

True Fellowship

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1263

INTRODUCTION

I. THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP (1 John 1:3-7)

What is the basis of fellowship? Is there really a legitimate basis for fellowship? Do we fellowship simply because we're all the same socio-economic status or because we live in the same area. Are we a part of a particular fellowship because we dress the same way, think the same way, or vote the same way? Do we really have a common ground of fellowship or are we just trying to stir up ecumenicalism? Is there real fellowship? Well I think there is. Let's look at 1 John 1 in examining the basis of our fellowship.

A. The Possession of Eternal Life

In 1 John 1:3 it says, "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.*" Anybody in fellowship with Jesus Christ is also in fellowship with anybody else in fellowship with Jesus Christ. This is our common ground. It is not social, economic, intellectual, cosmetic, or anything else superficial. Our common ground is that which is pulsing through the life of every Christian--the heartbeat of God. Our common ground is that we possess a common eternal life and are children in the same family.

B. The Position of Partnership

1. THE TERM KOINONIA

The word for "fellowship" in the Greek is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* can also be translated communion, partnership, or togetherness. The simple meaning of the word is "commonness." Another form of the word, *koinonos*, means "a partner," and *koinoneo* means "to be a partner, sharer, or a partaker." I believe that the fellowship in the church of Jesus Christ is not basically experiential--it is positional. Positionally we are in the fellowship, therefore, we can experientially enjoy one another.

2. THE GOAL OF THE GOSPEL

Look again at 1 John 1:3. It starts out, "*That which we have seen and heard...*" What is John referring to? The gospel of Jesus Christ mentioned in verses 1 and 2. The proclamation of the gospel was not

an end in itself, it was declared *“that you may have fellowship with us... with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”* The goal of the gospel was the creation of a fellowship. The gospel is preached because God wants to draw people into His family and into a family with each other. Truly our fellowship is with each other, with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ. So, the fellowship is a non-experiential fact of partnership. That’s the essence of *koinonia*.

*** Can a Christian be “out of fellowship”?**

I often hear people say, “Well, Brother so-and-so is out of fellowship.” I don’t think that is scriptural. I don’t believe a Christian can ever be “out of fellowship.” If fellowship means partnership, and we came into a partnership with Jesus Christ when we were saved--that partnership is for how long? Forever! You can’t be out of fellowship. To be out on fellowship in the New Testament use of *koinonia* would be to lose your salvation. So when you say, “So-and-so is out of fellowship,” that would mean he lost his eternal union with Jesus Christ. No Christian is ever out of fellowship! “Well,” you say, “how do you describe a Christian who just doesn’t seem to have it?” I John 1:4 says, *“These things (all the spiritual principles of 1 John) write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”* Instead saying, “So-and-so is out of fellowship,” we should say, “So-and-so has lost his joy.” Remember what David said in his prayer of penitence? Did he say, *“Restore unto me Thy salvation?”* No! He said, *“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation”* (Ps. 51:12). You see, the believer doesn’t forfeit the fellowship, because Jesus Christ is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). He also said, *“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Heb. 13:5).

Fellowship is the essence of what happens when you are saved. Joy is the essence of what happens when you obey God’s principles.

C. The Potential of Unity

It’s important for us to realize that everybody who is a Christian is in the fellowship. The basis of fellowship, then, is SALVATION. So there is no excuse in the church for anyone looking down their nose at somebody else in different social or economic situation, or because their IQ is not quite as high as others. If they were all master planned by the divine God of the universe into His church before the world began, they have infinite worth. If they have been master-planned into the body and have entered into the fellowship, then they have all the rights and privileges, and the same common eternal life that you do. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells in them you ought to love them too! That is fellowship! We must realize that we have the same responsibility to everybody in the family of God. There are some in the fellowship who have their little theological distinctions, but the Christian family is not to be separated into denominations--where you get everybody with his little theological shotgun up on his ecclesiastical ivory tower, ready to fire away at anybody who disagrees with him. We are all in the family and the fellowship if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

