

Corporate Fellowship

I Corinthians 12:27: “Now ye are Christ’s body, and members in particular.”

I Corinthians 3:9: “For we are God’s fellow-workmen; ye are God’s husbandry, God’s building.”

Revelation 19:7: “Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready.”

Revelation 21:2: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Let’s have a word of prayer:

Father, we are so thankful we have Your Word. Without Your Word where would we be? And because we have Your Word, it is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We just look to You, the Author of that Word, the Word made flesh, the One who speaks and all is done. You have the Words of eternal life which speak to us. Without that we have nothing but doctrine to share, nothing but thoughts to share. They may be good thoughts, but they would just be human thoughts. How we wait upon You to speak to us, to open to us Your living Word, those Words that can go to the very joints and marrow, those Words that can divide asunder, those Words that can transform us and conform us into the very image of our blessed Lord Jesus. Speak, Lord, Thy servants heareth. Amen.

We will continue today in this matter of fellowship that we have been sharing on. I do not want to take the time for much review, just to say this is the third message. The first one was from that wonderful verse in I Corinthians 1:9: “God is faithful by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.” An extraordinary verse! The second message we shared was on this matter of personal fellowship, and the message today is corporate fellowship. Now it is a little artificial to break these things apart, but for the sake of understanding it helps to do that so we can see the difference of what is included and what is not included.

We have been sharing on this all-important matter of fellowship. In God’s heart I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say everything that has to do with God is centered in fellowship, whether it is with His Son or whether it has to do with you as an individual Christian or whether it has to do with us as a company of God’s people or whether it has to do with His purpose. Everything is centered in fellowship. And if you dig down and beyond all that is written, you will find it was all because He wanted fellowship—fellowship with His Son, fellowship with the people He would create, fellowship that would extend way past time into eternity. I believe that is the secret that is within the Scripture. It is the key that unlocks our understanding of what is in the heart of God.

Knowing about Fellowship with God vs a Living Fellowship with God

Before I begin with corporate fellowship and describe some differences between individual and corporate, I would like to share the difference between knowing about God in fellowship and

having a living fellowship with God. We can know about God, but there is the question when we look at the Word of God: are we in living fellowship with God? That is the real question.

I will never forget David's Psalm 103:7 when he said this striking thing: "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel." Don't you see a stark difference there? When we are in fellowship with God, we understand and know His ways. When we just know about God, we may see some of His acts, and we can certainly talk about all the acts we have read about. However, there is a vast difference between knowing His ways and knowing His acts. Through fellowship we know His ways.

Let me make a distinction here between personal fellowship and corporate fellowship. Personal fellowship is our individual fellowship with the Lord and our walk with Him. I think of Enoch in the Bible in Genesis 5. There are only six verses written about him; therefore we do not know so much about his life. We know who his father was, we know he lived sixty-five years and he had Methuselah. We know he lived 300 more years, and he had sons and daughters. There is not too much we know about Enoch, but there is something emphatically stated about him. I do not know what happened in the first sixty-five years, but after that first sixty-five years, Methuselah was born, and something happened in Enoch. The Bible states right after that verse about Methuselah's birth that he walked with God. Now that is individual fellowship, and He concludes his thoughts on Enoch, which are not very vast by the way. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not because God took him." Now that is the heart of individual fellowship. Are we walking with God? And if you are so worried, are you ready as a Christian to be rapt? You can only think that this is the secret.

I love the theme Brother Kaung has brought to us these last number of years, and with that burden that has poured out of his spirit, he would ask us again and again, "Are you ready?" This is the secret—to be ready. It is pretty simple. If you walk with God as Enoch did, you will not be here; you will be taken when he comes. You will be ready. So that is individual fellowship.

When we speak of corporate fellowship, some people get confused over this word corporate and think we are talking about a business. I am a businessman, but we are not talking about business, although we are talking about heavenly business, the greatest business there ever was on this earth. It means a company of believers, a group of believers who are connected together, who are joined together, not only in fellowship with God, in whom they have individual fellowship, but they are joined together in fellowship with one another. I hope you see the difference.

Here is the way I have put it. Without personal fellowship with God the individual Christian life is impossible. It is true. If there is no individual fellowship with God, there is no Christian life. And without corporate fellowship with God, the Christian life is incomplete.

