

## **“One Another”- Can One Serve God Without Serving Brethren?**

Put another way, “Can we be *faithful to God* without being “in fellowship” with a local congregation?”

Firstly, let’s make no mistake about it: Our individual *connection to God* is **through Christ**, not the local or universal church- both of whom *result from* our spiritual connection to God rather than being the *cause of it*. Consider a few passages in this regard:

- John 15:4- Jesus clearly states that “*the branch* (that’s us *individual disciples*) *cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*” In case you missed it, “*the vine*” is Jesus, v.1.
- Acts 4:12- “*And there is salvation in no one else* (again, Jesus is being referenced, cf. vv.10-11); *for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.*”
- John 14:6- Jesus Himself said that He was/is “*the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.*”

Salvation, and therefore our spiritual connection to and fellowship with God, is **through/by Jesus** rather than ANY church (either in the *local congregational* or *universal* sense)! But...

Secondly, there is something else that must be considered. The phrase “*one another*” appears some **108** times in 101 verses in the New Testament, which is “*gospel of the kingdom*” which Jesus and His disciples proclaimed as “*the word*” by which all will be eternally judged on the last day, cf. Matt.4:23; Luke 16:16; John 12:48; Rom.16:1; 1Cor.14:37. It is true that **some** of those occurrences refer to *people generally* rather than *Christians specifically*, cf. Matt.25:32; Luke 23:12; e.g. But, it is also true that **most often** the phrase is utilized to reference duties Christians owe “*one another.*” These passages dictate- by the authoritative command of Jesus Christ, how Christians should **think about** “*one another,*” how Christians should **feel toward** “*one another,*” how Christians should **treat** “*one another,*” and even how Christians should **speak to** “*one another.*” So more often than not, these “*one another*” passages are detailing duties Christians owe other Christians, cf. Eph.4:31 – 5:4.

Now, lest someone still think that they can *think, feel, act, and speak* in these prescribed ways without being a part of a local group of “*one anothers*” (a local congregation/church), consider the following **congregational obligations** of “*one another*” that can only be fulfilled within a local church fellowship:

- **“One Another” Communion**- The local church at Corinth was *coming “together as a church”* or *assembling regularly*, 1Cor.11:18,20a. They should have been doing so “*to eat the Lord’s Supper,*” v.20b, but they weren’t meeting for that purpose, vv.21ff. Because of this failure of *purpose* and *activity*, they were *spiritually “weak and sick”* and *asleep*, v.30. Therefore, they were told how to *properly partake*, vv.23-29, and to “*wait for one another*” to do so, v.33. Why? See 1Cor.10:16-17 for the answer!

- **“One Another” Singing-** The local church at Ephesus was told to *“speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord,”* Eph.5:19. “Yes,” we can sing praises to God and encouragement to “one another” at other times and in other places, but these do not displace the “one another” obligation we have to our local church brethren. Lest you think this obligation was somehow specific to the Ephesus fellowship, it wasn’t- the church at Colossae was told they had this same “one another” responsibility, Col.3:16.
- **“One Another” Loving, Comforting, Encouraging, and Edifying/Building Up-** The local church at Thessalonica was given all the commands to *“love one another,”* 1Thess.4:9; *“comfort one another,”* 1Thess.4:18; *“encourage one another”* and *“build up one another,”* 1Thess.5:11; *“Live in peace with one another,”* 1Thess.5:13; and to *“always seek after that which is good for one another,”* 1Thess.5:15. How is this to be accomplished from the sofa and isolated from “one another”?!?

While other duties and passages could be provided, surely these are sufficient to make the point: While our connection to God is through Christ rather His church, such does NOT remove the responsibilities we have to be a part of a local church “fellowship.” The very nature of “fellowship” (Grk. *koinonia*) necessarily includes “association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse” Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon. Besides all of the above *duties* you owe your brethren in a local church, they owe them to you also! Neither they nor you are *comforted, encouraged, or edified* by your insistence to serve and worship God “on your own.” Don’t just think about it, get up, get busy, do the right thing(s)! (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at [vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com](http://vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))