

“Fellowship”

Part II- What Does Fellowship Really Mean

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I am continuing the study of “Fellowship.” It has been a lively topic for many years, and promises to continue with new mutations to accommodate the changing views of the church in a denominational world. We need to understand the will of Christ for his people in this sin-sick society. After having shown the contrast between righteousness and unrighteousness, good and evil, and the temple of God and idols, the inspired writer says: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). The admonition of the Bible is to abstain from evil and wrong doing and cleave unto righteousness. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

Definition of the Greek words that translate “fellowship” and related terms:

Koinonia: “common”; “I participate in; I share in.” (W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament words*).

Koinonia: “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse”;
“1. The share which one has in anything; participation; Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor. 13:13-14; Phil. 3:10; Phlm. 1:6, 1 Cor. 10:16; 2 Cor. 7:4; Eph. 3:9.
2. Intercourse, fellowship, intimacy: Gal. 2:9; 2 Cor. 6:14; Acts 2:42; Phil. 1:5; 1 Jn. 1:3,7.
3. A benefaction jointly, contributed, a collection, a contribution, 2 Cor. 8:4; 2 Cor. 9:13; Rom. 15:26; Heb. 13:16.”

Koinonikos: “1. social, sociable, ready and apt to form and maintain communion and fellowship;
2. inclined to make others sharers in one’s possession, inclined to impart, free in giving, liberal, 1 Tim. 6:18.”

Koinonos: “a. a partner, associate, comrade, companion: 2 Cor. 8:23; Phlm. 1:17; Lk. 5:10; Heb. 10:33; Mt. 23:30. b. a partaker, sharer in anything: 2 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 10:1; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Cor. 10:18.” (Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*)

The Definition of the English words meaning “fellowship.” Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language:

Fellowship: “a communion, fellowship, sharing in common; partnership.” 1 John 1:3, 6-7.

Communicate: “to share with another”; (Phil. 4:15; Gal. 6:6; Rom. 15:27); “a good deed” (Heb. 13:16).

Communion: “to have in common, partner, joint participation,” (1 Cor. 10:16; Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor. 6:14). “Joint suffering,” (Phil. 2:1).

Contribution: “to share with another” (Roman. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13).

The word “Fellowship” itself does not say what the nature of the partnership is, or who is involved.

Fellow: “partner, comrade.” 1. originally, a person who shares; partner or accomplice. 2. a companion; associate. 3. a person of the same class of rank; equal; peer. 4. either a pair of similar things; mate. 5. a graduate student who holds a fellowship in a university or college. 6. a member of a learned society. Other obsolete definitions.

Ship: “a suffix added to nouns (or, rarely, adjectives) to form nouns meaning: 1. The quality, condition, or state of, as in fellowship, friendship. 2. a) the rank, status, or office of, as in kingship, governorship. b) a person having the rank or status of, as in lordship. 3. ability or skill in, as in penmanship, leadership.”

Fellowship: “1. companionship; friendly association. 2. a mutual sharing, as of experience, activity, interest, etc. 3. a group of people with the same interest; company; brotherhood. 4. an endowment, for the support of a graduate student in a university or college. 5. The rank or position of a fellow in a university or college.

Communion: “1. a sharing; possession in common; participation. 2. a communing; sharing one’s thoughts and emotions with another or other; intimate converse. 3. an intimate spiritual relationship. 4. A group of people professing the same religious faith and practicing the same rites. 5. a sharing in, or celebrating of, the Eucharist (Holy communion).

Just What is Meant by “Fellowship”?

“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” (1 John 1:7).

Jesus prayed for his disciples “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me” (John 17:21). In spite of the prayer of Christ, the religious world is not united; and further, there is not unity among those who have obeyed the gospel and who profess to be New Testament Christians.

The question of *unity* and *fellowship* has proved to be one of the most serious issues to arise among those who seek the restoration of the ancient order. We are all aware of divisions which have occurred among those who profess to believe the restoration plea:

- 1) About the middle of the 19th century problems arose over the missionary society and instrumental music which brought about division. In 1906 the division produced the listing in the census of the United States of the Christian Church and the church of Christ. This division occurred over the instrumental music issue and the Christian Missionary

Society, and reconciliation seems impossible because we have two standards of authority, and the Christian Church will not give up either of the dividing wedges.