There are many people who say, "All I need is my relationship with God." Brothers and sisters, if you say that, you will take away all the corporate dealings with God, all the messages about God dealing with a people, all of the times when He is bringing a people together and forming them into a testimony, a living testimony of who He is. It says in Psalm 78: "He found a testimony in Jacob." A corporate testimony is what He has always been after. So once we are

called into fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ, we begin to experience this blessed corporate fellowship in its fulness. Until that calling comes, until you are saved, until you are brought out from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love, you cannot experience what corporate fellowship is all about.

We have been studying the book of Ephesians, and you will notice, and if you have not noticed it I am going to tell you so you will notice it from now on, the word *together* is of extreme importance. The word together is mentioned six times in those six chapters of that letter. So you cannot go anywhere in Ephesians without seeing that word “together.” And together is the whole explanation of corporate fellowship. It is together with God, and it is together with one another. And in this togetherness we express all that was ever in the heart of God with Christ and with one another. Well this is corporate fellowship.

Three things Concerning Corporate Fellowship

We will look at three things today. First of all, we will look at the body which is absolutely important in God’s eyes when it comes to corporate fellowship. Secondly, we will look at the building. It is absolutely important that we understand the place of building in God’s heart, and why the Scriptures put so much emphasis on this matter of being built together and building up. Third, we will look at one that I think is the most profound thing concerning corporate fellowship, and that is the bride. If you do not understand what God’s thought is for marriage and what He has determined for His Son, you will never understand corporate fellowship. These are the things we will deal with.

The Body

Let’s begin with the body. When God thought of what He would give His Son, I believe it is clear in the Scripture, He thought of these three things. He thought first He would give Him a body, a living body, and we will go into that. And in that body, that ultimate body, He would be eternally expressed, not just during time but eternally expressed. Without that body it could not happen.

Secondly was the building. In fellowship with His Son, God’s thought was what can I give My Son? What is the greatest thing I can give My Son? He thought about a home, a house, a place to dwell, and that was preeminent in His thoughts—the eternal home for His Son.

When He thought about what He could give His Son, what was the most important thing in His heart? His thoughts turned to the bride. This is the consummation of all my work is to give My Beloved and My only Son, in whom is all My delight, a companion for eternity.

Now I do not think these three elements that make up corporate fellowship are too different from a natural way to look at it. At least we can illustrate with it. It is a weak illustration, but when you think about your body, it is most important to you. You know that. They say if you have your health, you have everything. Paul, the writer of Ephesians, said in chapter 5: “No one ever hated his own body, but he cherishes it, he loves it and takes care of it.” Then he tells what is really on his heart. So the body is of extreme importance.

When you think of the building, home is very important. You know I travel a little bit or used to before Covid, but we have been homebound. And always in my heart, when I get near the end of my visit—and I love to visit with the saints—I am always focused on home. The nearer that last day comes, I am thinking about home. It is not that my home is so great, but home is in my heart. I remember growing up, and we always used to watch the Wizard of Oz every year, and maybe it was because we only had a few things to watch on three channels. But you remember Dorothy's secret was home. When the fairy, or whatever it was, turned to Dorothy and said, "Dorothy, the secret is home. There is no place like home." You understand that we are not talking about Kansas, but in Dorothy's heart was home. There is no place like home.

God thought of that for His Son, "I will give Him a home, an eternal home." Then He thought about the most dearest and the most intimate and the most personal thing He could give Him. He said, "I have to give Him a mate, a helpmate, a companion for life." In that companion all of the Lord Jesus would be expressed through this wonderful union. So you understand the burden.

When I think of the body, I always go to the opening of the book of Acts 1:1 when Luke was writing and giving explanation to Theophilus. While he was writing he said, "I composed the first discourse, O Theophilus." Now that first discourse was the gospel of Luke. In it the Person of the Lord Jesus was manifest, but then he said something of extraordinary value: "I composed the first discourse O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach," (Underline in your Bible *began* because the breaking point is in Acts.)

