

Wolf Lake/ Menahga Meeting 26 March 2021

Opening song

Dan Parks [6:15 - 11:10] Opening prayer and read 1 Peter 5.

Mark Skoog [10:30, not 11:20]: At this time I will call the meeting to order. ... [talk about getting Neil W and Ron Honga joined by Zoom] ... To begin, I would like to say Welcome to each and everyone of you. Pat [Lake] are you fine with recording this? We will give you a copy, also. It is just as we did in Wolf Lake. We will record this meeting. I will get Pat a recording of it. Also, there is coffee and lunch. Just help yourself at any time during the meeting. Also, when we have a zoom connection, I would ask that you speak into a mic. We have three different microphones. In the beginning, we were happy to be here tonight. We have hoped to have a meeting for a long time. We are thankful that we are now here. We can discuss these issues face to face. Once we scheduled the meeting, we visited with Pat. We received a letter from Wolf Lake. We sent the letter back to you via Pat. I do not have an agenda. We will not speak on any particular issue. But be open and free. We can speak about any and all of these issues that come before us. We pray that God will lead and guide our meeting. So, at this time I will open the floor. [13:10]

Leslie Ylitalo [13:15]: I called Mark [Skoog] this morning ... [Mark mentions to speak into the mic] ... [he asked about his attendance] I asked [Mark] if it would be okay if I would come here because of the circumstances. I believe that he is okay with it. Are the rest of you okay with it? If any of you feel different about it, I will gladly leave.

Mark Skoog [14:10]: It is a meeting for the board and speakers of Wolf Lake and Menahga. You explain the situation. I said, welcome. [pause]. Pat, did you share our letter with your board?

Pat: Yes.

Mark Skoog [15:00]: Who wants to begin? [pause] [15:30] Neil and Ron, feel free to participate in the meeting. [pause] [16:15] We can start with the very first bullet point that we sent to Wolf Lake. 1. "In the last 5 Years, there have been numerous meetings of various kinds with participants around North America in Zion. We believe that the Holy Spirit has with love spoken, guided and taught at those meetings on the basis of and in accordance with God's word. We have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. We understand that those of you who have been present at these meetings believe otherwise. Jesus said, a sheep knows his voice; a stranger they will not follow. [John 10] We are deeply concerned. We would like to discuss this and the reason for it." [pause] [17:13] I will read the other [bullet points], also. We can bounce around with them or discuss anything else. 2. "We would like to know your current position on the forgiveness question. It is a question that members of your board members raised in 2011. It came up again in 2015. You took a different position than ours, the LLC and a number of others at [various] meetings. To the best of our knowledge, the board members have never

acknowledged a change in their position or yours. We would like to clarify that issue.” 3. Members of your board have stated that members of the LLC, and we as well, have a different and a wrong understanding of justification. The Skoog / Raisanen letter that you fully endorsed would suggest the same. We would like to clarify this issue as well.” 4.”We have been concerned about the approach that members of your board have taken in several letters in recent years. We would like to talk about this, also.” These and any other issues, as I said, we are more than happy to discuss. There are several issues here that we could address and visit about. [18:34] Feel free.

Bruce Johnson [18:43]: What was the different position on forgiveness? It is the second bullet point.

Mark Skoog [18:58]: Is there EVER a time when you would not forgive?

Bruce Johnson [19:12]: I have asked in meetings with the committee. It is my understanding when I read, Christ's instruction is always to forgive. I know that Samuel and Saul, Esau and Jacob, have been talked about. I have asked the question. I have heard various interpretations of it. Put that aside, [it was] God withholding a blessing or his kingship. Where in the Bible has it instructed a believer to withhold forgiveness? I believe that the original question was not even this. Was the withholding of forgiveness from the children of God during the 1980s wrong or right? Somehow the question got turned into “Is there ever a time?” I believe that the Bible does not support that there would ever be a time. I believe that God guides even in this. It is God's choice. Our intention would be to always forgive, as a believer. I keep it simple. I don't want to get hung up on it. I believe that the original question was not even this. Was the withholding of forgiveness from the children of God during the 1980s wrong or right? Nick [Ylitalo], is it true that you asked this question in a joint Bible class here in Menahga?

Nick Ylitalo [21:28]: The first time that I ever heard this idea that there would never ever be a time was at a Bible class that Darwin had kept here in 2011. Prior to that, my understanding was this. God's kingdom is a kingdom of forgiveness. It is our desire to preach the gospel. Yet, God through his Spirit at times has -- I was not present in the 1980s, so I can't say one way or another on that -- but I have believed and understood that there are times when God through his Spirit has revealed to the believers for some reason or another that the mouths of the believers have been closed. My feeling on this [question] is this. As believers we would not have to predetermine when we would or when we would not [preach the gospel]. Simply trust that the spirit would lead and guide in the situation when [the gospel] would not be preached. The first time I had ever heard a believer say that there would never ever be a time was in 2011 when Darwin [kept a Bible class lesson] here. I did raise my hand at that Bible class. I shared how I understood it. The gospel at times, when the spirits so moves, can be withheld. To me [it is] a very important part of it. If it would happen, it would be done in love to reveal the condition of that individual. Maybe they are repenting on their own conditions, or who knows [what]. I do not want to get into hypotheticals. It is done in love. The thing that comes to my mind when you discuss the Bible. It is not to give that kind of permission. It is the office of the keys. Jesus breathed on them and gave them the Holy Ghost. He said, whosoever sins you remit, they are

remitted onto them. Whoever ever sins you retain, they are retained. The keys -- in this forgiveness discussion. It is such that God through his spirit has given us this power that we can free another person from their sin. And also, when in love it is needed, [we can] refrain from preaching the gospel. That is my understanding of the power of the keys. I think it is important to trust that God through his spirit will guide us in situations. You don't need to wonder whether I should or should not. We can open our mouths with that understanding that God certainly has the power to close our mouth, if he so wills.

Bruce Johnson [25:20]: My understanding is this. My intent would be to always forgive. In my mind I would never look for a time to judge someone -- do I withhold or not? I agree with you on this point. It is God's choice. I believe that there were errors made in the 1980s on withholding. That was the original question. Was the withholding [of forgiveness] in the 1980's wrong or right? I lived in the 1980s. I marched to the front of the church. I have seen where [the gospel] has been withheld. I don't believe that it was right. None of it was. That is just from me.

Nick Ylitalo [26:10]: In 2011, that was the topic at the MBMAC meeting. I was at that meeting. Darwin and a couple of others shared their understanding. There was a presentation kept by Keith [Waaraniemi]. He gave a presentation on the topic. It was ultimately acknowledged there that errors were made and the gospel was wrongly withheld at times. Even though mistakes can be made, they will be made again. We are faulty sinners in God's Kingdom who are doing the work. Errors can happen. I don't think that changes the power of the Holy Spirit as we move forward.

Pat Lake [27:04] When I look at that question, the position of the board is the same as it has always been. But to answer the question about the forgiveness issue, I will read to you from Matthew chapter 6 verses 14 and 15. These are Jesus's words. "If you forgive men their trespasses, the heavenly father will forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, Neither will your father forgive your trespasses." Then from the 7th chapter in the second verse. These are still Jesus's words. "For with what judgment ye judge, you shall be judged. And for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Nick Ylitalo [27:57]: What is your understanding of the keys?

Pat Lake [28:05]: I could explain that but I don't think that is the topic here. The topic is about forgiveness. That is what the question is.

Nick: The keys are [about] forgiveness

Pat [28:24]: I explained ... that is what the forgiveness issue is to me. I just read it. I can read it again, if we need to. [Nick says something in the background]. "What is your current position on the forgiveness question?" That is my [answer to Menahga's question].

Jon Bloomquist [28:59]: The reason we brought the question up is stated in the letter. What the original question was is probably not so important. It was what the question became. It is

what was discussed at multiple meetings. At one of those meetings, it was requested by the Wolf Lake board in southern Minnesota. It was perhaps in March of 2016 [April 8]. The Menahga board, other than Steve [Haataja] and I, were not there at your board's request. Some of you who are now on the Wolf Lake board were not a part of those earlier meetings and discussions. At that meeting, it was discussed forward and backwards for a long time. It was also discussed at a speaker's meeting a few months later [the following weekend]. Darwin [and Phil] were there. I am sure that Phil is familiar with those discussions. Bruce is certainly familiar with the discussions in Minneapolis. Joe [Wuollet] was there, and maybe that is it from your current board. The understanding that those meetings were consistent with what Luther has said for example about Esau and Saul and Samuel. You can find it explained in sermons and writings, otherwise in our Christianity. Most recently with regard to Esau, Keijo Nissila writes about that in his book [on Hebrews]. The understanding is that there are situations where we as believers cannot preach the gospel to somebody who asked. Some of the confusion is also from the fact some equate the word to 'ask' with 'repent'. They are not the same thing. It is certainly the case that we as human beings cannot see into another person's heart. Neither is right or proper to try and measure the depth of another person's penitence. It is openly acknowledged, as it was at that meeting in 2011, that there were errors made in those [caretaking] meetings in the 1980s, where that happened. But we do not have to see into somebody's heart if their words already reveal, for example, that they are not penitent. This was the case with Saul. That is a different question. That is why we have the understanding that we do. Sounds like some of you still deny that. You feel that there is never a case when you cannot preach the gospel. There is never a case when you would not preach the gospel when someone is penitent. If it is a little bit murky we would certainly want to err on the side of preaching the gospel. But if there is clear evidence in someone's words or actions that they are not repenting or turning away from the issue in question, that is not to try to dig into somebody's heart. It is what they are confessing themselves to. That wasn't the case with Saul, for example, and Esau. I think it is a mistake if you equate 'ask' with 'repent'. That seems to be, at least to me, the fundamental problem. [someone asks, what?] In your understanding, if you equate the word 'ask' with 'repent' -- they are not the same thing. I think, as Nick expressed, that ought to always be the case. We want to forgive. The analogy that I've used on some occasions. If you were walking down the road and you saw your neighbor's dog put its foot in a trap. You went over there and just petted and patted it. You just comforted the dog. Oh, it put its foot in the trap. That is in essence what we are doing, or something like that, if we preach the gospel to someone who has not recognized or acknowledged their sin. They remain in its grasp. That is how I understand it. Like I said, it is consistent with the understanding in meetings where we have discussed it [at speaker's camp]. It is consistent with Luther's writings and the confessional writings. The last time we met in May of 2019, we discussed this issue. Roger, who is not here, in one of his speeches he used an example of when one would not preach the gospel. I was so surprised by that. So, I asked Roger if I heard him correctly. He had never previously acknowledged that. At our meeting at Brainerd, he insisted that [unless] someone hit him with a box of rocks, he would always preach the gospel. That is why it is a question for us. [37:50]

Bruce [37:00]: Did you ever talk to Roger to clarify it?

Jon [37:05]: Roger and I talked about it after that meeting in May.

Bruce [37:10]: If you have been holding this in -- Have you been holding it in?