D. The Point of Contrast

All the way through 1 John, John contrasts the believer with the unbeliever. The first contrast in this epistle is between those who are in the fellowship and those who are out. In chapter 1, verses 5-7, it says, *“This, then, is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”* In verse 5, John reviews the message of the gospel--*“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”* Having stated the gospel, John recognizes that there are two kinds of people within the church: the

“if-we-sayers“ and the “if we doers.“

1. THE “IF-WE-SAYERS“ (v. 6)

The “if-we-sayers“ come along and say, “We have fellowship,” and “We’re in the fellowship“---but they walk in darkness. Therefore, they are liars, because God is light and anyone walking in the darkness can’t be walking in God. Anyone walking in darkness is not a Christian and is not in fellowship with God no matter what he or she says. Verse 6 is referring to non-Christians.

* *Can a Christian ever walk in the darkness?*

I don’t believe a Christian can ever walk in the darkness. I don’t care what you do, if you’re a Christian you’re in God, “*and in Him is no darkness at all.*“ Now, you can do the deeds of the darkness, but you do them in full light. God sees, you see, and the church is to act in discipline. But all Christians are always walking in the light. Consider the following:

1) Acts 26:18

Paul was called by the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of the Gentiles, “*and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*“ Salvation is turning someone from darkness to light. Therefore, all Christians are always walking in the light.

2) 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5

“*But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness.*“

3) Colossians 1:12-13

When we were saved, we were *made “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,”* and were “*delivered... from the power of darkness.*“

4) John 8:12

Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.*“

No Christian at any time is ever in the darkness. If you’re in the fellowship, you’re in the light. Now you may choose to sin in the light, but you’re doing it in full light, with full responsibility and full manifestation before God and your own conscience.

2. THE “IF-WE-DOERS” (v. 7)

Verse 7 refers to Christians - those who walk in the light. In the Greek, the verse literally reads, “*But if we are the ones walking in the light as He is in the light, then we are the ones having fellowship...*“ In other words, the fellowship is made up of people who are saved and redeemed--people who know God. We’re the ones who have had the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanse us from all sin.

What’s the basis of the fellowship? Salvation.

II. THE NATURE OF FELLOWSHIP (Acts 2:41-47)

The basis of fellowship is salvation; the nature of fellowship - TOGETHERNESS. Once a Christian is in the fellowship he or she has some interesting responsibilities, and they can all be summed up

under the term “togetherness.” The early church at Jerusalem illustrates this point. According to Acts 2:41, 3,000 people were saved and baptized on the first day-- the birth of the church. These 3,000 people “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (v. 42). Here we find a beautiful picture of togetherness. As soon as the church was born it had fellowship. Looking at this text we will see that this church had two main elements to its togetherness:

A. They Were All Saved

1. SIGNS OF THEIR SALVATION

a. Steadfastness

Verse 42 says that these 3,000 new believers “*continued steadfastly*.” It is the people who continue that are genuinely saved.

1) John 8:31

“*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed on Him, If ye continue in My word then are ye My disciples indeed.*” Continue steadfastly is a sign of real salvation.

2) 1 John 2:19

“*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*”

True believers continue!

b. Growth

The genius of the early church in Jerusalem was that they were all redeemed and they all continued. The legitimacy of their salvation gave impetus to the church so that the church grew and “*people were added daily*” (v. 47). In fact, later on in Acts it says that the religious leaders got so upset with them that they said, “*You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine*” (5:48). In other words “You’ve literally taken over the town with you teaching!” Well, that’s what they were supposed to do! The early church was together, first of all, because they were saved. Secondly.