Now we come to the book of Acts, and we begin to see a change in God's moving because what that word *began* implies is that now He will continue to do and to teach in another body. At first it was in the body of His incarnation through the virgin Mary. He did and He taught for thirty-three and a half years, a very brief life in any measure. But then something grand was about to happen. Luke is implying because he is very precise with his words that from this time forward God is doing a new thing. He is looking for a body, a supernatural body, a heavenly body, a spiritual body, and in that spiritual body, which is the church, He will continue to do and to teach and to express Himself through all eternity. I think this is wonderful.

Now do not get troubled about who Theophilus is because they do not know. There are at least four ideas about Theophilus. In chapter 1:3 of Luke he calls him, "Most excellent Theophilus." So I will leave that for another time, but the emphasis is absolutely clear. God was looking for a body for His Son, and His intention was in this new body that He would manifest all that His Son is, Head and body joined together. It is absolutely clear.

There is a verse in Hebrews 10:5 which is very meaningful. It says, "Wherefore coming into the world he says, Sacrifice and offering thou wiltedst not; but thou hast prepared for me a body."

That is how important this is in God's thought. He was not just talking about that body of incarnation; He has in His view something more tremendous that would be the very heart of corporate fellowship, and I believe this is a supreme privilege. It is hard to imagine that God would choose us to be the body of His Son and to be that vessel through which He would manifest Himself for all eternity, but it is absolutely true.

We are going to look at I Corinthians 12:27, but I Corinthians 12 is a very important chapter. If you do not understand I Corinthians 12, you will never understand what the body is. As a matter of fact, in I Corinthians 12 the word “body” is mentioned more than any other book in the whole of the Bible. Now that is kind of extraordinary when you are talking about physical bodies in the Old Testament very often, but the word “body” occurs more in I Corinthians 12 than any other book in the Bible. Basically it has many “buts” in there, if you read it carefully, of all these things to describe what this new body of corporate fellowship is to be.

I Corinthians 12:27 makes this extraordinary statement: “Now are ye the body of Christ and members in particular.” What a wonderful thing this is. This is what we have in corporate fellowship. And if you think somehow this is just mystical or allegorical or if you think this is something like unto a body, the Scriptures do not ever use that phrase. This is *the* body of Christ. It is tremendously significant.

In Ephesians 5:29-30 it says, “For no one has ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the church, the assembly: for we are members of his body; we are of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Do you see how precise that is? He did not say, “Well figuratively.” “In the spiritual realm we are like unto His body.” Maybe some would perceive us as to being His messenger and we could be referred to as His body. It does not say that. It says none of those things, “We are His flesh and His bones.” It is an extraordinary statement. It immediately takes you back to Genesis 2:18 where it says, “It is not good that man should be alone.” Now think further into this whole matter of corporate fellowship. It was not good that this first man would be alone, and in God’s heart it is not good that the second man should be alone. It says in those verses, “He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and out from his side He took a rib, and He fashioned into a whole new vessel called woman. You have to take note of Adam’s reaction. He said when he was awakened from that divine anesthetic: “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” That is exactly what Ephesians 5 means. This is the grandest privilege you could imagine that now we are Christ’s body. This is God’s purpose in fellowship.

It goes further than that; Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all and in all.” Think of that! He is not saying that about the Lord Jesus. He is talking about the body of Christ. He is saying, “This body is to be so important in God’s economy that the very fulness of Christ that fills all in all would be expressed through this vessel. Isn’t that wonderful?! Can you imagine? Paul, the writer of Ephesians could not contain himself in Ephesians 3:10, “But now through the church to the principalities and authorities might be made known the all-various wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose of God.” How marvelous! How strikingly marvelous what is going to happen with us, brothers and sisters. This is corporate fellowship. This is the grand purpose of corporate fellowship.

I Corinthians 12:12: “For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.”

Here I want to show my prejudice. I hope you will put up with me. I love the way Darby puts it. He says, "So also is *the* Christ." Now the Authorized Version which you know I love says, "So also is Christ." But that word *the* is of extreme importance. As a matter of fact, Darby made it very clear when he was inserting words. If they were just words to help us not stumble over the English, as I often do, he puts them in square brackets, and these square brackets are words that were inserted that were not in the original. So it is even more emphatic. It means, "So also is *the* Christ. That is how it ought to be read. What is that? That is Head and body joined together in this ultimate vessel that would express all that He is for all eternity. How wonderful! That word *the* in Greek is called the emphatic article. It is *the* Christ. Very important. It is like you say, "The University of Virginia." So also is *the* Christ, Head and body joined. But the remarkable thing is that it is all about Christ; it is not all about the church. Some people say, "He talked too much about the church." I hardly think you can do that if you have a right understanding. Now if you make a big deal only about the church, you have missed God's point. This is *the* Christ. It is the Head joined with the body expressing all who He is. It is not the body expressing all that the body is.