Jon [37:15]: I haven't been holding it in. We discussed it at the meeting in Brainerd. That is what I am saying. That is why it is a question for us. You guys have never accepted the understanding, as far as I know. Phil [Alajoki] accepted it at the speaker's meeting [in 2016], when we discussed it. When I visited with Darwin at the speaker's camp [afterwards]. He said, which I fully believe and understand. His only intention in bringing it up -- he would not want to see the mistakes of the 1980s repeated. None of us would like to see it repeated. You can't throw the baby out with the bathwater. If something has been wrongly used, it does not mean it cannot be used. That is why it is a question for us. If you go back, for example, to those meetings. Bruce, I think you guys were pretty adamant that LLC's and the brother's understanding was wrong. You guys stated that and pushed it very hard. It has caused a lot of confusion in our Zion. That is the perspective that I have and I see from the meetings and discussions that I have been a part of. [39:10]

Mark Skoog [39:15]: Who is next?

Joe Wuollet [39:30]: I believe the danger with what Jon just said is putting yourself in the judgment seat of God. That is God's place to judge whether someone is penitent or not. It is God's place to know the heart as to know whether or not the gospel is actually believed. After the new Awakening heresy in Finland, there was a discussion. I do not remember what year it was. When the forgiveness [issue] was discussed at the speaker's meeting, they took a stand: when a person asks for forgiveness, the person has to be forgiven. It will be revealed in its time if people have believed [minister's meeting in 1947]. It was also reminded about the use of the keys of binding. They belonged to the congregation and not to the individual. [40:47] To continue a little bit more. As I said in the Brainerd meeting, I do not deny the power of God to do whatever He wishes to do. He is Almighty and all-powerful. Neither will I deny His command. It says, you will forgive otherwise you will not be forgiven. [41:28]

Mark Skoog [41:30]: On that, too, it comes to mind. There are two keys, not just one. It is important that we remember that there are two keys.

Bruce Johnson [41:45]: In response to Jon [Bloomquist]. I have to agree with Joe [Wuollet]. I don't want to dwell on or be in that place where I start looking at someone who is asking for forgiveness whether they are penitent or not. I hope and pray that God would lead and guide me in that situation. Ultimately, he is the one who forgives. As far as the meeting in Minneapolis [April 8, 2016], you said it is your perception. I think you were referring to Roger's [Alajoki] comments at that meeting. He said that he would always forgive. What is wrong with that [statement]? He [Roger] knows that the power is not his -- or God would close his mouth. I would say that I would always forgive, so what. I don't see why we are getting so hung up on this. I agree with Joe [Wuollet]. When we start to go down that path ... Forgiveness has been

withheld even in recent years. That is why I try to keep it simple. My intent would be to always forgive, and leave the rest to God. [43:29]

Randy Hillukka [43:33]: This morning when I was driving to work, I was thinking about this meeting. I figured that the situation of the 1980s would come up. I remember it very well. I was a teenager. I remember that time of difficulties. They were very difficult years for a teenager. I don't remember much detail. I was thinking about this. Just so you are clear, Bruce. Anytime we have talked about the 1980s, there has been this recognition there were errors made in the caretaker. I believe so. I was pondering this rift that seems to be here in this room. I don't like it. Why is it there? How deep is it? I don't like it. Go away, rift. I wish that we could come to a common understanding, dear Wolf Lake members. I believe as Jon and Nick [Ylitalo] discussed forgiveness. As Jon explained, the Bible teaches where there was a situation with Saul and Esau. Forgiveness was not given. So it is. Bruce, I don't worry about that place where I could be put in some day [to] judge. I trust that God will show me through the Holy Spirit, if that is to happen. I have heard you say it twice. Your intent is to forgive 100% [of the times]. So is mine. But I cannot say that sometimes God could close my mouth. It is biblical, I believe. I forgot what else I was going to say. These matters that were brought up about the 1980s, I just want to throw it on the table. Are these questions ... Of course, these are big questions. As Jon has said, Luther had been debating doctrine. Luther agreed on 14 and 1/2 [points]. We need to agree on all of the points. The Holy Spirit guides and teaches. It teaches us doctrine. Our confession of faith is doctrine. I have heard this question -- let us talk about doctrine. How we confess our faith is based on doctrine. It is doctrine. Is it something else that keeps these things to keep rising? I have heard it in many discussions. I can go back to the discussion of the 1980s at the farmhouse. I remember discussions in the early 1990s with my mother. I remember many times the thought about people having something against the LLC. I remember a conversation that I had in the 1980s with another fellow teenager. We need to care for matters that are causing this division. We need to speak about those things and be free. If you see something [wrong] in me, please tell me. I want to get to heaven. I believe the way that I confess my faith. I am not very confident in my faith. I am confident in that way. [48:42]

Esa Vilkkama [48:53]: I think that the scriptures clearly tell us and commands us to forgive. I simply understand that I want to forgive. Beyond that, it is God's domain. God is all-powerful. I want to forgive people. Regarding Samuel and Saul, I don't think it applies here. As I understand it, God had already rejected Saul. I think that it is a different situation. It does not say that we should do it in the same way. I have been studying the SRK historical books. I have some references about this issue. There was a speaker's meeting in Finland in 1947. This was the question. Do we preach forgiveness to heretics or do they have to first clarify that they ask forgiveness for false doctrine and heresy? The matter was discussed. The conclusion was that "Forgiveness and repentance must be preached to the heretics as in general to those who are on the outside [of faith]". No, we do not need to clarify. We just preach forgiveness and time will tell if people have believed. There was also this New Awakenism, where the gospel was restricted. It was in Ari-Pekka Palola's [Seppo Lohi's?] book. According to Matti Suo and Eetu Hurula, the borders of God's kingdom were too close if they were placed along the walls. Jesus commanded to preach the gospel in all of the world. One cannot set any condition on the

gospel. Sins must be preached forgiven without any kind of questioning. One more thing. It is the topic of binding. It is a different issue. We know what the Church Law of Christ is. There are two keys. Only the congregation can bind. An individual cannot withhold forgiveness. It applies to a situation where the Church Law of Christ has been followed. In The last resort the congregation binds. I would keep these two issues separate. [52:08]

Nick Ylitalo [51:19] Just to clarify, Jesus spoke a couple of different times about the keys. In one portion he speaks about loosening and binding. He also speaks about remitting and retaining. There is another version of the scriptures out there in English. If you look up the word 'retain' it is to withhold something. This other version actually words it in this way. Whatsoever you forgive, it is forgiven in heaven. And whatsoever you do not forgive, it is not forgiven. I think about this forgiveness issue. I feel like we are 99.999% in agreement on this in that we want to forgive. It is unfortunate that it is a debate. Yet, I also feel like we cannot just leave it to rest. When there is this seemingly very small and very rare time that we are talking about, when the gospel maybe would not be preached. It has not happened in my 40 years of life. I was never in the position where I felt that I could not preach the gospel. I hope that I am never in that position. I think the reason why I cannot just ignore it, so to speak, when we speak of the power of God, is the Holy Spirit, too. For me to say that I will always forgive, to me it leaves no room for the Holy Spirit to work in me in those situations. I would always have the intent to [preach the gospel]. If we can agree that the Holy Spirit, which is God In the third person, is in his kingdom to each believer. The Holy Spirit has the power. The Holy Spirit guides our mouths. This is what it really comes down to. It is the acknowledgement of the power of the Holy Spirit. I have had this thought. If we would deny the power of the Holy Spirit, could we fall into the place -- as the Bible says -- that we have a form of godliness but we deny the power thereof. There was another portion of Scripture that talks about this, too. I don't know if it exactly applies. I have heard it talked about not laying your hands suddenly on no man, and to be a partaker of his evil deeds. I have understood that we would not want to corrupt the gospel in that situation.

Randy Hillukka [56:20]: A couple of more points regarding this. We talked about this in depth at the speaker's camp in 2016. I don't want to put words into anyone's mouth, so I won't say who I think said this. He said the same thing as Jon. We would want to err on the side of caution and forgive [Jim Frantti]. When I heard it, I said amen in my heart. As we heard, it is our desire to forgive. Jesus was asked how many times we would forgive -- up to 70 times 7. It happens many times. The Bible speaks much about forgiveness. As Believers, we want to forgive. [57:23]

Esa Vilkkama [57:28]: One more comment. I think we have to confess that none of us really understands this issue deeply. We are talking about extremely rare situations. So, dear brothers, why do we break the love over these issues? Can't we just admit that I do not have all of the answers. I don't [fully] understand these issues. This issue does not pertain to my personal salvation. We should keep the love. It is more important than to attempt to deeply analyze these issues. I don't think that any of us fully understand them. [58:32]

Phil Alajoki [58:43]: I will just read [something]. Nick [Ylitalo] mentioned that we leave room for the spirit. I will read Jesus's words in 1 John 5: "There are three that bear record in heaven -- The Father, the word, and the Holy Ghost. These three are one." Also in the Gospel of John. These again are the words of Jesus. "It is the spirit that quickeneth. The flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and life." Going back to the words of Jesus. He spoke the words that if we do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will the heavenly father forgive us. These are the words of the Holy Spirit. They are the words of Christ. The words that I speak unto you are spirit and life. [1:00:04]

Jon Bloomquist [1:00:37]: I think that Esa hit on a key point. Why do we war over this? That is exactly our question. Why? Why did your board at that time war against the understanding that was shared in those meetings? When Esa and Anne were over visiting one time, you basically made the statement. Some of us recall the 2011 meeting. We cannot say, never. It is because of the rare examples that are [existing] in God's word. We can trust that the Holy Spirit leads and guides. Your board actively rejected it in the discussions over the next several years. That is why it is a question in our mind. It seems like that is where some of you still are. Why is there contention over that? Esa, I do not agree with your understanding about Saul. God had rejected him as a king. That is not the same issue as not forgiving him, because he was not penitent. Those are two different issues. I think about binding and withholding forgiveness. They are not even the same thing. When someone is bound, as Juhani Uljas explains quite clearly in his introduction in 1979 on confession and the keys. He explains that when somebody is bound, they are removed from the care of the congregation. That is not quite the same thing. To me, that is the question. Why was there this battle and contention over this issue? In 2011 we discussed it. Now, at least, it seems like you are willing to consider it anyway, Bruce. I don't know if you were there in 2011. This warring against [us] that has gone on is what is troubling. Likewise, on the issue of justification. Some members of your board said that we have the wrong doctrine on justification. That is a very serious statement. If that is wrong, we do not have anything. It is the most central doctrine of our faith. I can say for me, I have felt like we needed to explain and defend our understanding. When there is all of this contention, then when we express concern about it, those of you have accused us of having a wrong understanding -- What is wrong with our understanding? It is very hard to understand what is going on with that. Do you think that we have a wrong understanding of justification? [1:06:03]

Bruce Johnson [1:06:04]: It is hard to understand. We have never discussed justification in our meeting. These are your perceptions, I feel. I don't think that we were fighting in those meetings. You keep on coming back and turning it into an adversarial [event]. I don't look at it in that way. In the Minneapolis meeting when Roger said that he would always forgive, he was accused of having unforgiven sins. Someone across the table [Jim Moll] could see into Roger's [Alajoki] heart. These are the things that took place in those meetings. Were you at that meeting? Steve [Haataja] was there. [Jon says that he was there. I don't remember that]. I don't like when this tone keeps going into that it is a fight. This is my perception that it is coming from you, Jon. Let us sit here and discuss this. Don't start to accuse people of this and that. That is all that I am saying. We are not going to get anywhere if we start to accuse [people] of this or being that. It is your perception. I don't look at it in that way. If you have this perception, as I brought it up at this

meeting. Go visit Phil and Darwin. Go visit these guys. I don't even know these [other] guys [here]. I know Randy. I have known him for years. I have no problems [with him]. I have confessed how I believe on this forgiveness issue. This is how I confessed it in those meetings. I agree with Nick. I don't know what this 1% is where we are off. [1:08:17] Let's just be able to discuss this. I don't have great knowledge. I am trying to confess how I believe. I don't care to have someone to start accusing me of this or that. We have to keep this discussion to where we can freely discuss it

Nick [1:08:52] You had asked about the 1%. Are you acknowledging that there could be a time and that God through the spirit could close the mouth?

