

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, September 4, 2022

They That Feared the Lord Spake Often One to Another

Malachi 3:16,17 “16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

These verses are often on my mind, and spur me toward my duty to “speak” with my co-elect. This duty to speak (communicate, commune, fellowship) is in the DNA of the body of Christ. This is not about coffee and chit chat with your buddy; it’s not about calendars and family activities. This duty is communion in the spirit, driven by our mutual fear of God. It is a duty that is critical for each of us, and yet we each struggle with it in our flesh. If you don’t think that you struggle with this, then I submit that you have a view of yourself that is inaccurate at best, and supremely arrogant and self-righteous at worst. The fact that the people of God are provoked to this communion throughout the entire Bible is proof of its importance, and of the very real struggle in our flesh. As such, while we look into this topic today, please work to keep your heart focused on examining your own duty, struggles, and behavior, rather than diverting your mind to what you perceive to be the failings of others. This is work for each of us to do in faith as pleasing to God and not to men. We will consider this topic under the following headings:

What drives our communion?

What is the purpose and nature of this communion?

What gets in the way of spiritual communion?

What drives our communion?

Clearly the driver of our communion is our mutual faith and fear of God. There is no other meaningful commonality in this context. This fear is a reverential fear of God that is born of faith. This fear arises in hearts that are shamefully aware of our sins against our Creator and King, knowing the debt we owe and can never pay. Yet, this fear is not servile, despairing, or consuming, because God has loved us, had mercy upon us, redeemed us, and caused us to love him. Faith-driven Fear of God and love of God are inseparable. Therefore, this fear causes us to desire to please Him, and avoid offending Him.

Consider the terrifying context of our text in Malachi chapter 3. This chapter is all about the second coming of Christ, and the righteous judgment that He will render at that hour, particularly amongst the Jews.

Malachi 3:

"1 ¶ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. 2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: 3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. 4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. 5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. 6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. 7 ¶ Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? 8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts. 13 ¶ Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? 14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? 15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. 16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. 18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

- In the context of this passage, the "speaking often" is clearly driven from the mutual fear of the Lord; it is also driven toward maintaining holiness – of thought, word, and deed - in the midst of a godless generation. My friends, the Lord is at hand! What manner of people ought we to be? We need all the spiritual help that God has graciously provided! When we are tempted, afflicted, confused, etc., we should be helping each other to think upon and dwell upon the name(s) of God, rather than turning to the wisdom of our flesh. Our God has many names to describe His many attributes, and each one is instructive and helpful when applied to the right situation.

When we are in distress, our ability to do that for ourselves is compromised, so we ought to be leaning upon our friends of faith to help us to get our spirit focused on the promises of God. The world around us doesn't do that. They help each other to solve things in their flesh. As we just read, they don't want to walk mournfully; they don't want to be constrained. They will reap destruction. Consider this passage from Isaiah that contains many of the same elements:

- ***Isaiah 50:10,11*** “*10 ¶ Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. 11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.*”
- A book of remembrance was written. The Lord God Omnipotent has bent down His ear and heard the cries of His servants. He takes particular notice of the exercises that His little ones go through as they are tried and purified. It is apparently of special note that His sheep minister to one another while we make this pilgrimage.
 - ***Matthew 18:20*** “*20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*”
 - ***1Peter 1:6-9*** “*6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*”
- This “book of remembrance” puts me in mind of Hebrews 11, where the Holy Spirit recounts the actions of our spiritual forefathers. In such a record, our sins will not be mentioned, and even what we did in weakness, because it was produced by faith, will be counted for righteousness. Our feeble, sin-encumbered efforts are made righteous by Christ. This is no license to be presumptive; it is great comfort to the weary soul that strives against sin, and yet knows that when we go to do good, evil is always with us.
- This is wonderful encouragement as Satan's attempt is to overwhelm us with the sin around us, and within us, such that we forsake our profession of Christ as a vain and hopeless thing. Here we have reassurance that it is not a vain thing. The God of all Creation – the Great King – will take note, and will reward His humble servants. Even as He is bringing wrath and judgment to the entire world, he will carefully separate out His precious jewels.
- If we want the “jewels” part of this passage to apply to us, then shouldn't we be laboring to ensure that we are indeed speaking often to one another in the fear of the Lord?

What is the purpose and nature of this communion?