I remember one of the famous old writers said, "I went to church today, and I was not greatly depressed." Now that is what happens if you just look at the church. If you just look at the body itself, you will get greatly depressed. You might need some help, but if you see Christ in the body, if you see Him in every member, if you see the fullness of Him that fills all in all, you see the glory of corporate fellowship. How marvelous it is!

I Corinthians 12 also emphasizes many members. It says this phrase, "Many members, one body." Thank God for that! Thank God it is not just one member or two member or three members and the rest of us are somehow relegated to the gallery. Some people call it the peanut gallery. It is not so. The emphasis is quite clear when it comes to the Bible. The emphasis on the body is that every member or many members but one body. Thank God for that!

In Romans 12:4-5, after you deal with the doctrinal section, says, "For, as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; thus we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each one members of one another."

Not only are we members of the body, but we are inseparable members of one another. I think that revelation that Brother Nee had when he visited England in the thirties and saw that dear old brother saint, George Cutting as he was passing away. The impression Brother Nee had from Brother Cutting that he took back to China was, "I cannot live without my Lord and He cannot live without me." What a revelation! But then he took it further than Brother Cutting who uttered that same word over and over. Nee said, "I cannot live without my brothers and sisters, and they cannot live without me." If you can live without the Lord, you do not have an individual fellowship. If you can live without your brothers and sisters, you do not know what the body is, and you do not know what corporate fellowship is.

I think the body is an amazing thing. Even the human body is an amazing thing. Do you remember Psalm 139 that says, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made"? Think how magnificent your human body is. I always think of the opposing thumb because I think it is a tremendous clarity of an important member. This is what the opposing thumb means. You can touch each

finger, and it is only primates that have this. I am not insinuating you came from a monkey and please do not take it that way, but God in His wisdom made one member as the opposing thumb, and think what you can do with it. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You can do the most difficult tasks, and you can do the most delicate tasks. You can even have very sensitive feelings of things. Just think of what that little thumb is.

You might be a little finger or you might be a thumb. You might be a hand. You might be an eye or an ear. But you can never say, "Because I am not an eye, I am therefore not part of the body." That was a mistake that Paul had to correct. Every member is vitally important. You may sometime get up here on testimony Sunday and think, I know I am not very important. You should stop right then. Stop full stop! If you read I Corinthians 12 you can never say that again. Every member is equally important, and the weakest of all members it says is important. This is the secret of the body.

The last thing on the body I want to point out is this: brothers and sisters, there is a comprehensive whole between I Corinthians 12, I Corinthians 13, and I Corinthians 14. They should be read together. I Corinthians 12, in my explanation, is the body explained. When you read it you understand how all the members are *the* Christ, and it is not the focus on the church. Every member is important, and there are diversities of gifts and diversities of function, but yet we are all still one body. How wonderful that is!

I Corinthians 14 is the body of Christ expressed. And when we talk about the fellowship meetings, that is what I Corinthians 14 is all about. When you come together, let each one have a song, have a word, have a prophecy. This is what it is. But there is a very important chapter in between. Chapter 13 is an absolutely important chapter. And you should never read 12 and 14 by itself. You should always reread 13 because there is a secret ingredient. If it is lacking then the body will never be fully what God meant it to be. And that secret ingredient is love. Now before you get all syrupy and sentimental, it is not talking about that kind of love. It is talking about divine love, agape love being in your midst. It never once has any other word rendering in it. Unless there is agape love, God's love, divine love in your midst, the body of Christ will never be fully manifest as to its calling. I think often of that special ingredient. How we need that special ingredient. How it needs to flow through the members of the body one to another as we are members one of another. How that needs to be the cement that holds us together, the divine glue that holds us together.