Bruce [1:09:02] I said that at the beginning. I am not saying that there could be a time, or whatever. I will leave that to God. My intent would be to always forgive. I agreed with you.

Nick [1:09:11] But you would acknowledge that God through the spirit has that power if He would ...

Bruce: [1:09:15] He has the power to do anything. My intent would be to always forgive. I agreed with you. It hasn't changed. Jon made it sound like the understanding has changed. Not with me, it hasn't. If [Jon] has a problem with someone he can go and discuss it with them to find out what their understanding is. That is all I am saying.

Nick [1:09:47] Is that how all of the rest of you feel about it? The spirit would have that power?

Someone in the background [Scott Haataja?] [1:10:07]: I think that is the question -- acknowledging the power of the spirit. That is the question that needs to be ...

Milo Lake? [1:10:25] I guess I would pose the question. Would the Holy Spirit contradict the words of Christ? If the Holy Spirit is God the Father, the spirit of Jesus Christ, would it contradict the words that he instructed for us to do? As far as the retaining of sins goes -- I think the remitting is pretty clear. I think that Jesus gives a good example of retaining when he sent his disciples out to preach the message of the Kingdom. I will read a couple of verses out of Mark chapter 6, starting with verse 10. "And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city." I would think that in either case, whether we are remitting or retaining sins, we as the ambassadors of Christ are preaching the same gospel message. When sins are remitted, a person accepts the gospel. When sins are retained, they reject the gospel message. [1:12:05]

Mark Haataja [1:12:18] I would just when speaking about this matter of forgiveness, the matter of justification. They have them brought out in a spirit of mistrust. That is my perspective from the meetings that I have attended. And also in personal conversations were these matters have been brought out that somehow in the kingdom here in North America it has been taught wrong.

It is not just one man's perspective. It is not just Jon's perspective. We have already seen and experienced much division. In these matters, if we consider any one matter, I don't need to understand these matters deeply to get to heaven. But when we discuss a matter through the spirit we can say -- when someone else speaks we can say, Amen. The spirit answers. That is how I believe. If we are all of the same mind and the same spirit and we discuss a matter and we say Amen, what more is there to discuss on that matter? I don't think we can just dismiss them. And this has caused -- these matters have caused much division and strife. If we believe the same on these matters -- on this matter of forgiveness -- we can confess our faith and say, yes, I believe that there are times through the spirit -- the spirit of God that is in each believer, God being all-powerful can withhold from preaching the gospel and forgiveness. I have personally known of one believer who is no longer -- who has passed away -- that had such an experience. I don't know that we have to bring up all of these examples. There was one person who was traveling in heresy. He had an ecumenical understanding. All people who have the stadium background all believe the same. We just have some disagreements. In this way he wanted to preach the gospel one to another. We can just preach the gospel to each other. The spirit did not answer. We are not able to preach the gospel. I myself have the desire in my heart that I would always be ready to forgive. But this isn't what the discussion is about. I think everyone that has spoken has [said] the same matter. What is in question is whether or not we believe the same. There are times when God has through the power of the Holy Spirit withheld forgiveness. [1:16:55]

Bruce Johnson [1:17:15] Mark, there have also been times when the enemy of the souls Here in us has without forgiveness, too. We have to acknowledge that.

Steve Haataja [1:17:45] We are acknowledging ourselves that we make those mistakes. The enemy of souls can tempt us in that. Regardless of what the original question was -- I don't know what the original question was. There has been plenty of discussion over the years where the point has been made that here NEVER could be a time that we should withhold forgiveness. The word 'never' is a pretty strong word. I do not have the desire that I would ever withhold. But I do not believe that God does not have the power ever to use the word never -- that it would never happen. It seems strange that for many years there has been this position that there could possibly be a time -- or that there could never be a time, I should say. That I could say never. That God couldn't close my mouth. I hope not. But I sure cannot say 'never'. I was at many of those meetings in the 1980s. It was certainly a strange and confusing time for a young man. It was such a relief when those times passed. I grieve on all of those things come back to mind from these discussions. I thank God that those things were cleared up. We will not have to go down that path [again], hopefully. I do wonder how and why people could say 'never'. [1:20:18]

Bruce Johnson [1:20:25] Steve, I do not like it that there could be a time. I don't even want to go down that road that there could be a time. I will leave that up to God. That is where I have been trying to come from. I agree with Esa. Do all of us have real great knowledge on this forgiveness issue? I don't know if I heard the word 'never' [said]. Maybe there have been times, but whatever. [1:21:05]

Leland Lake [1:21:15] On this topic, I think that the real fear for me -- when do I choose to forgive? Sometimes the discussion has felt to me like it is I who am choosing who is forgiven and when are they forgiven? That does not seem like it would be right to me, because I am not capable of choosing. As to the statement about the spirit shutting my mouth. I can't say that it could not happen. But I don't see that in my mind I could be the one to choose. [1:21:50]

Esa Vilkkama [1:22:00] I think that we all agree that God is Almighty. God does what he wants to do. We desire to forgive. The scriptures exhort us to forgive each other. Can't we leave it right there? I think that it is simple. [1:22:30]

Steve Haataja [1:22:31] I agree, can't we leave it right there? But why is it continuing to be an issue? I guess I do not know. [1:22:41]

Bruce says something in the background.

Dan Parks [1:22:55] I have been sitting here and thinking back. It is rather obvious to me that the enemy of the soul is also here tonight. He is always here. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy. When I think about this question: is there ever a time? Steve was alluding to it. I always come back to this instruction that the Apostle Paul gave to Timothy. He said in this way, but foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they have gendered strife." To me that in a nutshell tells us what is going on here tonight. We are asking some questions that are hypothetical. I think that the questions that should be asked: How do we believe that our sins are forgiven? Do we always believe that they are forgiven? We have talked about continual forgiveness. To me that is a much more important topic to talk about than this hypothetical question. In my mind I have to say that it is a foolish question, Because it causes us to just look beyond like we are at the end of the universe so to speak. It just causes misunderstandings. It causes us to be at odds with each other. It is coming from the enemy of the Soul. It is not coming from the Holy Spirit. Let us take a deep breath and step back. Let us talk about the beauty of God's forgiveness that each and everyone of us tonight can enjoy -- forgiveness and peace of conscience when our sins are forgiven. Let us avoid the questions that gender strife. It is not healthy for the situation. We should understand and realize that there were things done in the 1980s that went beyond what God's word and spirit would teach. But we do not need to keep digging those [things] up. The holy spirit is still with us today. He guides us. I think we are all focusing on the wrong topics here. We have been concerned about whether or not we need to bless each other and need the gospel always. Some of those things have been causing strife and unrest. I give it a thought on our board and speakers' WhatsApp group. This thought has been with me. When we are talking about these matters that are causing confusion, I think it is good if we could encourage both Phil [Alajoki] and Darwin [Lake] to speak about how they believe on these matters, because Phil and Darwin are the ones that have been disinvited, not the boards. We need to have a common understanding, so confusion is not there and causing this unrest. The Holy Spirit is not the author of confusion. I think that we want to step back from some of these questions. Like Steve mentioned, never and ever -- there is no end to that

question, because you can always come up with some new thought and idea. It just causes division and strife. Let's not go there. I would like to hear that gospel, too. [1:27:20]

Phil Alajoki [1:27:55] One of the thoughts that I think I expressed in our congregational meeting, while I was in Florida. I spoke about humbling ourselves and asking, have we always put the best construction on these discussions? Have we looked at each other as Christ looks at us? Have we fulfilled the Golden Rule? Do unto others as you would like to have done unto yourself. When we think about forgiveness, as it has been talked about -- the depth of forgiveness. It is important to recognize that forgiveness is a matter of the heart. It is not necessarily that someone ass and we bless them, but we still need to forgive them from our own heart. We are all sinners. As the Bible says, we have all fallen short of the glory of God. When I think of that portion that Pat quoted which is in Matthew. They are Jesus's words: if you do not forgive men their sins, neither will the heavenly father forgive you. I really recognized or it opened to me to a little deeper meaning what that Bible verse meant. I will share the story. All of you know that I am in business. As a businessman, we hope to get paid. Those of you who are in business know that sometimes you do not get paid. Someone is taking advantage of your services. This was actually the case with one guy. It was a fairly significant amount of money [in question]. It bothered me. And it bugged me every time that I thought of him. And it bothered me every time that I saw him in town. I would go and try to collect money from this man periodically. I knew that he was in his house. He would not answer the door. It really ate at me. One time I was actually coming out of Hugo's [grocery store] and he was coming in. I accosted him again. I said, hey, what is the deal? When are you going to pay me? He literally turned around and left. He didn't actually even go into the store. I thought to myself, did I behave as Christ taught us to behave? My actions weren't [good]. I turned a man [away] from the grocery store. Then I started to think about it. When I read that Bible portion sometime later, I recognized that I have not forgiven him, even though he is taking full advantage of me. Then I realized that I need to forgive this man, even though he had done something that was not correct. Then God opened it to me to some extent the significance of us to forgive our fellow man. When that opened up to me and I realized that I needed to forgive this man, it sort of took all of that away. I didn't have that feeling of angst. I didn't have that feeling of bitterness or anger toward this man any longer. Subsequently, he has never paid his bill. I have sort of let it go. That is what forgiveness is. As far as the topic of justification. If you brothers would ask how do I understand justification, I guess I will just read from the Bible. These are Apostle Paul's words that he wrote to the Romans. They really cover a lot of the topics of what justification and the forgiveness of sins is. I don't know how much I will read but I will start to read. Let us try to listen to these words [for ourselves], and not for our neighbor. Let us listen to these words for ourselves. They are really encouraging words. Dan [Parks] mentioned the joy of believing. When we can believe this way, we have peace with God.

