

# Fellowship

## John 17:23

Announcements:

- 1) OCC-161 boxes
- 2) Leadership retreat—pray
- 3) Pat Reid's memorial service is November 28 @ 11am
- 4) Irene Knight passed away this week at 106 yrs of age, in her sleep
- 5) Potluck directly following service

We are in our 8th and final week of our '7 Weeks to a Better Body'. We are going to look at 'Fellowship' this morning. In many ways we have glanced at fellowship over the last 7 weeks. And, just by the fact of us coming together to worship by looking scripture, praying, and singing we have to living out part of this very important part of following Christ: fellowshipping together.

I want to tell you a story: Years ago, Leslie Flynn penned a book called, Great Church Fights. In it he chronicled the way people in different churches would go after each other – all in the name of Jesus Christ. A young father heard a commotion out in his backyard; he looked outside and saw his daughter and several playmates in a heated quarrel. When he intervened, his daughter called back, "Dad, we're just playing church!"

There is humor in that, but unfortunately there are plenty of people within the church that do this, but it is not playing...and it is heartbreaking.

This morning we are going to ask what, why, and how of fellowship.

Fellowship simply defined as "sharing in common, partnership, contributing, communion." Our verse this morning, John 17:23 gives us some direction as to what true fellowship is to look like. It says this, "I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."

A couple things I want to point out about fellowship found in this verse:

- It has a basis: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have perfect unity

- Those that are followers of Christ are in Christ
- It has a work: Jesus prays for us to strive towards perfect unity with one another
- There is a result or a goal that comes because of it: So that the world will see Christ in us and see the love of God

May we strive towards perfect unity that is found in Christ. The reality is that we live in a sinful world, so perfect unity won't happen until we are in heaven with Christ, but it is something we can strive for here and now. Paul in Ephesians 4:2 and 3 says, "Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."

Acts 2:42 says, "All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer."

They devoted themselves 'to fellowship.' They strived for unity in Christ. But notice fellowship connotes relationship and partnership. We are in a partnership together. The partnership is centered upon the gospel which is centered on Jesus. It is centered upon the glory of God.

Our commonality is found in Christ. Our commonality isn't found in likes or dislikes, races, intelligence, jobs, hobbies, married, not married, kids or no kids, similar stories or different stories. Our commonality is found in and based upon who God is and what He has done.

Our fellowship is found and based upon the blood of Christ, on what Christ did. Listen to Ephesians 2:14-22

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. Now all of us can come

to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

When we repent of our sin and trust in Christ, the result, according to 1 John 5:20 is that “now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God and He is eternal life.”

Biblical fellowship is only experienced between believers. John Piper said, “Fellowship is a mutual bond that Christians have with Christ that puts us in a deep, eternal relationship with one another.” It’s a relationship in eternity. Think about what that means.

Paul says in Galatians 3:28, “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” There is equality within the fellowship of God. Our equality is based upon Christ alone.

In our verse this morning, Jesus said, “I am in them.” Jesus told us that He would send us the Holy Spirit. John 14:17 says, “He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.” It is the Holy Spirit in us that is the glue that holds us together, that unifies us, and leads us.

So this gives us a basis of fellowship: It is found *in* Christ and our unity is *because* of Christ. Our focus is on what we have in common, Jesus and the new life we have in Jesus.

There is a way we are not to partner together. Paul asks a very important question in 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” Another question could be said like this, “what fellowship does righteousness have with sin?” Biblical, God-ordained fellowship is rooted in righteousness, not sin. This is why it also says in 2 Corinthians that we are not to be unequally yoked.

Fellowship is broken when we give freedom to our sin to grow within us. 1 John 1:6 says it plainly, “If we claim to have fellowship with Him (God) and yet walk in darkness (deceit, sin) we lie and do not live out the truth.”

Romans 8:7 says, “For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will.”

Our fellowship with God is broken when we sin. Our relationship with Him is affected, but please understand it is not ended. Our relationship with other believers is also affected. There now becomes a rift between us. We will have grieved God’s Spirit in us and we will have put a wedge, created a division between us and other believers. This is one of the reasons that Jesus told us if we have a problem with a brother or sister in the Lord to go to him or her and work it out before taking communion.

You ever felt distance between you and God. Almost like He isn’t there or listening to your prayers? Maybe it’s sin that hasn’t been dealt with. You ever felt like just doing your own thing apart from what the church of God is doing? Maybe it’s sin that is growing in you creating a divide between you and the people of God. You ever felt drawn more to people outside the church than inside the church? Maybe it’s sin that has taken root in your life.

However, that being drawn away from people inside the church could be sin that is ignored or blatantly allowed within the church.

Sin is detrimental to the relationship between the people of God. Jesus likens sin to yeast and later Paul does too. It affects the whole bread, not just a small portion of it. That is why Paul tells Timothy to ‘flee from the lustful desires of his youth.’ That is why Paul says in Romans 8 that “letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.” Paul even says in 1 Corinthians 5 to hand an unrepentant person “over to Satan.” God sees sin as that detrimental and that serious within the body of Christ. Paul also says in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 “Take note of those who refuse to obey what we say in this letter. Stay away from them so they will be ashamed. Don’t think of them as enemies, but warn them as you would a brother or sister.”

Sin that is allowed to run rampant breaks fellowship because there is now hypocrisy. Sin breaks up fellowship. Sin creates divides. Sin taints the church and its message. Some of you may have seen the quote I put oil

Facebook, “The purity of the church is its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct, and its degree of conformity to God's revealed will for the church.” Sin doesn't lead to the purity of the church body, but it infiltrates with impurities that eventually will move us from being unified upon the things of God as the center and church becomes man driven and man-centered.

The writer of Hebrews in chapter 3 says, “You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.”

Fellowship is not an internal, personal act. It is very other's focused. My faith and the care I have for my faith has an impact upon your faith and visa versa. My growth in Christ has impact upon you. Your growth in Christ has an impact on me. Your lack of fight against sin has an impact upon me and my lack of fight against sin will have an impact upon you. The way we live out our faith together reveals to the world a truer picture of God or it gives a false picture of who God is. Maybe that is why America has turned its back on God, the fellowship of believers is broken.

Hebrews 10:24-25 gives us a picture of what fellowship should look like. “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Part of fellowship is to stir up one another towards love and good works. The love of God and the good works that God has called us to do.

Fellowship simply stated is this: it depicts an interactive relationship between God and believers who are sharing new life through Christ.

John Piper: True fellowship is less like friends gathered to watch the Super Bowl, and more like players on the field in blood, sweat, and tears, huddled in the backfield only in preparation for the next down. True fellowship is more the invading troops side by side on the beach at Normandy, than it is the gleeful revelers in the street on V.E. Day.

Scripture is full of how we are to fellowship together. Some of the most clear are the ‘one another’ commands. There are over 50 of them.

I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction. (1 Cor 1:10)