I think of the story about John Fawcett. He was in England in a little country church in North England, and he was destined to become the successor of the ill Doctor Dill. He was hand-picked to be his replacement. How great that was! You would think that a preacher leaving a little country place and going to England to be at the heart of God's work would be elated. How could he turn it down? But as he and dear Mary packed up their bags, loaded and ready to go, those poor saints came to him with their broken hearts. Poor Mary wept and said, "We cannot leave these people." And John thankfully heard the spiritual sensitivity of his wife, and they wrote a letter and turned down this grand opportunity. That night they wrote the hymn, "Blest Be The Tie That Binds our hearts in Christian love." This is talking about fellowship. "Fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above." You would never know who John Fawcett was except we have that wonderful hymn. He understood the essential ingredient, and he understood without that

essential ingredient the body would never be what it was intended to be. That is the story of John Fawcett.

One thing I am concerned about when we talk about the body is that we have a concept of the body, but we do not have a true consciousness of the body. That is the difference between fellowship and understanding. We can talk about the body, we can tell all the verses on it, we can teach about the body, we can wax eloquent with brothers and sisters here and other places and say, "This is what the body is." But unless you have real body consciousness, and I am not talking about thinking you are too fat, that kind of body consciousness. What I am talking about is a spiritual consciousness of this grand body of Christ and how we cannot live without it. We will not live without it, and God never intended us to live without it. And when He thought of His Son, it was the first most gift. That is the body of Christ.

The Building

You know, the body is marvelous enough; it would certainly be enough. However, God had other thoughts in mind concerning His Son. We read the verse in I Corinthians 3:9: "For we are God's fellow-workmen; God's husbandry, God's building." Isn't that marvelous? We are God's building. Brothers and sisters, He thought of a home for His Son. You remember when the Lord Jesus gave that powerful Sermon on the Mount that is recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7. And right after that it is recorded in chapter 8:20 that a scribe came to the Lord Jesus, and he said, "I will follow You everywhere." And the Lord looked at him and said, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Brothers and sisters, how He longed for a home! You remember the story later in the gospels of that well-spring of a home He found in Bethany when He went to be with Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Bethany was His temporary home, but this is the glory of corporate fellowship. We are that permanent dwelling place of God. How wonderful that is! We are that permanent, that eternal dwelling place of God.

Ephesians 2:19-22: "So then ye are no longer strangers and foreigners, but ye are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

How wonderful that is—God's home! has it dawned on you? When you think of the privilege of fellowship, has it dawned on you that all of those instances in the Old Testament when He was dealing with buildings, whether it was the Tabernacle or whether it was the more glorious Temple of Solomon or whether it was the recovered temple in Ezra and Nehemiah, Haggai and Habakkuk, or whether it was the beautified temple in Herod's day when the Lord came. Have you ever imagined? All those were just placeholders to explain to you as the people of God this most grand thing you have been called to in corporate fellowship. He says emphatically we are made a habitation for God in the Spirit. How wonderful that is!

Some people say, "Well, you know a habitation for God ..." This is the place God dwells. I remember reading recently that the ultrarich in America have an average of nine homes. I cannot

imagine. I suppose you could have someone clean the bathrooms if you could have nine homes. Another thing it said, "They never visit some of them." They may occasionally visit some, and one of them you live in. Think of it. God has chosen this one home, His eternal dwelling place. We are the temple of God. I think that is amazing, and if I am not getting through, forgive me.

Two things strike me when I think of this aspect of corporate fellowship. A God is so vast, nothing can contain Him. You remember when Solomon dedicated the temple in II Chronicles 6:1-2, "Then said Solomon: Jehovah said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. But I have built a house of habitation for thee, even a settled place for thee to abide in for ever."

But then he immediately realized in that same prayer and thought he said in verse 6:18: "But will God indeed dwell with humans on the earth? Behold, the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" That is the marvel of corporate fellowship.

Yes, the answer to Solomon's great puzzle was that God will indeed dwell among man, and He will make man His eternal habitation, that home that He has always wanted for His Son, that home the Lord longed for in His thirty-three-and-a-half-year journey, that home in the Spirit to where His Son is completely at rest.