4 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? **2** For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. **3** For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. **4** Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. **5** But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. **6** Even as David also describeth the

blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, **7** Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. **8** Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. [Ps. 32] **9** Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. **10** How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. **11** And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: **12** And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

[It is sort of a tongue twister going back and forth]. [He was quoting Romans 4]

That is not really the main part. It is but ... As far as justification, I think the end of the chapter speaks more to it. I will read the whole thing. "**13** For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. **14** For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: **15** Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. **16** Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, **17** (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. **18** Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. **19** And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: **20** He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; **21** And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. **22** And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. **23** Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; **24** But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; **25** Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." We could also read chapters 5 and 6, where the Apostle Paul teaches of the new man. When we are believing in Grace, we also walk in the newness of life. It has sometimes been said -- I have heard the comment, anyways. If we live in Grace, there will come a permissiveness of sin. This is not according to God's word at all. The Apostle Paul explains it very clearly in many places in the Bible. Chapter 6 would be one place where He speaks that when we live in the new man, We basically put to death the old body. As all of us understand, we have this sinful portion. We are not going to get rid of it here on Earth. Nevertheless, when we live in the newness of the spirit, things are well before God when our sins are forgiven by faith. It does not give license to live contrary to God's

word. In fact, the Apostle Paul gives some examples. There was a man named Demas who had the love of the world in his heart. On account of that he lost his treasure -- the gift of faith. So, we do live in Grace and Truth. Also in the 8th chapter of Romans, Paul says: **"8** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. **3** For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **4** That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Later in the same chapter the Apostle Paul speaks about who justifies us. **"29** For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. **30** Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

The Apostle Paul also talks very beautifully about the matter of justification in the second chapter of Galatians. I won't read that. That is how I believe that I am justified before God. By and through faith I have been gifted this righteousness, not of myself, but it has come from Christ Jesus who resides in my heart. I have peace with God and great joy. Perhaps we can look into ourselves and recognize that all of us have fallen short. Words do mean things. Perhaps I have said something in a manner that has offended some [people] here. I don't know. I asked, if I have [offended someone], I would want to ask for forgiveness. Can I believe those sins forgiven? The gospel has an amazing power. It gives us strength. Jesus commanded that when we offend one another that we would take care of these offenses. Also, restore one another. I think all of us recognize in our lives when we have offended someone. Perhaps we have spoken poorly of our brethren. There is nobody here tonight that can boast or push out their chests and say that throughout the last years that they have spoken well [of others]. We are human. We are corrupt. We are sinful. I know that I have had these kinds of thoughts and feelings towards others. Even though it is as natural as humans. When we and some regard feel hurt and things are said that I know are not true. Like I said, words can cut like a knife. But above and beyond that, this is what Jesus is teaching us. Despite the fact that I need to forgive my fellow man and have love for my fellow brothers and sisters. In the Epistle of John it says that God loved us first so that we could love him. When we read from the Bible, it is incomprehensible when I think about myself and my sinfulness. It is an incomprehensible matter to believe that God has not imputed my sins, like I read from Romans and how David has written. Blessed is the man that God does not impute sins. It is a mystery of faith. It is incomprehensible for our human understanding and our carnal reasoning to understand the depth of God's grace to someone like me. I think that when we can see that in part, it is easier to look at our brother and try to put the best construction on them. When we recognize this divine forgiveness that God has given for me -- it is undeserved and unmerited -- in some ways it makes me want to love my brother as God has loved me. So, I encourage each one of you here tonight. You, too, can believe all sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood. If in your heart or mind you have felt ill will toward another [person], and perhaps have even spoken words that have hurt someone -- perhaps they have not even heard someone -- but you know that you have spoken ill. Perhaps you have bore false witness or slandered someone. This is close to

each and everyone of us. First and foremost that you would want to believe it forgiven in your own heart -- all sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood. Like I mentioned, the power of the Gospel is such that it begins to make tracks to repair and to restore one another. [1:50:20]

Bruce Johnson [1:50:20] I have to say for myself, If I offended somebody with poor words are wrong words, can I hear the gospel?

Randy Hillukka [1:51:35] Another thing that has been resting on my mind for quite some time surrounding these issues. I brought it up earlier when I mentioned the rift or the seemingly difference that we have. I have asked the question of myself, even at one of the recent board meetings when we were visiting about this. It is the thought about fellowship. I have asked and I have wondered. Do we share the fellowship that we once cherished anymore? I am just asking the question. I ask it for a particular reason. It has been on my mind. One of the things that we learned at the MBMAC [meeting] was that we heard Joe [Wuollet's] letter to us. It did not support Keith [Waaraniemi] and George [Koivukangas] to be nominated for the LLC board. I feel that I need to ask the rest of you. Do you share that type of feeling? I think that it would be important to know that. We share the same fellowship with Keith and George. It is a simple answer that I would like to know. [1:53:25]

Bruce Johnson [1:53:30] I think they maybe you should visit with Joe personally. I don't care to bring that up here. That was his letter. He encouraged people to visit him. As far as fellowship goes, I don't have anything against any of you. I visit with you Mark [Skoog] and Randy [Hillukka]. I have a suggestion. To restore this fellowship, Maybe we could do a joint Bible class one time a month and discuss issues or whatever. Maybe it could be at a round table between Menahga and Wolf Lake.

Randy: That would be nice. You obviously support Keith and George being nominated for the LLC board?

Bruce: I don't have an opinion one way or the other. I think that there are issues there. And I have discussed it.

Randy: That is why I am asking.

Bruce: I have had my discussions with Keith. And I hold him as a dear brother. And Keith knows it.

Randy: That is good.

Bruce: If you have an issue, you visit with Joe. I would encourage you guys to visit with him.

Mark Skoog [1:55:13] That letter was publicly read. It is a public letter.

Randy: It was read to us.

Mark: Urge any kind of retraction, you guys are in full support of that letter.

Bruce: I don't have an opinion.

Mark: I don't believe that.

Bruce: I have somewhat of an opinion ...

Randy: I think it is important, Bruce. I think it is important. It may seem small and insignificant. I said this earlier. I have heard throughout my life. I have her differences about the LLC and its Brothers. I've heard it from you, Bruce. It is good to be honest about these matters. Bruce we have had visits when we have disagreed about situations around the LLC Brothers. That is why I asked [the question]. I want to humbly ask it. I just want to ask. It is important.

Bruce [1:56:15] I have had my visits with Keith. I will leave it at that. But being that I have the mic. Mark, I am getting tired of talking. I will just bring up an issue. It is the disinviting of our ministers.

Mark Skoog [1:56:39] It is good that we visit about that. It has been several years since we visited it. Roger [Alajoki] was the chairman and Joe [Wuollet] was the secretary. I approach them at MBMAC the meeting. Joe, I am sure that you remember it. We wanted to visit with the [Wolf Lake] board and with Phil [Alajoki] and Darwin [Lake]. It was several years ago. And this is our first meeting that we have had [since then]. If I remember right ,I visited with Roger [Alajoki] when he was the chairman. I have also visited with Pat [Lake] since he has been the chairman. From what I remember, Pat and I discussed it. What I have heard is that at a speaker's meeting – I don't remember when it was. Of course, I would not have been there. Like Pat and I have said, we were not there. This is what we heard from our speaker Brothers. Maybe one of them can speak to it. They had a different understanding. I believe that is when Cokato disinvited [Phil Alajoki]. Since then many many congregations have disinvited [the Wolf Lake ministers]. We will no longer serve in Wolf Lake either, until these issues are resolved. I think it is important that we visit about [this topic] and be open and honest. We want to know what the difference is. What are the differences? That is what we wanted to talk about. I am sure Joe [Wuollet] will clarify it then Pat [Lake]. They said that there were differences. We want to know what the differences are. Maybe some of the stuff has been revealed since then. It is important that when there are differences that we would freely talk about them. [1:58:55]

Bruce Johnson: I know. If there are differences it should start with this. If you have a difference, go visit with these guys and discuss [the issues] ... Go visit his brothers.

Mark Skoog [1:59:15] I don't know where these issues are now to be honest.

Bruce: Maybe we should step back and go and visit with these brothers. That is what I am saying.

Mark: That is why we have these meetings. I see that Darwin is not here. I hope Phil [Alajoki] will speak to what the differences are.

Bruce: I think that he just made a confession about how he believes.

Mark: Yes but ... I don't know what the discussion was at ...

Bruce: I wasn't there either. Neither of us were [there].

Mark: If it was openly stated that there were differences ...

Bruce: Did they openly say that there were differences?

Mark: I said that they said so. I am assuming that they did because our speaker brother said that. And I have no reason to dispute what they said.

Bruce: I don't know. I can't speak on that. [someone said something in the background]. I know first and foremost, I have to believe [for] myself.

Mark Skoog: [2:00:25]: Once we are talking about the letters. Even your letter that your board sent to the Brainerd congregation and accuse them openly of sinning for not allowing your speaker to go there and serve.

Bruce: I have openly said in meetings – and you were there – that I do see it as sin.

Mark: Okay, explain [yourself].

Bruce: It is not according to scripture, when you start cutting off the body of Christ and to say that you have no need of them. I am just saying how I see it, Mark.

Mark: I think it is good that we discuss it.

Josh Byman [2:01:10] My understanding is pretty small and pretty slim. Concerning the cutting off of the members from the body of Christ. I think it is important that we remember that our speaker brother serves at the will and at the behest of our congregation. When there are storm clouds or clouds of confusion, concern and worry around the understanding of a particular speaker brother. If they are asked to not come and serve at this time until we can speak and visit about matters. And the spirit that dwells within us agrees, I don't believe that it is cutting off the members from the body of Christ. I don't believe that it is saying from one member to the other that we have no need of you. I believe that the spirit and intent and understanding of those letters that I have read directed toward the dear Wolf Lake congregation has been one of love and concern. It has not been a condemning letter. At least that has not been my feeling. We have heard much about perceptions. Maybe my particular perception is wrong. But I can say

that the discussions that I have been a part of far and wide, both personally and in large meetings, the understanding of the vast majority of God's Kingdom has been that these letters have been sent with love and care and concern for the undying soul of mankind there in Wolf Lake. So, it is difficult for me to say that this is only my perception. I guess I would have to ask the question or rather suggest that maybe take a step back. If they feel that way. Maybe take a step back and ask. If I feel this way, where am I? Faith is a personal matter. The congregation won't get to heaven. The board won't get to heaven. But we as individuals can. This topic of forgiveness. Bruce, you brought up [the topic] a couple of times. I don't want to call you out but you brought up a couple of times about the original question [that] the withholding that happened in the 1980s was right or wrong? There seems to be this question and desire – maybe not on your part – but on the part of some individuals that have really struggled of late to go back and debate and discuss the situation in the 1980s. And they try to drag up things that have been cared for with the most precious gospel. Phil [Alajoki] even spoke to this: forgiveness comes from the heart and it is received in the heart. Each one of us needs to forgive. I have to ask this question. Have all of you dear brothers forgiven those things that have happened in the 1980s? That question has been on my mind for some time. If in your heart you have forgiven and forgotten it, and those matters are drowned in the sea of grace, there is no heartburn over it anymore. Maybe it is easy for me to say, because I was just a little tyke during those years. I was in the innocent stages of infancy during those years. For me they have not been a point of contention or a point of difficulty. But it has been my understanding And I have heard from many different believers from across the North American Zion that those were difficult times. There were things that were done incorrectly. There were those [people] that went into the flesh. There were those [people] who were heavy-handed. There was over shooting and dryness. It has been openly acknowledged. But the most important thing that I have heard over and over about that time is that the gospel was preached and sins were forgiven. Most importantly, sins were believed forgiven. The individuals that took part [in the meetings] at that time were able to care for matters. The love was restored. And they died leaving a good testimony. And those [people] that are living today, from what I have understood, were able to take care of [their] matters. If there is somebody that you feel who has not taken care of their matters, have you visited with them? Have you taken care of matters with them? If there are difficulties and struggles there, have we taken care of those matters? I think it is a question that needs to be asked. Individually we can ask ourselves that question. The other thing that has been left in my heart when I have listened to many of the speeches so far. There has been a lot of talk about God and a lot of talk about Jesus Christ. [But] there has been very little talk about the Holy Spirit. That has been my perception. That is what I have heard. And that is what I have felt. I may be wrong. But it is not the first time that I have heard this. It is not the first time I have felt this way, as I have listened to speeches in past meetings. But when it continues to come to my heart and mind, I need to bring it out. I am not accusing anybody. But I need to lay it on the table. If it is incorrect, I want to be corrected. But that is what I have heard. There is much talk about God; there is much talk about Jesus Christ; [but] there is very little talk about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third part of God that dwells within us and within God's congregation here today. It is leading, guiding and instructing and teaching in all things. It also brings to remembrance those things which Christ has said to us. The Holy Spirit will not contradict itself. And the Holy Spirit will not contradict the

word of God. The Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is here today dwelling in his kingdom. It is leading, guiding and teaching in all things. [2:10:00]