- 2) In the 1930s and 1940s there arose divisions over the question of premillennialism. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Debated Charles M. Neel on the subject of Premillennialism (The reign of Christ for a literal thousand years) June 6-9, 1933.
- 3) Congregations also divided over such questions as classes, women teachers, literature, and in later years, church support of orphan homes, sponsoring church cooperation, playgrounds, and social gospel church activity.
- 4) At the present time a division of even greater proportion looms large before the church with respect to liberalism, modernism, lax attitudes toward the inspiration and authority of the scriptures, and, interestingly enough, over the question of fellowship itself.

It is mandatory that we examine the teaching of the scriptures on this vital subject. It is a theme about which we can expect to hear more and more in the years ahead.

How Koinonia is Used in the New Testament

Fellowship is translated from the word **koinonia** which is defined: association, community, joint participation, the share which one has in anything.

- 1) **Acts 2:42**, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and **fellowship**, (koinonia) and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
- 2) **Romans 15:26**, “for it pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make certain **contribution** (koinonian) for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.”
- 3) **1 Corinthians 1:9**, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the **fellowship** (koinonian) of his son Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- 4) **1 Corinthians 10:16**, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the **communion** (koinonia) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the **communion** (koinonia) of the body of Christ?”
- 5) **2 Corinthians 6:14**, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what **fellowship** (koinonia) hath righteousness and unrighteousness?”
- 6) **2 Corinthians 8:4**, “Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the **fellowship** (koinonian) of the ministering to the saints.”
- 7) **2 Corinthians 9:13**, “Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal **distribution** (koinonias) unto them, and unto all men.”

- 8) **2 Corinthians 13:14**, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the **communion** (koinonia) of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”
- 9) **Galatians 2:9**, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of **fellowship** (koinonias); that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”
- 10) **Philippians 1:5**, “For your **fellowship** (koinonia) in the gospel from the first day until now.”
- 11) **Philippians 2:1**, “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any **fellowship** (koinonia) of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies . . .”
- 12) **Philippians 3:10**, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the **fellowship** (koinonian) of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”
- 13) **Philemon 1:6**, “that the **communication** (koinonia) of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”
- 14) **Hebrews 13:16**, “But to do good and **communicate** (koinonians) forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”
- 15) **1 John 1:3**, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have **fellowship** (koinonian) with us: and truly our **fellowship** (koinonia is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”
- 16) **1 John 1:6**, “If we say that we have **fellowship (koinonian)** with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”
- 17) **1 John 1:7**, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have **fellowship (koinonian)** one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin.”

From these passages in which *koinonia* is used we may conclude that there are acts of fellowship exhibited in at least four areas. These may be summarized in the following manner:

1. *Communion*: the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 10:16).
2. *Community of goods*: that in which the disciples shared in their needs (Acts 2:42).
3. *Contributions*: funds for the needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem. A sharing with others in this manner is fellowship (Romans 15:26).
4. *Cooperation*: working together, encouraging, such as extending the right hands of fellowship (Gal. 2:9).

In all of these uses of the word, however, the basic idea of **participation** or **joint-participation** is present; it is a **sharing** by Christians of the common bond which they enjoy in Christ.

Fellowship necessitates:

1. The **Nature** of sharing or participating.
2. **Law**: rule, stated or implied of sharing or participating.
3. **Purpose**: the action of sharing or participating.
4. **Relationship** of those sharing or participating.

What Does “Fellowship” Really Mean?

How should we use the word “fellowship” in expressing Bible teaching and practice? To whom does Bible “fellowship” apply? When, Where and How should we use the word “fellowship” in a scriptural sense? These questions and more demand a Bible answer.

“*Fellowship*” does not mean the same to everyone. In this generation it is used in different ways, meaning different things, thus having reference to some people “*fellowshipping*” other people they believe are wrong religiously. That forces us to the conclusion that *fellowship* is often used of “acceptance” rather than “sharing, “partaking,” “association,” “community,” “communion,” or “joint participation,” even if we believe they are walking contrary to the doctrine of Christ. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

People become angry and resentful when some who will not accept their views and practice of doctrinal issues suggest that they can not have “fellowship” with them as long as they walk contrary to the word of God. Their anger does not come from the fact that they say they do not agree with their teaching and practice; it comes from the fact that they say, “we can have no fellowship with you as long as you teach and practice unscriptural doctrines.” That means you consider them scripturally wrong, therefore, in a lost condition. That is what men resent when told that you cannot have “fellowship” with them because of their false doctrine and practice. That is why some brethren labor so hard to develop a way to let erring brethren who teach and practice false doctrines be accepted into “fellowship” with the saints.