B. They Were All Sharing

Verses 44-45 exemplify a sharing church, “*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold* (lit. “were selling”) *their possessions and goods, and parted* (lit. “were parting”) *them to all men, as every man had need.*” Now didn’t take all their money; dump it in a big church pot and dole it back out so that everybody would live on the same basis: That would be Communism. What it is saying is that these people, out of their togetherness, were selling possessions to give money to people when they had needs. There was a tremendous sensitivity! In fact a man named Barnabas sold a piece of land to get the money to meet somebody’s need (Acts 4:36,37). They had a wonderful, loving, sharing response to each other. They had all things in common. The result? There was a “*gladness and singleness of heart*” (v. 46). The character of the early church was that they cared for each other and hungered for fellowship and love. Simply stated: The key to unity in the church is fellowship; the key to fellowship in the church is love; and the key to love in the church is humility. What is the key to humility? Philippians 2:3-4, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*”

Humility is when you see others better than yourself and sacrifice for them.

The basis of fellowship is salvation. The nature of fellowship is togetherness.

III. THE SYMBOL OF FELLOWSHIP (1 Cor. 10:16, 17)

The symbol of fellowship is found in verses 16 and 17 of 1 Corinthians chapter 10. What is it? COMMUNION.

A. The Remembrance

The symbol of our fellowship is the cup and the bread as it pictures the act which provided the basis of our fellowship--the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Luke 22:19, "*This do in remembrance of Me.*" The Communion which reminds us of the death of Christ, then becomes the symbol of our fellowship. But, I believe there's even more to it than that ...

B. The Reality

In 1 Corinthians 10:16 Paul says, "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (fellowship) of the blood of Christ. The bread which we break, is it not the communion (fellowship) of the body of Christ?*" I believe when we come to the Lord's table, we literally commune with the living, resurrected Christ. Communion is not just a remembrance, it is a literal fellowship with Christ and every other believer gathered there. When I go to the Lord's table, I almost feel like one of the Apostles gather about the table at the Last Supper the night before Jesus as crucified. Jesus is the host and we're at His table communing with Him. We're all at the same level and we all come to the same table because the Lord died for us all. It's the symbol of our fellowship, visualizing Christ as the head, and the family all gathered together to partake of the cup and the bread.

C. The Renewal

When anyone comes to the Lord's table they must face their sin. According to 1 Corinthians 11:27-34, you are not to come to the Lord's table unless you come worthily. If you come unworthily, you bring upon yourself the chastening (Gr. *krinna*) of the Lord. In other words, you can't say that you want to celebrate the cross while you're entertaining sin in your heart--that would be a mockery. How could you entertain the very sin for which He went to the cross? So, Communion is a purifying thing.

IV. THE DANGER TO FELLOWSHIP

What is it that fouls up the fellowship? What is the real danger to fellowship SIN! Since God is holy and cannot look upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13), sin violates our relationship with Him. It doesn't put us out of the fellowship, it just messes it up.

A. The EFFECTS of Sin on the Fellowship

1. IT RESTRICTS PERSONAL JOY

When we sin, our relationship with God is violated but not terminated. Let me illustrate: We have four children. Most of the time they're pretty good, but now and then they misbehave. However, no matter

what they do, or how many times they're disciplined or spanked, or how severely they violate the relationship they have with Mom or Dad by disobedience, they are still our children! So it is with God. Hebrews 12:6 tells us that His children are the ones he chastens. When we sin we do not lose our relationship, we just lose the joy of it!

2. IT RETARDS THE MINISTERING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

When we sin, our sin affects everyone in the fellowship. This is because sin prevents us from exercising the spiritual gift that the Holy Spirit has uniquely given each one of us to minister to the body.

3. IT REMOVES THE POSSIBILITY OF CAUSING JOY IN OTHERS

When you sin, you lose the joy of your salvation; and if you don't have joy, you can't help to cause joy in someone else. I'm not saying that your sin is unforgiven, because that's not true! According to 1 John 2:12, "*Your sins are forgiven for His names sake.*" But when you continue in sin without dealing with it, repenting of it, and turning from it, you put yourself in a situation where you violate the fellowship with God and with other believers. It's not a question of salvation, it's a question of the fullness of joy in that relationship and the fullness of potential for ministry to one another.