Mark: You can give the mic to Mitch [Johnson]

Mitch Johnson: [2:10:25] Josh, in regarding your comment about there being much talked about God And a lot of talk about Christ. I have heard rumors that Wolf Lake speaks too much about Christ and not enough about the congregation or the spirit. I don't know if this is an answer to your question. In John 16 verse 13 are the words of Jesus. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me [Christ]: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you." That is what comes to mind when you ask that question about speaking of Christ, our Savior and of God, and not enough about the spirit. That is what came to my mind. Also, I would like to welcome all of your Servants of the word from Menahga to preach in Wolf Lake. Not to speak of yourself but of that unspeakable gift From God. It is an Indescribable gift. It is the gift of Jesus Christ and eternal life [2:12:20]

Mark Skoog: Mitch, do you want to give the mic to Joe?

Joe Wuollet [2:12:30] The only thing that popped into my mind when Josh [Byman] made his comment when speaking of the Holy Spirit or not speaking of the Holy Spirit. In my mind – there is God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit. I guess I didn't realize that there was a need to differentiate and to speak of each portion of the godhead individually. [2:13:00]

Mark Skoog [2:13:20] What are your thoughts about the first discussion point about all of the meetings? We have heard the Holy Spirit. We have heard it said that there was no Holy Spirit there. There was only anger, and on and on and on – about the meeting. We have heard that about several meetings, and some of the major meetings. How have you Brothers felt when you have been at those meetings? Have you heard the Holy Spirit calling with love, or not? [2:13:55]

Bruce Johnson [2:14:25] I believe that the Holy Spirit was there and also the enemy of the souls. I wouldn't say – how would I say it – that Christ was in some of those speeches. I have been open at those meetings. I sat there with Ray Waaraniemi. I am not going to go into it now. I do not want to give tit for tat. They know how I felt. I do not know anyone from both like who I said that the Holy Spirit was not there. They may have disagreed with some of the speeches. I am done. [2:15:16]

Nick Ylitalo [2:15:27] Just thinking about where we are at and where things have gone with these issues in the past 10 years now. When I think about where things are today. Two to three years ago, most of the congregations in God's Kingdom were not comfortable anymore having Darwin [Lake] and Phil [Alajoki] serving [in their congregations]. Two to three years have now gone by. Now the congregations in God's kingdom are no longer comfortable sending speakers to Wolf Lake. We see how the division has seemingly widened between God's kingdom and

Wolf Lake, and other areas. The unity between Minneapolis and Wolf Lake is seemingly [strong] – and in other areas as well. The concern is great. We have discussed these points of doctrine. In some ways I agree on the majority of it. [But] there is this different feeling or difference even now in our comments. It seems to some extent that we are on different sides of the issue a little bit. Then it shows up at summer services. There is a big group of those who are of another mind and then [there is] the majority of God's Kingdom. Recently, I was at a couple of different birthday parties for friends of mine. Suddenly, it is a totally different and new group of people at the birthday party compared to a party that had been held 10 years ago. So, we see these groups. There is this group that is beginning to form, or it has formed. It can't continue in that way. You can't continue being together and not be in unity. Maybe we can find our differences here. Or maybe we can't. I guess I can say that in my time and God's Kingdom, I have believed what I have heard and what has been preached. It has been a comforting message. It is a secure dwelling place. It has been a beautiful kingdom. Is it made up of faulty individuals? Yes, it is. We are faulty individuals. It has been a place where we have traveled together on the way to heaven. It does not work if we are not in unity. The path cannot go a different direction than what it has been in God's Kingdom. It feels like it has [divided]. [There are] these differences. Part of the challenge [is] with these doctrinal issues. You can have two points and they are both correct. But maybe the emphasis is leaning in one way or the other too far. It might be hard to point out with Scripture and then [in] black and white exactly if the emphasis is in the wrong place. But the spirit knows. And the spirit can feel it. There may be some comments in a meeting. The Spirit does not answer to it. Even though there may be some specific doctrinal things that we do not see eye-to-eye on. I think generally, as it was pointed out in the letter, we have gone away from these meetings with different impressions. Why is that? I don't know how to say it. I remember a brother from Toronto [Hannu Janhunen?] who was at the meeting in Monticello. He related his situation. He said that when he was a new board member, there were other people on the same board who began to ridicule – if ridicule is the right word. They began to challenge God's Kingdom. They were finding faults. He said that he began to listen to this. Pretty soon he was nodding [his head in agreement]. He was in full agreement and looking for support for his positions. [2:22:20] Some of you were at the meeting and heard it yourself. Some of you were not there. When he was approached, it was said that you have fallen into a wrong understanding. You are in a dangerous place. He was defensive. He said: show me in black and white [from] the Bible where I am wrong. He said that when the Holy Spirit pointed a finger at me and I was able to humble myself and simply repent of my disobedience and battling against God's Kingdom. When I was able to put that away, then all of my questions went away. These doctrinal questions did not matter anymore. I was free and a humble child of God again. I, of course, cannot see into any of your hearts. But I can say from my heart that you are in a dangerous place. God's kingdom is the same yesterday, today and forever. I feel that it is the same Kingdom that I have been in my entire life. The message has not changed. It is the way to heaven. There is not a different way and there is not a different group within God's Kingdom that can get us to heaven. I think it is that. It requires humbleness and repentance, and just simply be in unity with God's Kingdom. If you feel that there are errors or [that] you felt differently at these meetings or you feel like God's kingdom is on the wrong path, [speak up]. God's kingdom is not on the wrong path. But if you feel that the North American Zion is on the wrong path, be free to speak [about] that and share what your concern is. But I feel that it is the same path that

we have known our whole life and the majority of you have known during your lives. I think that this is the only way that this can go away and we can be in unity again. I don't think that we are going to solve the doctrinal differences and then to be in unity again. [2:25:07]

Nick Ylitalo [2:25:40] For my own doubts and sins, can I hear the gospel?

Mark Skoog [2:25:59] I will go to my go-to guy. Bruce, what do you have to say? Be open and free everyone. Mitch.

Mitch Johnson [2:26:24] I will speak again. Some of these current actions that have taken place – having congregational discussions and coming to a decision to not preach God's word at Wolf Lake and Minneapolis, I feel it is not a good road to go down. To me it feels like we are getting isolated in that way. The preaching of God's word is being withheld. I just feel that it is not the way that Jesus would go about doing it. I think if we could back up from taking those types of actions of congregation against congregation. By going forward with those types of actions it will only further divide versus if we can back up. Then hopefully we can have more fellowship. I agree with [having] more fellowship. [2:27:45]

Esa Vilkkama [2:28:02] In the last few years I have been concerned about what I call 'Spirit talk'. Often people say, listen to the spirit; listen to the voice. Listen to the spirit. Things are decided because 'the spirit said so'. That is true. But doesn't Wolf Lake and Minneapolis also have the spirit? If we go into a situation and I say that my spirit says this way but your spirit tells another way, who is the judge? We are getting into an impossible situation if we say that my spirit reveals but your spirit does not. That is why the Word of God is above spirits. If you read Luther, he very strongly warns about this kind of spirit talk. Luther always emphasizes that the Word comes first. Always. And then the spirit must be tied to the Word of God. So, I have been troubled and concerned about [the spirit talk]. Do you understand what I mean? I am also very concerned [when some people] say that the Holy Spirit left Minneapolis. I think that it is a shocking statement. There may be 100 believers [in Minneapolis]. Then someone says without knowing any of them that the Holy Spirit left Minneapolis. Brothers, this cannot be correct. [2:30:07]

Josh Byman [2:30:18] I would ask Esa to explain what happened in Minneapolis.

Esa Vilkkama [2:30:30] I am not the right person. I am not from Minneapolis, so I would advise you to call a Minneapolis member. Again, I am from Wolf Lake, so I cannot speak to that issue. It is wrong. There is no way that it could be correct [to say that the Holy Spirit left Minneapolis]. We don't even know those people. And without talking to those people and without knowing how they believe, we cannot become judges. [To say that] you guys [in Minneapolis] are now unbelievers. The Holy Spirit left the congregation. Again, I would encourage you to go back to the Minneapolis people regarding this issue. [2:31:05]

Josh Byman [2:31:10] I don't bring it up to move this discussion towards Minneapolis. I agree that none of us are from Minneapolis. But just about the thought that you brought up. You so

strongly feel that it is wrong to express that type of thought or have that kind of understanding. [You say that] it is so wrong. I wanted to hear your opinion about what you saw about that situation. I would say that the situation there is significant and troublesome. I won't go into it any further. I yield the floor to Bruce.

Bruce [2:31:50] Josh, you weren't going to speak anymore.

Josh: I yield you 30 seconds

Bruce: I agree with Esa. But the people that I do know there – I don't know everyone in that church – but the ones that I know personally, I hold them as children of God. That is all I can say. I am done [speaking].

Josh [2:32:14] I think that we have to acknowledge – and I think all of us do – that the situation and what happened there is quite significant. It wasn't an overnight [occurrence]. What happened there was not something that just happened overnight. It has been ongoing. And how that separation came to be, I am not going to give my opinion on it. It is significant. It is very much so. [2:32:40]

Mark Skoog [2:32:58]: Who is next? There are very many issues that we have been talking about.

Wolf Lake member [Milo Lake?] [2:33:11] Concerning the disinviting of the Wolf Lake speakers, I would have to say that after how many years that they have been disinvited, I still don't know specifically why [it is so]. Based on some of Mark's comments, it sounds like maybe some of you do not know either. Maybe there are some unknown differences and understanding? I think that the approach to just inviting in my opinion was inappropriate. I believe that we should have followed the church law of Christ and approach the speakers as Christ outlined. Determine what the dividing issue is – if there is one – before making a decision like this. Also, about some of the reasons that have been given why the Wolf Lake speakers are not accepted in other congregations and here [in Menahga]. Some of the reasons are very vague, such as that there is something wrong with them, but I can't put a finger on it. There are concerns and confusion around them. But again, it cannot be explained. I think this is very hurtful to anyone and especially our speakers when these sorts of accusations are made. Paul writes to the Romans. The kingdom of God is not eat or drink, but it is peace, joy and righteousness in the Holy Ghost. Paul also writes that you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba Father. So I think when we label these speakers that they have concerns or a problem with them – nothing specific – I think it puts them in a place of fear [where they have] anxiety. I think it is a dangerous thing to do. It is not promoting peace, joy and righteousness that Paul says the kingdom of God is [2:35:48]

Mark Skoog [2:35:55] It is kind of interesting that some [congregations] have not asked your speaker Brothers to serve [there]. Maybe this has happened in several different localities. Now

there are several congregations that have said that they will not send their speakers to serve your congregation. I would ask you brothers: Have you stepped back to ask what is the problem? Is there something with me? What are your feelings? It has been going on now for quite some time. There have been several meetings. There was one with Cokato. Brainerd was here one time. There was one with the LLC. There have been other meetings specific to these issues. The issues don't become resolved. So, I am curious what your thoughts are with all of what has happened in the last year or two. Go ahead. [talking in the background]. Do you guys step back and say, "what are the issues?" Is it me?