No one can take a few passages of scripture and develop a doctrine that is in conflict with other clear passages and claim it is from God. The denominational world is filled with false ideas that claim to have come from the word of God, but they did not.

For example the gospel according to Mark says: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). I just wonder if anyone reading this paper has any problem understanding what this passage requires of one who wants salvation.

Mark 16:15 says to “preach the gospel to every creature.” How one can misunderstand that plain statement is beyond me. It says to “preach the gospel.” That eliminates every other doctrine of any kind by any person. NOTHING but the gospel of Christ is authorized by Christ to be preached. That

gospel is revealed only in the inspired word of God. No creed of man, no doctrine of antiquity, no vote of humanity, no declaration by any judicial or political power can change or modify in any way or to any degree the gospel of Christ and claim it to be the gospel. The pure gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It **MUST** be preached to **EVERY** creature (man or woman) in all the world until the Lord comes again. The gospel of Christ is at the center of the fellowship issue. That is not difficult to understand.

Then the next verse says, “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mk 16:16).” That seems easy to understand. First, it required *faith*. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Second, “He that . . . is baptized.” Does anyone not understand what baptism means? It is described as a burial in water and a resurrection to a new life. This fact is found in a number of passages in the New Testament. But his passage says the one who believes is to **be baptized**. So far the passage says, “He that believeth and is baptized . . .” Not one single passage in the word of God annuls that commandment in the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But go on: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . .” What did the Holy Spirit say? “He that believeth and is baptized **shall be saved**.” Who shall be saved? Who did the Holy Spirit say would be saved? This is very important! The answer is: “He that believes and is baptized . . .”

Do you know what doctrines have come from this passage? Some creed books, manuals, and disciplines say it means: “He that believeth is saved and may be baptized;” “Repent and believe to be saved, then be baptized;” “Be baptized as an infant, then believe and be confirmed;” “We are justified by faith only, before and without water baptism.” Perhaps there are many other “interpretations” of these verses, but they are all wrong because the passage does not say what these creedal statements allege. The passage teaches but one doctrine, no more. An alien sinner must hear the gospel of Christ, repent of his sins, and be baptized.” That applies exactly alike to every creature on the face of the earth. That is what Mark 16:15-16 plainly teaches, and the fact that other religious leaders teach other views from these verses does not change it one iota. It makes no difference what other verses may be read from any part of the New Testament, they do not contradict this passage. It always teaches the same thing, and any other interpretation from other verses that contradict this passage is wrong. The word of God is not contradictory. The truth and only truth will make men free (John 8:32). Truth is singular; it is one way only.

I want to use these same principles on another passage. We are talking about “fellowship” in a scriptural sense. A dozen different ideas are taught about “fellowship” with Jesus Christ and with the saints. The conclusions of some of them permit, even obligate, a Christian to have fellowship with one who teaches and practices a false doctrine. I do not believe this is taught in the New Testament. I do not believe one can have fellowship with another who is walking in sin.

Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be ye not therefore partakers (summetochos - W.E. Vine) with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: Walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness

and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:6-11).

Ephesians 5:7 says: “Be not ye therefore partakers with them.” *Partakers* is a word that translates “fellowship.” See Ephesians 3:6: “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same promise in Christ by the gospel.” “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partakers of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). “Partakers” in this verse is from “koinoneo” which means “to have a share of, to share with, take part in” (W.E. Vine). That is the definition of “fellowship as used in many passages in the word of God.

This verse 7 plainly says NOT to be PARTAKERS with them. Them who? This means not to share in, or participate with, or become partners with in any of their works. It means not to have fellowship with them in any way. “Be not ye therefore partakers with them.” There is not a more simple and clear statement in the word of God.