I think the second thing is that from the beginning God has been looking for that place in which to dwell, even with Moses. you remember when the children of Israel came out of bondage in Egypt, the first thing God had to say was very striking and very helpful for us to understand. He said to them in Exodus 25:8, "Have them build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell with them." It was His clear intention from the beginning. May the Lord really help us to see it. He never gave up on it. Israel failed and turned away from Him, but He came back to that idolatrous nation. You would have thought He would have given up, but He never gave up.

In Ezra 1:1-2: He raised up Cyrus, King of Persia, a Gentile king, who said, "The Lord has given me everything, and He has charged me." That was his emphasis. "He has charged me to build Him a temple in Jerusalem." Even though Israel had completely failed, God never gave up on this thought for His Son. He never gave up. And even at the end in Malachi Israel had no spiritual sensitivity whatsoever, and God said, "You have grieved me." And they said, "Well, when did we do that? Where did we do that?" He said those words, He uttered those words because He never gave up. He said, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you," saith the Lord. In that returning His eternal home would be the Lord's.

Now on this matter of the building let me mention just a few points. It would be inappropriate if I didn't.

In God's present work, what is God doing in corporate fellowship? Ephesians 2:22 we read that we are being built up together, a dwelling for God in the Spirit. We are not the builder; He is the builder. He is building us up together, and the one thing that I have learned in my career is that there are three necessary ingredients for a building to be built. I may not have learned too much about engineering, but I have learned these three things. The first thing is mobilization. If you do not have mobilization you can never build a building. The second thing is that you have got to have the right material. If you do not have the right material you cannot build a building.

And the third thing is you have to have manpower. If you do not have manpower, the building will never be built. Those three things; it is that simple. All these years, almost fifty years, this is all I have learned.

Think of mobilization. If you are not on site, you can never build a building You have to be on site. You know we always ask people like Philip when they try to slip in one of those early pay requests, are you mobilized? Because their first line is mobilization on their pay request. If you are not mobilized on site to build, the building will never be built. It is as simple as that. Now I love zoom in the sense that it was God's provision, and I like the way Dana put it. It was His temporary provision while we were apart for Covid. It is not His permanent solution. But if you look at this analogy which is perfectly applicable to the spiritual analogy, unless we are together six times as it says in Ephesians, it will never be built.

In Nehemiah 3 there are some wonderful phrases. I remember years ago Brother Kaung spoke on Nehemiah and it arrested my heart. In Nehemiah chapter 3 is the secret. There are two phrases. One says, "Next to him." How did the wall get built? They were related to one another. They could not get away from one another, and I am sure they aggravated one another more than a few times. But so and so was next to him, and she was next to him, and the rich were there, and the poor were there, and the children were there, and the grown-ups were there. The whole secret was captured in this phrase by the Holy Spirit—next to him.

As you read on in that chapter, there is another phrase which is absolutely important if you are going to understand how God's house is going to be built. It is the phrase, "after him." So and so was after him, and so and so was after him building the gate. And because those two things were real in their midst, this little weak harassed remnant was able to build up the Testimony of God in just fifty-two days. Now if you go to Philip and say, "Philip, I would have you build me a wall all around Jerusalem. How long do you think it will take?" He would think and finally say, "About three years." Fifty-two days! What a miracle! When we are next to one another, when we cannot live without one another, when we are after one another, when we are together, God can do great things.

You have to have the right material, and in I Peter 2: 5 it tells us about the right material. It says, "You are living stones, you are the material." Now I do not know if you knew that, but you are the material. All the time in our spec books we tell them what the acceptable materials are, and we do not accept anything that is not the acceptable material. For the house of God to be built, there must be the appropriate material, and the appropriate material is living stones being built up into a holy temple to the Lord. It says, "If living stones are absent, there is no building. There is no house, and God's heart for His Son would never be realized.

Then there is the manpower. Chapter 2:5 of I Peter says, "You are being built up a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ." That is the manpower. You can say, "Mr. Superintendent, build us this thing." And it will never get built regardless of his ability. You have to have skilled labor and manpower, and the skilled labor and manpower that God has in mind is the priesthood of all believers. If half of them do not show up on Monday because the weekend was too tough on them, you will never get the place built. You absolutely have to be on

site. You have to be part of that living building material, living stones, and you have to have that right manpower which are priests.