Bruce Johnson [2:37:15] I know for myself that I am nothing but a filthy rag. It is only by the grace of God that I am here today. I believe that.

Mark Skoog: That is how all of us believe – by the grace of God.

Bruce: It is only by the grace of God.

Unknown [Milo Lake?] [2:37:35] I was going to echo Bruce's comment. I think we in Wolf Lake have asked that question many times, "what the problem?" I don't believe that we have got a clear and specific answer to it.

Mark Skoog [2:37:50]: Bruce, I will talk to you, because .. very well. Over the years there have been many many meetings. Right? I suspect that you have left many meetings feeling differently than a lot of the other people. Is that correct?

Bruce [2:38:09]: Different with some, yes. I mentioned that earlier.

Mark: It is kind of peculiar. Over the years where I have been lately, the brothers from Wolf Lakes sit very silently until the end. They have their speeches. [Then] they get up and leave.

Bruce: I'm getting tired of this. Now I am speaking for myself. Especially in these bigger meetings – you have been there. I have visited with some of these Waaraniemi boys. They have agreed with me that these bigger meetings really do not produce anything. There is a lot of condemnation, which I tried to get away from in this meeting here. Let's just visit. But that has not been the case in those bigger meetings. That is the way I feel. I am just being truthful. I have been truthful with those guys. To me it seems like there is a presentation. They all say Amen [to it]. I don't know of anyone [who disagreed with the presentation] – even though we have been accused of not agreeing with the presentation. I believe it is a false statement. Then somebody there – I don't know how to say this politely. It is just my way of saying it. Someone start attacking. Then they say repent, repent, repent. [Repent] of what? I don't believe that I am fighting [against] God's Kingdom. [I am speaking for] myself personally. I am fighting some of you [laughter].

Mark Skoog [2:40:11]: Sirius asked: Are you fighting God's Kingdom?

Bruce: Who asked? I don't know what that is. You tell him to get out of this meeting.

Mark: That is what it sounded like.

Bruce: I'm done.

Steve Haataja [2:40:45] Bruce, I will address your "big gatherings" question. Back a number of years ago there were just a few people that gathered a couple of times. It was suggested that the sister congregation in Menahga would meet with the Wolf Lake board. The Menahga board members should meet with the Wolf Lake board. The Wolf Lake board did not want to meet with the Menahga board. They said that there is some history there. We want to meet with the Minneapolis and Rockford Boards at this bigger meeting. Al Lake called me after the meeting. [He said that] I realize that we should not have had that big meeting. But when we came to no agreement there, it was suggested that we have a national meeting. We basically had a national meeting in Monticello that year in May. There were more board members there that there has ever been at such a meeting before from across the continent. When a resolution was not reach there, there was a request to include SRK in our meetings. The hope a long time ago was that we would have a smaller meeting. This is the first time it has ever happened – many years later. [2:42:35]

Bruce [1:11:55] I am done after this. I will sit and drink coffee. As far as what you said about not having Menahga in that meeting, there is some history there. I wasn't a part of that conversation. There was Jon Bloomquist and someone else. They agreed to it. I don't know what the history is between Menahga and Wolf Lake, as far as personal grudges. It is up to them to go and take care of that. I didn't grow up [in this area].

Steve Haataja says something in the background – It came from Wolf Lake ...

Bruce: Do you know what I think the problem is? You keep turning to man for answers Instead of Christ.

Someone says something more in the background.

Bruce: I said that I think we keep turning to man for answers, when we should turn to Christ.

Someone: How do you turn or determine it?

Bruce: Right here.

Someone: How about the Holy scriptures?

Bruce: Right here.

Someone comments [Nick?]

Bruce Johnson: Isn't this [the Bible] the highest authority? I'm not a theologian. But I think that the answers are here. I'm just saying for myself, Nick [Ylitalo]. We have had this thing. I have been for having Finland here, and whatnot. Finland has not come and we have Covid. Maybe that is why we need to search the Scriptures. Nick, don't pick on me now.

Nick Ylitalo [2:44:39]: I am not picking on you. But regarding the written word. There is a confirmation lesson that has a picture of the Bible with a padlock on it. What opens the word? The Holy Spirit.

Bruce Johnson: You cannot separate them.

Nick Ylitalo: Exactly. The important part is what does the spirit reveal from the word. That is what we turned to. We do not turn to man. But what does the spirit say?

Bruce Johnson says something.

Nick Ylitalo [2:45:13]: I don't feel that way. We have the prayer when we go to meetings that the spirit will speak and reveal God's word. Milo [Lake] had asked what the concerns have been regarding the speakers. Just speaking for myself. I suppose some of the concerns came out more so when Darwin [Lake] spoke at summer services in Outlook [in 2015]. There was a significant majority of God's kingdom that was troubled by that sermon. I would say my own feeling, and of others, that it was broadening the way for preventing God's gift of children. I don't know where that matter is today. I know that it has been discussed. I think some of the examples in [the sermon] were not according to how we understand in God's Kingdom in regards to abstinence. I feel like one thing in regards to forgiveness and the other side of the issue has been – maybe it is not so much so today. There was a time – I remember visiting with a very good friend of mine. There was an emphasis on the gospel not being such an important part. There was discussion that Juhani Raattamaa had come up with that phrase that we used as the preaching gospel of the forgiveness of sins. This friend even shared sermons with me from Finland where they did not preach the gospel. There was an emphasis on just believing. Of course, we are saved by faith and believing. But I feel like where the emphasis question comes in. How do I say it. At least during my lifetime in God's Kingdom I have not wanted to rely on my own faith and my own ability to believe. But the gospel when it is preached is where my strength is found. Oftentimes when you listen to a sermon, you might catch some [of it]. But when the gospel is preached, our strength is renewed. I feel like – I don't know if it is so much right now. There was a time when the preached gospel, as we have known it in God's Kingdom, was diminished. There was an emphasis that it was not so important. That came through in some of the sermons. There was a comment made. If you believe that Jesus died for your sins, You will be saved. On the one hand, we understand that to be true. On the other hand, There are millions of people, maybe billions – I don't know how many people there are in the world – who believe that Jesus died for their sins. They believe that he died on the cross for their sins. But they are not in God's Kingdom. That is the difference between God's kingdom and the rest of the world. The power to forgive sins is in God's Kingdom. So, I feel like that is

one thing. The emphasis has changed a little bit in some of the speeches. Part of it is that it is a mystery of faith, too. When the spirit answers and when it doesn't. There have been sermons when the spirit has not answered. It is not so that we need to have a specific reason. In fact, there are probably sermons that have been spoken in unbelieving churches that are doctrinally correct. I have been to heretic funerals and weddings where the sermons have been doctrinally correct. But the spirit does not answer. And when that happens, the kingdom gets troubled and it is uncomfortable. I think that is where we have to trust in the Holy Spirit. If God's children are troubled by the message, it would be better that they would not speak. It might not be that we can come up with a black and white thing – he said something wrong. We trust that the spirit does move in the congregation. I don't know if there are other things. I felt like I had to say how I felt, at least, about some of those sermons and some of the concerns that I have had. I want to say also. I was at the reviewal [visitation] for Arlene [Arvola]. Darwin served there. To me it was a very foreign sounding message. There was no call to God's Kingdom. He talked about being ready before God and knowing Jesus. There was not a call to God's Kingdom. And the gospel was not preached. So, these are the kinds of things that do cause concern. I think it is important that we care for even those brothers and for their own faith. It is not important that they speak. It is important that they are cared for in God's Kingdom and that they can make it to heaven.
[2:52:05]

Joe Wuollet [2:52:15] Mark stepped out so I will take my turn. Just one correction – maybe I shouldn't say correction. The message did not get put forth from either side of the discussion. It took place in this very room. Darwin's sermon was discussed. It was agreed that there was nothing incorrect in what Darwin spoke at the summer services [in Outlook in 2015] by the pastoral committee and Wolf Lake. It was understood that way.

Bruce Johnson: They did say amen. I don't know why Darwin's sermon ...

Mark Skoog: Anne is next.

Anne Vilka: [2:53:17] Hopefully you guys don't mind me speaking. It has been great to sit and learn and listen. It bothers me to the core. When is a man or a sinner forgiven? Darwin has asked for offense – for everything – and it keeps coming up. To me: where is your forgiving heart? If you did a sin, and every year they keep talking about your sin – that is terrible. Can't we forgive him?

Nick Ylitalo? [2:53:59]: Just to clarify. Was it taken care of? If it was, I would be happy to hear that – for that sermon.

Anne Vilka: It bothers me also. He asked for the offense. But the other thing is. There is a place. We have talked to many Finns. In a Christian marriage, a couple knows. If there is mental illness or a physical illness, there is that option to abstain. It just bothers me that they are going to go off and practice birth control. I know that Darwin said [it] seven times. There was a preacher who counted how many times he said it. We are not promoting birth control. So, why do we keep talking about it? That is what is so hurtful. Then what bugs me, to be honest, is this

term – ‘you want to broaden the way’. ‘You diminish the gospel’. ‘You don't put sin away’. Who of us is to ask? I don't go around asking [saying]: ‘You diminish the gospel’. I don't know of anybody. I don't live in sin. My circle of friends don't live in sin. So why is this? It is one of these same things – forgiveness. It is a bad accusation.

Esa Vilkama [2:55:32]: Just a few comments. These sermons. I would love to know what sermons are in question? I have asked it before [about sermons by] Darwin and Phil. I would like to listen to them myself. If they are wrong, they are wrong. I would just like to know what [sermons] they are. Secondly, back to the spirit talk. Let me read what Luther says.

