeniable description of the God family of what we should be as a community. So, with all of this in mind and Christ's new commandment in mind, let us do exactly what Peter has told us to do.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.