- Our hearts are prone to wander; we are forgetful, and we have war between the spirit and flesh within us. Simply put, the speaking and communing of the saints is designed by God as a means to chasten us away from the deeds of the flesh, and to provoke us to the fruits of the Spirit. We can feel like we are drowning in the constant waves of wickedness, distress and sorrow that crash down upon us; but we are brought to stand upon firm ground when our hearts are renewed to the truth and hope in Christ.
- Consider these words about communing in the Spirit:
 - ***1Corinthians 2:12-16*** “*12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*”
 - The only place in this entire world where we can commune in the Spirit is with our co-elect. How foolish are we when we shy away from this wonderful, and readily available help, that the Lord has provided? Consider how feverishly the world works to encourage each other in their path of wickedness. Should we not be more dedicated to encouraging one another in following after Christ?
- This is help that each of us owes to the body. This is help that each of us must receive from the body. No exceptions in either direction. This work must begin with a spirit of love toward each and every member of the body. You can’t love most of the brethren, but harbor malice toward one. This isn’t a percentage game. It’s back to the fact that our behavior is driven by our mutual fear and love of God, and by extension our mutual love of God’s people. This is a defining characteristic of the sheep:
 - ***John 13:35*** “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”
 - If we don’t begin with this spirit of love, with a sincere desire to edify our co-elect, then we can have no expectation that God will bless our efforts to help each other. Feigned love is not love at all.
- When the love of the brethren is present and thriving, there is great joy in the body despite whatever afflictions and trials are resting upon us.
 - ***Psalms 133:1*** “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*”

- ***Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*** “9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? 12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”
- Our Lord appointed us to be members of the body of Christ, and He appointed the New Testament Church – the Assembly of the saints - to be the visible manifestation of that body.
 - ***1Corinthians 12:12-26*** “12 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. 13 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. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 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? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 20 But now are they many members, yet but one body. 21 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. 22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: 25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the **same care one for another.** 26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”
- Christ did not leave us to be some loose coalition of free agents who are bound to submit to nothing but the whims of our own self-righteous hearts. We are not some philosopher's guild of great thinkers, in pursuit of our own theories. We are humble servants who live in the fear of God, and submit ourselves to one another, even though our flesh largely despises the yoke. We are weak, foolish, sinful men and women, but we are mighty through Christ, and have been wonderfully furnished with all things necessary for life and godliness.
 - ***1Corinthians 1:26-31*** “26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base

things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

- Speaking often one to another in the fear of God is a part of our birthright in the earth, as those who belong to the household of faith. This “speaking often” is no different than what Christ commanded directly in the Great Commission:
 - ***Matthew 28:18-20*** “18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”
 - This is the work of the church: Preach to the world; baptize those that are called out of darkness and make a good profession; assemble yourselves together, and spend your days in humble communion teaching all that the Lord has commanded.
 - This is not theoretical work. This is not work that is only left to the formal teaching of elders in the pulpit. This is work for every servant of God to participate in every day of their lives. Remember the backdrop of this communion: we are huddled together in the fear of God, taking refuge, while surrounded by palpable darkness, howling wolves, and hissing serpents. All the while, Satan coaxes our flesh, tempting us to believe that this whole thing is vain and unnecessary because we’re actually strong and wise, and surrounded by rainbows and unicorns. “Ye shall not surely die.”
- Earlier I used “communicate”, “commune”, and “fellowship” as synonymous with our duty to “speak” often to one another. There are many verses that help to make that connection, but I think that the following passage is sufficient to illustrate the point:
 - ***Hebrews 13:14-17*** “14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. 15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. 17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”
 - The word “communicate” here certainly includes speaking to one another, but it is a much broader concept. That same Greek word is variously translated as: fellowship, communion, communicate, distribution, contribution. We must consider each other, know each other’s frames, know each other’s needs, and minister to those needs. Does a person have practical needs? Look to cheerfully provide them. Does a person tend to be fretful? Encourage their spirit, and

edify them in faith. Is a person headed toward danger? Humbly provoke them, and help them to see what danger lies ahead. Know each other, watch for each other, and therefore communicate to each other's needs as appropriate, and with intention. Provide that help according to the gifts God has given you; according the experience wherein He has exercised your senses by reason of use; according to the comfort wherein He has comforted you.

- It is a sacrifice. Therefore, by definition, that means that it is going to be chafing to our flesh to continually offer that sacrifice. We owe it, and ought to give it willingly, cheerfully, and with our strength.
- Notice these additional elements in this passage: the fear of God; trouble and distress in our worldly pilgrimage; peace, rest, and reward in the life to come; submission to one another, and obedience despite the desires of your flesh. You see those same elements in our primary text for today, and in several other places that I have referenced thus far. If you search the scriptures you will find those same elements present any time we are provoked to our duty to commune with our co-elect.
- In addition, consider each of the following words as tactical expressions of our duty to "speak" to one another, as those that fear God: sing, exhort, edify, instruct, train, nurture, consider, provoke, correct, rebuke, admonish, etc. This is the work of maintaining the discipline of Christ within the church. (Sermons: 11/19/17, 2/11/18, 4/29/18, 6/24/18) This work will never end as long as we are in this sinful flesh; we must ask the Lord to renew us to that work each day; we cannot be weary in it.

What gets in the way of spiritual communion?

The rest of these words are my attempt to add some practical application to this weighty concept.