“In matters pertaining to the spoken, outward Word we must firmly maintain that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word. On this we must insist in order to protect ourselves against the enthusiasts, that is, spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and then proceed to judge, explain and stretch Scripture or the spoken Word as they please.” (What Luther Says, p. 915)

Another [quote]. “The Word, which is called the Word of Christ, must be the rule and touchstone by which the Church is to be discerned and by which it must govern itself. There must be a certain rule by which the Church shall measure its conduct. It will not do for individuals to formulate their own ideas of conduct, act accordingly and then say that the Church is led by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, it is shown here that this Word precedes or must be spoken beforehand, and that afterwards the Holy Spirit works through the Word. One must not reverse the order and dream of a Holy Spirit who works without the Word and before the Word, but one who comes with and through the Word and goes no farther than the Word goes.”(Luther's sermon on Pentecost, John 14:23-31; Luther's Church Postil, Lenker's edition)

One more [quote]. “The Ultimate Aim of the Devil. The devil has no better strategy to conquer us than to draw us from the Word to the “spirit:. ...One should stay by the Word and not grant people the Spirit without the Word.” (What Luther Says, p. 395)

We can see how the spirit must be tied to the word. We know that the word of God is above everything. It is the highest authority, as we know from the Reformation [teachings]. [2:58:37] [Meeting between Wolf Lake and Menahga on 26 March 2021]

Pat Lake [2:58:40]: I suppose it is getting a little bit late. I have sat here and listened to all of the speeches. When Nick [Ylitalo] spoke, I wondered: What is he really talking about? I have not heard anything here tonight that is such a great divide that we have gotten [to the point] where we are at. Nick did speak to – I am not trying to pick on you, Nick – that there would be repentance. I think that is what your word was. I haven't heard anything that has got us to this place yet. So, it puzzles me that our speakers were disinclined. I would hope – I do not know – based on your letter that you sent to us requesting this meeting. I don't know if you brothers

have decided not to send [speakers] to come and preach in our congregation. I would hope that is not the case. I really think that we can make some steps forward. But clearly, as I have told Mark [Skoog] - If this action is such that you brothers choose to do this, I am not sure how we sit together like this many times to try to resolve it. How do we resolve it? I would hope that you have not made that decision. If you have, and you have not told us, that you would back off of it and that you would continue to send [preachers]. We could visit. It seems to me that this has been helpful tonight. [3:00:43]

Mark Skoog: Neil or Ron, do either one of you want to speak?

Neil Waaraniemi [3:00:56] This is Neil. Can you hear me? I do want to say something about the sermon that was in question from 2015 summer services [in Outlook]. It is true that in the sermon Darwin said that we are not talking about birth control. We are not promoting birth control. But the example that he gave in the sermon was not talking about mental illness or some other sickness. But if the husband is going to be away for a long time, maybe it would be okay for the couple to refrain from or to have abstinence before he leaves. The only reason would be that a child would not be born during that time when he is gone. Well, I would like to say – it was not the LLC board whose ears were pricked during that sermon because they were in the annual meeting at the time. But many listeners were concerned by that sermon. When I listened to it – I was actually in the room when the sermon was kept. I didn't hear the part that was offensive. But when I listened to the recording afterwards, it did sound like birth control, even though he had said that we are not talking about birth control. What bothered me most. Even though that message was out on the internet where anyone could hear it, there were people who were angry at the fact that it was removed from the archives. There was another thing that I heard. There might have been some people who liked the message that maybe it was okay to refrain from intercourse if the husband is going to be away for a long time. So, it seemed like the rumbling happened after that time. The differences have become more public since then. I think that there were many [people] in the Wolf Lake congregation who were supporting that sermon. They were wondering why it would be removed from the archives, when it had that foreign message. I would also like to ask, can I hear the gospel? [3:04:55]

Bruce Johnson: Neil, are you there? Neil, Bruce here. Can you hear me?

Neil: I muted it. Yes, I am here. [3:05:13]

Bruce: I need to be muted. I am going home after this.

Neil: What?

Bruce: Just listen. There were people who agreed with that sermon and people who disagreed with that sermon. We have hashed it out. I talked to both your brother Keith and Jouko [Haapsaari] more than once. They said that there was nothing wrong with that sermon, after it was taken down. I wasn't on the board [at that time]. [The board] disagreed with taking it down. We had three meetings. It took the third meeting where we all agreed – if you are using

abstinence for birth control, it is wrong and sin. We all said amen. Jim Frantti stood up. We all said amen. All I can say, brother, is that you forgive that brother from the heart and get over it.

Neil [3:06:22] Can you hear me?

Bruce: I can hear you, brother.

Neil: Okay. I am going to check with those brothers. I have never heard any of them say that the sermon was okay. I will have to say that it sure sounded to me like birth control when he said what I said about a husband being away for a long time. Maybe it would be okay for them to refrain from intercourse before he left [back]. I will talk to those brothers to check to see if what you're saying is true or not.

Bruce: When you come up here [to Wolf Lake], you come over here for a sauna.

Neil: Sure.

Leland Lake [3:07:37]: I would like to speak about the ministers – the possibility of not sending ministers. Where do you think that we will hear the word? If I would come here, as I did tonight, and you accept me. If I move to Menahga [congregation] then all of the matters are [supposedly] fixed. I don't see that it is really the case. You asked: how do we feel? How about being confused, uncertain and not knowing what is wrong with us? I do not know what to fix. Because I go to Wolf Lake, it feels like I am labeled. But I don't know what the problem is. You speak about repentance. [Repentance] of what? I actually want to get to heaven. I think that we have to be our brother's keeper. Show me the way. If you don't send ministers, where am I supposed to hear the word? How do I fix what is wrong with me personally. Just showing up here [in Menahga church] on Sunday will not fix what apparently is wrong. Make sure that my soul is cared for and my salvation is assured. [3:08:57]

Scott Hillstrom [3:09:05] Just a couple of nights ago I was visiting with one of my little boys before I went to bed. He said: Dad, if every child is born as a believer, when are they not [a believer]. He is only in 4th grade. If everyone is born in this world with faith and they can believe, how do we know when they are not believing? I said, I remember having the same questions as you when I was little. I was probably a little bit older than him. I told him, it is a good question. It is a good question for the whole world, if they would ask: what can I do to be saved? When some people leave faith, they lose faith because of sin. They fall into the world. They are drawn away from their childhood faith. It is hard for my mind to wrap around that whole idea. But we believe that all children are born with faith. I can't answer when it happens. There are some people like my brother Kurt who has Down syndrome. He would never lose faith. I said that when the children fall into the world and they lose faith, they need to seek God's Kingdom. It is just like we do as believers. We still need to continue to seek God's Kingdom. I know that we are in it and can be happy to be here. And we are thankful that we are here in God's Kingdom. It is like I said, when we are born into a believing home, it is a special gift. And maybe we will not completely understand like someone who repents from the world. In the world

there are a lot of people who believe in Jesus and they want to get to heaven. I said to continue to search for God's Kingdom. Turn to God's Kingdom. That is where the spirit is. It is the only place. It is the only place where the forgiveness of sins is found. There is forgiveness in the world. There is forgiveness from people to people. We have to have forgiveness for a neighbor. We have to love our neighbor. We have to be christ-like. We want to be forgiving. I just thought about it. It's one of those questions as a young boy. I wondered when someone would not be a believer. It pertains to this idea. It is in God's kingdom where the spirit is. It is in the congregation where the spirit is found. It is the only place where the forgiveness of sins is found. I was visiting with my dad not long ago about his struggles. He was a speaker for a short time. I was visiting with him about it. It was a confusing time for him. He remembers. His pride was great when he was speaking. He didn't know why they were concerned for him. He said that the only thing that I remember is that they had love for my undying soul. I wanted to remain in God's Kingdom. That is where his heart has been ever since. I just think about those things and they help me. We don't always have to have all of the specific answers. I think if we are humble and we want to believe, we can simply ask. We want to remain in God's Kingdom. Can I hear the gospel? [3:14:37]

Mark Skoog: It is starting to get late. I don't know how long we want to continue. But there are a couple of items that I have heard about. I just want to put them on the table. One, I understand that there are several who are participating in Halloween from Wolf Lake. Is that true? Do any of you guys know, is it true or not? Another question that I have heard. It was asked in the southern Minnesota meeting in October about confirmation school. Wolf Lake had not just one but two confirmation schools last summer on their own. Does anyone want to speak to that [issue]? These are questions that get left on the table and nobody speaks to them. So, I think it is important that we speak to them.

Pat Lake [3:15:50] You may or may not believe me. I don't know about the Halloween topic. As far as the confirmation [School], I don't have a confirmant. I haven't had one [yet]. I know that the congregation – and you do know this Mark because we talked about it. The congregation did not host the confirmation [school] but some individuals did. Was there one or was there two? I honestly can't even answer that question. I guess I have to leave it there. We as a congregation did not host a confirmation [school]. We even did discuss it – as I told you. In the congregation we did discuss it, but it was not done [at the congregation level].

Mark Skoog [3:16:45] But don't you understand how it raises a lot of questions when the word gets out that there are a couple of confirmation classes in Wolf Lake? The question gets asked and no one will speak to it.

Pat Lake: I understand it. I don't know the ins and outs of it. I am aware that Al [Lake] talked to Jon [Bloomquist] many times. I will back up. Maybe it was not many – once, twice, three times – I don't know – about doing it. I believe that they even asked for the confirmation material from the LLC. Now I am speaking about what I do not know.

Mark Skoog: [3:17:30] I know that you and I have visited it. You said the same thing. You are unaware of it. Like the Halloween deal. I have heard that it is fairly widely participated in by members from Wolf Lake. That's why I figured that this is the place to ask. If you don't know about it and none of you brothers know about it and none of your families have participated in it, then we just let it go.

Pat Lake [3:17:56]: I will say this. If my kids did go to Dan and Nicole's [Lake] for Halloween to get some candy. If that is a problem – I don't even know if they did. If they did, I hope that is not really a problem.

Randy Hillukka [3:18:31] I don't know but I think all of this conversation is connected. I can't help but think about this. The questions that we have heard. The question that I raised earlier about George and Keith – nobody has spoken to it. Now this Halloween question, which has bothered a lot of us here. Then this confirmation question. Pat, you explained. It has been bothersome for us. I have mentioned fellowship. I have had this thought settling in my mind a lot. I still do. I can't explain my thoughts. When Leland was speaking and pleading. I felt for Darwin and Phil personally. I felt awful for them. I have. It is hard enough to go speak with our own flesh and fears that we carry. I have to say. I am here with the Menahga speakers and board – I share such an awesome bond of unity. I was thinking about the words of Paul to the Galatians: Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, temperance. It is so evident. I don't say that I don't share it with you guys. But I have to say this. When I look at the other fruits. It seems like in a lot of the conversations that I have had personally, even with some of your members throughout the years – maybe even some of you on the board. There has been this strife. There is a little bit of strife. It is not like we arm wrestle. It is there. How does it speak to us? It is a question mark. We welcome you guys to come to Menahga. We welcome you to come and listen to God's word here. This question, Pat, is difficult for us right now, because of this I would say. We so much want to be in the same fellowship and unity, as Paul speaks. We do so much. I so much want to have Darwin and Phil to speak here. Pat, I do, from the bottom of my heart. I have to be open and honest. There is something there. We have heard from other congregations with which we are one hundred percent unified. There are no questions of the worry that the sheep have heard a different voice. Can I put my finger on it? I can't, personally. We have heard that. We are united with Cokato, for the most part, Elk River and Brainerd. We share the same unity of faith. Those are some of the things that are on my heart. I still need to ask, can I have all of my sins forgiven? [3:22:14]

Dan Parks [3:22:29] When Scott [Hillstrom] was sharing his experiences and questions in his mind. First of all, I wouldn't consider it a foolish question to ask: When does a young child in a believing home cease to be a child of God? Of course, as [Scott] said, no one can determine that. The thought comes to me. If we look at it in the natural sense. If someone is not giving natural food, how long would they survive? If someone does not get spiritual food in an unbelieving home, how long does a child have faith? The enemy of the soul begins to preach to those unbelieving children in the unbelieving homes. Unless God can call them, soon the innocence of childhood disappears. We do not know when, but God calls. We can pray for unbelievers, and the call goes out – seek the kingdom of God. We don't need to agonize over

that question because there is no answer to it. But using the natural example of not having food – there is no spiritual food out there. So, naturally they are going to eventually succumb to the wiles of the enemy. We don't understand the wisdom of God, but we know that God's word says only a few will find God's Kingdom. We don't understand that either. God's wisdom is much higher than ours.