We owe a great debt to the old Brethren teachers that understood and recovered once for all concerning the house of God this great thought of corporate fellowship, the priesthood of all believers. I will never forget that time Bobby said in a meeting when we were going through a crisis, a huge crisis, and Bobby said the one thing that caught me, the one thing that held me was the priesthood of all believers. Now are you a priest? Are you a priest in the house of God? The second major question: are you functioning as a priest?

The Bride

Let's at least mention the bride. We would be wrong if we didn't. The bride is the closest relationship, and the building is the most intense fellowship. But the bride is the most intimate fellowship. When Ephesians was written by Paul, the whole thing was about this divine marriage. Now I know some people digress at the end and get into the practical part, and they are given all these instructions on what we are to do as husbands and wives. That is there; the practical is always part of the spiritual. If you are not practical, you can never be spiritual. Nevertheless, that is not what Paul had in his heart.

In Genesis 5:31-32 Paul went back to that moment in Genesis 2:24 when he thought about Adam, "And for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh." Then he said a remarkable thing, "I speak of Christ and the assembly." There are certainly things we need to do in our marriage for them to be Godly, but do not ever lose focus of this grand plan of corporate fellowship which was a bride for His Son. We cannot help to look at it this way. When God thought, "What is the thing that I can give My Son that means the most?" It was an eternal companion, and that is why Genesis was written. That is why Ephesians was written, that is why Revelation was written with the emphasis on the bride. I hope you all see this.

Now we know that the Old Testament begins with marriage, and we know the New Testament ends with marriage. We have often talked about that. But the Bible is about marriage through and through. You remember the prophecies in Isaiah. He said in Isaiah 54:5: "Jehovah is thy husband." That was the message to this people that were under judgment.

Isaiah 62:3-5: "And thou shalt be a crown of beauty in the hand of Jehovah, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed, Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed, Desolate: but thou shalt be called, My delight is in her, and thy land, Married; for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married."

That word married in the King James Version is translated "Beulah." It is the only place in the whole Bible where the word Beulah is in the English Version, but married means Beulah. I think we often sing those old hymns about going to Beulah Land. We do not know what we are singing. We think, if we could only cross the river and be in Beulah Land. That is what we are thinking. Beulah Land is not heaven; it is to be the bride of His Son. That is what Beulah Land is. It is a married land, an eternal companion. It is to be the one in whom all of His intimacies, all of His sharing, all of His fullness goes throughout eternity. That is what Beulah means.

When we come to the end, we think of Revelation 19:7: "Let us rejoice and exalt, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready."

This is the beginning of the thousand-year kingdom. The whole emphasis at the end is on the wife being ready? Is this bride prepared? And then when you turn to Revelation 21:1-2 after the millennial kingdom, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea exists no more. And I saw the holy city new Jerusalem, coming down as a bride prepared for her husband."

How wonderful! God finally has what He wants for His Son. It is the eternal plan for His Son. Have you ever thought that you are a part of that? We have so minimized marriage in this present culture. We need to understand how important marriage is and truly understand what marriage is in the heart of God. It was the highest thing; it was the holiest thing. It was the most important gift He could share with His Son. It was Beulah Land.

I just hope you understand something of the burden. This is corporate fellowship. We are called to be His body, to express all He is for all eternity. That is pretty magnificent. We are called to be His building; He has chosen no other home. He has illustrated with several homes, but the one eternal dwelling place and home is this building of God. And finally, we are called to be His bride. There cannot be a higher privilege than that, and may you newly married ones think about that. I know you are pretty excited, but God is even more excited about His thought for His Son. It will be His eternal companion. He will not withhold anything from that eternal companion, and He will share everything with that eternal companion. This is corporate fellowship.

Father, for what we cannot communicate, forgive us. But we are asking the Holy Spirit to so work in our spirit that in the days ahead we will understand this vast scope of corporate fellowship. Lord, You could have not done more. You could not have wanted more for us. Though we live in this current mess of time, we look beyond this mess and we consider what we are and what we will be, and because of this we say, "You have lavished upon us all of the grace of God, unimaginable grace, unending grace, endless mercies that are beyond us even comprehending, but nevertheless they are altogether true. We are so thankful You have chosen us for this special corporate fellowship. Amen.