B. The EXCISION of Sin in the Fellowship

Sin shatters the unity of the body of Christ. This is why when a Christian sins, he is to repent--it affects the entire body. The procedure for dealing with a Christian who doesn't repent is given in Matthew 18:15-17, "*If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector.*" If a Christian within the fellowship does not repent of sin, he's to be disciplined. The church can't tolerate it! In fact, there were some in the Corinthian church that sinned so frequently and with such unrepentance that the Lord just took them home to get them out of the way (1 Cor. 11:30).

V. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FELLOWSHIP

The responsibility of fellowship answers the practical questions of "What am I to do to you, with you, for you, and at you to show my fellowship?" I believe the issue of the responsibility of fellowship is delineated specifically in Scripture. I like to call them the "one-anothers" of the New Testament.

A. Confess to One Another

James 5:16 says, "*Confess your faults one to another.*" The word "faults" is the Greek word *hamartia* and should be translated "sins." We are to be open and honest about our sins and confess them to one another. We're all on the same ground, we've all sinned, and we all have the same struggles. We can have an amazing breakthrough when we're open and honest. All Christians ought to have somebody that they can unburden their heart to, who can pray for them in their areas of weakness.

B. Forgive One Another

1. COLOSSIANS 3:13 says, *“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.”* *“Forbearing one another”* has reference to someone who has sinned against you. When they come and confess it, your response is to be forgiveness.
2. MATTHEW 18:21-22 - Peter, feeling very self-righteous and magnanimous, asked the Lord if he should forgive someone seven times who sinned against him. But the Lord said to forgive 490 times, which was a way of telling Peter that he was to forgive indefinitely.
3. 2 CORINTHIANS 2:6-8 says, *“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted by the many. So that on the contrary ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore, I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.”* Paul is saying, in other words, If the guy has confessed the sin – don’t rub it in! Forgive him and “affirm your love to him.”
4. EPHESIANS 4:32 - How much should we forgive? What’s the limit? You are to forgive one another *“even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.”*

C. Hold Up One Another

1. GALATIANS 6:2 says to *“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* This is spiritual sympathy - carrying the cares of others.
2. ACTS 20:35 - Paul says, *“I have shown you all things how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* Paul says, *“Support the weak help them stand up, carry them, and share their burdens.”*

D. Rebuke Sin in One Another

1. EPHESIANS 5:11 says, *“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but, rather, reprove (or rebuke) them.”*
2. 1 TIMOTHY 5:20 says that an elder who sins is to be rebuked before all (cf. Titus 1:13; 2:15)
3. GALATIANS 2:14 - Paul rebuked Peter to his face because he was to be blamed.

The Spirit-filled Christian is under the mandate of God within the framework of fellowship, to rebuke and reprove sin in the life of another believer. In fact, it’s a responsibility of fellowship to go to a Christian who is in sin and tell them that they are sinning against God. We owe it to each other!

E. Restore One Another

When someone is overtaken in a fault (Gk. *paraptoma* = to trip or fall into sin), we are to pick them up, hold them up, and build them up (Gal. 6:1).

F. Care for One Another

Romans 14 tells us that we are to care for the weaker brother.

G. Love One Another

1. 1 PETER 1:22 says that we are to “*love one another with a pure heart fervently*”. The Greek word for “fervently” is *ektenos* which means “to stretch.” We are to stretch our muscle as far as our extremities will reach. This is how we are to love!

2. OTHER REFERENCES: Jn. 13:34; 5:12; Rom. 12:9,10; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 1:9; 2:2; 3:12-14; 1 Thess. 1:3; 3: 12; 4:9; Heb. 10:24; Jas.2:8; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 3:8, 9; 4:8; 1 Jn. 2:10; 3:11ff; 4:7, 11, 12, 21; etc.

H. Comfort One Another (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11)

1. Exhort One Another (Heb. 3:13; 10:25)

J. Admonish One Another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16)

K. Pray for One Another (Jas. 5:16)

L. Edify One Another (Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11)

M. Teach One Another (Col. 3:16)

All of these things are the responsibilities of fellowship.

VI. THE RESULT OF FELLOWSHIP

1 John 1:4 says, “*These things we write unto you that your joy may be full.*” What is the result of fellowship? JOY.

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