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

Put another way, “Can we be *faithful to God* without being “in fellowship” with 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; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)