- First, I want to acknowledge the fact that we cannot all have the same level of relationship with every other person in the body. It is literally impossible to spend the same amount of time focused on knowing and talking to every individual. That reality isn't problematic, because that's the nature of a body. The shoulder is directly connected to the arm, but it's not directly connected to the ankle. There has to be healthy blood flow coursing throughout the body, but we don't each have the same tactical relationship with every other part. Our focus ought to be ensuring that we have a relationship with every person that enables comfortable conversation when and where it is appropriate; the focus is not on a quota of talking time.
 - Again, we must start with the right spirit, having the same love toward every member. If I start to get to a place where I am struggling toward a person, then 1) I need to get to the Lord to help my spirit, and 2) I need to get about the business of renewing my relationship with that person.

- If you see a gap, where it looks to you like a person is isolated, then you should seek to fill that gap, or provoke someone to fill it who is more naturally connected. This is part of considering one another, so that we can effectively provoke to love and good works.
- If you feel like you are isolated, then you should work to get connected; don't spend your time feeling sorry for yourself. This burden rests upon you first. Do not spend your time critically analyzing others. That is fleshly behavior that is driven by pride, and has nothing to do with communing in the spirit.
- Accommodate yourself to others:
 - ***Proverbs 18:24*** “*A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*”
 - Figure out how best to spend time with people based upon their frame, not just your own. The method we use to spend time together is just a vehicle, it is not righteous in itself; it is not the definition of communion. We have to work through our fleshly preferences and distresses so that we are communing in the spirit.
 - If we won't press through our own distresses and discomforts, then we miss the benefit of communion - for ourselves, for our households, and for each other. Fathers and mothers that avoid this duty cut off the blood flow to their houses, and there are real consequences to that isolation. It's like a tourniquet on the body. It leaves you unsharpened, untested, unprepared, and therefore coming up with our own standards - lighting up your own sparks.
- If most of your relationship time is spent on frivolous talk and activity, then you need to recalibrate. You are drifting into sloth and worldliness. You are not being sharpened, and you are not contributing to the health of the body.
- Develop strong relationships with your peers (by role, and experience). These relationships certainly contain vain talk and activity, but that cannot be the basis of the relationship. Be in alignment with your peers, and provoke each other – challenge each other - to engage in good work that is fitting to your situation. Look to model for those who would be in your role. (Titus 2)
- Develop strong relationships with those who have more experience in your lane. Iron sharpens iron. If this isn't at least an element of those that you speak to frequently, then you are setting yourself up for trouble; this puts you at risk of having an amen corner, rather than good counselors.
- Develop strong relationships with the elders, and be in alignment with them. They are supposed to keep the oversight of the body. Ensure that you are not subverting them by quietly teaching behavior contrary to their example and instruction.
 - ***1 Thessalonians 5:11-15*** “*11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and*

admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the febleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."

- The fear of man:
 - **Proverbs 29:25** "*25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.*"
 - The fear of man is running the show if I avoid talking to someone because I don't know how I will be received, or because I am afraid of blowback from them.
 - This becomes even worse when I know I need to address a matter with someone, but because I'm worried about how that discussion will be received, I instead talk about it to several other people instead of talking to them. This is destructive to the body.
 - The fear of man is running the show if I give counsel to someone based upon what I know they want to hear, rather than what I know to be good, safe, hearty, spiritual counsel. If I'm trying to protect my status with you, then it is the fear of man operating in my heart, not the fear of God.
 - The fear of man is running the show if I treat every bit of constructive criticism from my loved ones as a frontal assault wherein my loved ones are seeking to undo me.
 - The remedy is that we have to trust the Lord, and lean into our mutual fear and love of God. The fear of God must trump the fear of man. Seek God earnestly for a proper spirit, and then push past your flesh and engage whole-heartedly with your loved ones. Talk peaceably and earnestly with each other. Sober is the order of the day: have true consideration of how we impact each other, and therefore communicate with careful intention.
 - Do you need to have a difficult conversation with someone? First spend time seeking the Lord to give you a right spirit; ask Him to take your vile flesh out of the equation so that you can bring effective help to your loved one.
 - Is someone addressing you about a matter? Recognize that they are doing a difficult thing and look past any fault in their presentation. Talk to each other. Listen to each other. Freely confess your faults to each other. This is the nature of the body of Christ. If you don't want to receive correction, then you are in the wrong place.
 - **1John 4:18** "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*"
 - When we spend our time in fear of each other, we are not loving each other. Our duty then is to do everything that we can to avoid provoking fleshly fears in each other, and to avoid fleshly reactions toward each other.

- Other barriers:

- My relationship with person x is defined / heavily influenced by the words of person y.
- I don't want to look stupid.
- I feel inept and unequal to the task.
- I assume that someone has nothing of value to contribute to me.
- I'm easily offended, and am quick to assign bad motivation to every action.
- I deal with someone strictly from the viewpoint of some deficiency that I perceive in them, rather than working to build a hearty relationship.
- I hold malice in my heart over past offenses.
- I protect my time and visibility, so that no one can look too closely at my walk.
- I'm too busy.

Hebrews 3:12-15 “12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; 15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.”

I love you all. Amen.