But someone says, “This is a list of immoral deeds, and immorality is what we are not to have fellowship with.” Well, Simon the sorcerer committed just one sin after being baptized after the preaching of Philip in the city of Samaria. He tried to purchase with money the power to lay hands upon people and give them the gift of the Holy Spirit as Peter and John had done. Having been a sorcerer, this power had a great appeal to him. Now, because of this one sin Peter pronounced this condemnation upon him: “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:20-23). Peter told Simon that he was “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” This was a sin of trying to purchase a spiritual gift and appropriate this divine gift to his personal use.

I am trying to show how the word translated “partakers” in this verse forbids being partakers (having fellowship) with any of the sins stated in verses 3-5: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting, whoremonger, unclean person, and a covetous man, who is an idolater. All these sins are committed by persons. The people who are guilty of these sins are those with whom we are not to be “partakers.”

Ephesians 5:8 says, “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” What is the significance of “darkness” and “light”? *Darkness* is used of literal darkness of night, the absence of light. It is used in this verse, according to W.E. Vine, “by metonymy, of those who are in moral or spiritual darkness; (g) of evil works, (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11).” It identifies all that is opposite of light. On the other hand, *Light* signifies the very opposite. It is used metaphorically as the light of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). It signifies the dwelling place of God (1 Tim. 6:16); and the very nature of God (1 John 1:5). It signifies Christ in the world (John 1:4-5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:25,36,46; Acts 13:47). It signifies the word of God, the gospel of Christ (Psalm 119:105).

We are delivered by the gospel from darkness to light (Acts 28:18; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:13). As light opposes darkness, the light refers to the truth of the gospel; darkness refers to the influence of evil and ignorance that blocks out the light. Read John 3:19-21. Those who have become Christians have been in darkness but have come into the light of the Lord by obeying the truth of God and by walking in it. To “walk” in light is to live in the truth. One does not simply move into the light; he is to “walk” in the light. To “walk” in the truth is to walk (live) in Christ by obeying his word and nothing else. By the obedience to the gospel one is “delivered from the powers of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Walking in the light is walking in Christ by obeying his word. Walking in darkness is walking according to the course of this world and disobeying Christ in some respect (1 Peter 2:9).

As God is light, and Christ is the light of the world, his disciples are instructed to walk in the light of God’s truth. (Matt. 5:14; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:16; Psa. 43:3). The word of God directs us into that light (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23; 1 John 1:5; James 12:17; John 1:4; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). After obeying the gospel we are directed in the light by the wisdom from above; by the revealed word of God. It comes no other way (Eph. 2:10; 4:1,17; 5:2,15). We must obey the truth of God to be in the light (1 Thess. 5:5,8; John 12:35-36; Luke 16:8; 1 John 1:6-7

Ephesians 5:11 teaches to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. Lawlessness is sin! All that is not of faith is sin (James 4:17). Faith is what is revealed in the word of God, but something that men believe. Some believe a lie and are damned. It is the truth that makes men free (John 8:32). I may honestly believe something that is not taught in the word of God. But my sincerity does not put me in the light of God’s word. Paul was sincere before he obeyed Christ, but he was still in darkness and in his sins. “And Paul earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1) The fact that he had lived in good conscience (always thought he was doing right) did not guarantee that he was right. He was not dishonest; he thought he was right when, in fact, he was wrong. He said, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). He thought he was right, but he was wrong.

Again, Paul spoke of himself in these words, “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief: (1 Timothy 1:13). Paul left all this when he obeyed the truth and was baptized into Christ.

This statement in Ephesus 5:11 says to “have NO fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. The Holy spirit also says to “reprove” these unfruitful works of darkness. What is meant by the “unfruitful works of darkness”? Unfruitful is barren; without any fruit that is acceptable. It is the fruit of “darkness.” We can learn something about darkness from 1 John.

The Holy Spirit said, “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” (1 John 1:3). That which was revealed by the apostles is necessary to have fellowship with them and with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. That word of that message that was declared unto us affirmed that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Since “darkness” is in absolute contrast with “light,” and since God is “light” and in Him is no darkness at all, whatever

“darkness” is, it is completely contrary to the nature and essence of God. God is truth, and in Him is no lie. In Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

We must walk **in the light**, as He **is in the light** to **have fellowship with Him**. Now if I must walk in the light to have “fellowship with Him, every other person must also walk in the light to have fellowship with Him. That makes us all ONE. If not, why not?

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