I also had some thoughts about the sharing of speakers. I read an article recently [what article?]. It came from a Finnish brother who was speaking about the situation in Finland where they have much more sharing of speakers among congregations. [This] is not unheard of. When there is concern over one of the speakers about his understanding, they don't call him until the matter is clarified. It is certainly not cutting someone off when we put a pause on it. We are not saved by speaking. We are saved by faith. It is my concern as a speaker that I would not preach incorrectly and lead souls away from God's Kingdom with my preaching. That is why speakers depend on active listeners that listen with the Holy Spirit to see if something is not right. They would then in love address the matter.

I see that Esa [Vilkama] left. He placed so much emphasis on ... Oh, he is still here. We need to be a little cautious – how would I put it – when we rely on the word first and then the spirit. I would say that the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos was given instruction to send letters. In all of those letters it was said, he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. We also come back to Philip and the eunuch [Acts 8]. The eunuch was studying God's word carefully, but he did not understand it. He needed the spirit, as Randy [Hillukka] [or Nick Ylitalo, rather] said that unlocks God's word through the spirit. The spirit and the word are inseparable. They are both part of the Triune Godhead. We can't set the spirit aside and say let's read the word. Then bring the spirit back, because the spirit makes it alive. Without the spirit, it is a spiritless and dead devotion. The world is full of spiritless devotions. We have to be careful when we talk about the role of the Holy Spirit, because it is an office of the Holy Spirit. When we look at the Creed, which the children learn in Sunday School. When we visit the Third Article of the Creed, where it talks about the office of the Holy Spirit. He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and preserves it in Jesus Christ and in true faith. It is an integral part. You cannot separate the word from the spirit. God through his Spirit enlightens His word to us. It is good to remember that the spirit was left to enlighten us.

When talking about the sharing of speakers, there is one thought that I had. The enemy of souls is active there, I think. His goal is to divide us. When we heard of the difficulties and confusion and the activities in Minneapolis. God's Holy Spirit – we believe – directed some of those to go elsewhere for their spiritual strengthening. There is a vast majority – I don't know how to describe the situation there. We know that many, many congregation boards have sent letters on their intent of waiting until these matters are resolved. Speakers and boards are concerned about the situation there. We might want to [think] from our carnal portion [that they are being] deprived of the opportunity to hear God's word, because speakers are not being sent there. But in this day and age it is not something that we need to worry about. The pandemic is showing us that we can have God's word in our pocket with our virtual services every Sunday. We can listen

in the morning, afternoon and evening, depending on the time zone and so forth. It is not something that we need to worry about that there is a lack of God's word being spoken.

The point that I was going to make. Now when so many of those congregations have made a decision to put a pause on sending speakers to Minneapolis. When we think about how the enemy of the soul is using that situation to divide us even further. The situation in Minneapolis requires care of the spirit. As I understand it – I don't have all of the details. I can trust those from whom I have heard and with whom I am akin to the spirit. There are matters there that are not right. They need to be corrected. If we – like Menahga – then decide, we don't care what those other congregations have decided. We are going to go to Minneapolis and ignore what many of the other congregations have done. To me it seems like we would be driving a wedge even further. Shouldn't we be more concerned about those matters that have not been corrected in Minneapolis and try to help with the gifts that God has given to resolve the issue and to seek resolution to those matters that have caused great concern and damage in Minneapolis. It would be good if we could join together with those that have taken that position rather than being critical that someone has not sent speakers. I think the issue of whether speakers are sent or not is just a bit of diversion, because there are plenty of gifts and plenty of opportunities for anyone to hear God's word and even to have fellowship. I am not being critical, but it is my observation. My feeling is that by going against what so many of the congregations have decided – I would have to say in sincerity. For the concern of those matters, it would be good that we don't [send speakers]. I wouldn't muddy the waters by trying to take sides. There's only one Holy Spirit and we should all try to join into that spirit and not point fingers at someone who does not agree with us. These are serious matters. We hope and pray that God can yet enlighten the situation, and the souls that have been deceived could come unto repentance and once again be united in peace and love of God's Kingdom. [3:34:41]

Dave Keranen [3:34:49] I will try to be brief here. Some of my thoughts regarding God's word and the Holy Spirit. I understand how God's word is the highest authority. But I feel that we need to allow the Holy Spirit to work also. We can't, like Nick [Ylitalo] used the example of the lock. Without the Holy Spirit to unlock God's word, we cannot understand it. I have two brothers who are not believing. They are part of the Spruce Grove Church [Federation Group]. I have had discussions with them over the years. We know that the Holy Spirit does not reside there. The Bible does not say this and that you can't do that. The Bible does not say that you can participate in this and that. You can't have a TV in your house. [You can't show]: that is what God's word says. I am a poor example because I should study God's word more and the scriptures. I am not a reader, for one thing. I don't read a lot. It is not my deal. I try to read God's word for Bible class for Sunday School lessons. It is good because it gives me an opportunity to pause around God's word, to study and read the Bible. But I rely on God's Kingdom and the Holy Spirit to lead and for me to understand. We can think of many examples in this world where God's Kingdom through the Holy Spirit reveals these understandings to us, whether participating in sports or going to a rodeo, some of these worldly pleasures of the world. I believe that God's Kingdom through the Holy Spirit has revealed it. Just seeing my brothers who were raised in God's Kingdom. They have become lost and in unbelief without the Holy Spirit. Just recently it was baffling [to see] how they don't understand. Albeit, our discussions do not

last very long, because we disagree. We can't have a long conversation and talk about God's word, because we disagree almost immediately. I know that I brought up the Halloween and trick-or-treating concern at the meeting in January. I believe that it is pretty widespread in Wolf Lake. Some of my kids had talked with some people at school. It is difficult for me to explain to my children why we don't go trick or treating. I simply trust that God's Kingdom through the Holy Spirit has said that it is not a place for a child of God. It is not an activity that we want to participate in. That is all. I want to be brief because it is getting late. I don't know what time Mark [Skoog] wants to wrap it up here. There is still a lot of food here. I suppose we could say that once the food is gone, we could call it a night. Those are just a few of my thoughts for discussion. [3:39:59]

Mark Haataja [3:39:59] I have a number of thoughts. I will try to put them together. I have a thought in regards to the confirmation [school]. It is simply this. The issue has caused so much turmoil in God's Kingdom. Don't you brothers feel a responsibility to visit it – as a board and a congregation. It feels troublesome to say: I don't know. Pat, you are the chairman of the board. You don't know what happened. Isn't there a responsibility to visit about it and try to speak to it? I don't mean to try and put it out in an accusing way. I have been attending board meetings here [in Menahga]. When concerns come up, they are freely visited about. If there needs to be a follow-up, it happens. It is not like it has to happen overnight. Considering Esa's [Vilkama] comment about the word. We consider the written word as God's word. It says the word of God was revealed to the men of God who were inspired by the Holy Spirit [2 Peter 1:19-20]. When we speak that God's word is the highest authority. Through faith we are speaking of the Living Word of God. How is the word living? It is only made alive through the Holy Spirit. Where does the Holy Spirit dwell? It dwells among the flock of believers. It is the precious flock of sheep of which Jesus speaks. Jesus says, I know my own and my own know me. We can visit with other believers, some we have not known in different places. I'm sure many of you have experienced it. Quickly in a few matters we can discuss matters of faith. Our Spirits say amen. We know that they believe the same. Thinking about and pondering Leland's [Lake] question. Faith is a gift. We can't be taught living faith. We can't through instruction somehow figure out how to believe. It is a grace gift. I also remember the teachings of my youth. The teaching in God's kingdom is still the simple instruction to keep faith and a good conscience. Even in these times this has come under attack. Keeping faith in a good conscience – you are now bringing your own works and efforts in front of grace or above grace. I believe that this age-old instruction is from the Holy Spirit. It is an instruction that our parents have given with much love, because they have also experienced the effects of sin and how it separates us from God. It means to simply believe and live by the Gospel. The gospel freely flows from God's kingdom. You can freely ask for it. It is the precious message: can I believe my sins and doubts forgiven. I will have to say that I have had to live by this gospel. My flesh often in the service of God's Kingdom comes out through many doubts. I often have to ask to have those doubts forgiven. Sometimes it seems that I suffer from these things more than others. But I have been encouraged to simply continue to believe and put those matters away. I believe that when the gospel is preached, those sins and doubts are washed away in the sea of grace. Throughout my life this message has been from God's Kingdom. It's still so – keep faith and a good conscience. Put sin away. Believe all sins and doubts forgiven in Jesus' name and blood. For myself I have to say that even tonight my

focus has been on – I have a turn to serve in Monticello this weekend. I ask you, can I hear the gospel? Can I believe my sins and doubts forgiven? [3:47:00]

Mark Skoog: Okay, the hour is getting late. How long do we want to go? [short comment in the background]. I think that it would be nice to meet again. My recommendation is that we wait until the national meeting comes up in May. I would encourage each and every one of us to participate in that meeting. I think it is very, very important. It will be a Friday and Saturday meeting. Try and schedule that you can participate in it. Anyone else have anything? Pat, are you agreeable that you and I will try to schedule something for later? Is that what you brothers want?

Scott Hillstrom [3:48:10]: Just going back to the thought about meeting. It was really nice to have this [meeting] tonight. I'm kind of worried that we have this [follow-up meeting] sooner [rather] than later. I thought back to a couple of years ago when the thought came out – until we meet. I thought that we could have a meeting sooner than this but I am thankful that we had it now. I think, like Dan [Parks] was saying earlier. I have been in conversations with several people outside of the board. I think our focus goes to this issue of serving or not sending [ministers]. Like Dan [Parks] said, I feel that we need to focus on: do we want to help those people wherever they are suffering? If we want to help, then let's not make that the subject. I think that it would be taken care of if we could find unity again. Those things happened after the discussion started. They have become ... they are no doubt an issue. But it feels like they are not the reason. It is like a symptom of what has happened in the past. As a board we have talked about this in this congregation. I have visited with some of my siblings and friends. They have asked: are you going to meet soon? We are hoping that it can be soon. I have always had the hope that it could be soon. I told my father-in-law one time. If you tell the Wolf Lake brothers to call a meeting, I don't mean to say it in a proud way – I said that we will be there. I know that we will be there. You can't put that desire there. I was hoping that their [Wolf Lake] desire would be just like ours. You would want to call a meeting and say that let's visit. I've wondered about those things. Why is it taking so long? I am really thankful that we could have this evening to visit about some of these matters. I look forward to [having] even more. [3:51:22]

Mark Skoog: Okay, anyone else? Otherwise, we will try to wind it down and schedule another meeting. If there is nothing more, let us all join together in the Lord's benediction ... Dear brothers, can I hear the gospel? [break]

Help yourself to coffee and goodies before you go. [3:52:51]