

Essential Truth

2. The Fellowship

Stark Road Gospel Hall

July 31st 2002

I. Meaning of Fellowship

A. Definition

- 1) Sharing in common (1Jn. 1:3)
- 2) Participation in something (1Cor. 10:16)
- 3) A partnership (Php. 1:5)
- 4) A pledge of support (Gal. 2:9)
- 5) A money-gift of support (Rom. 15:26;12:13; 2Cor. 8:23)
- 6) “The merging of human spirits in the enjoyment of God-given privileges, and a sharing of experiences of Christ Himself” A. Stenhouse.

B. Biblical illustration of fellowship

- 1) Peace (fellowship) offering (Lev. 3:1-17)
 - a. Sacrifice of Christ is the basis for fellowship
 - b. The person bringing the offering, the priest and the Lord all have a share of the sacrifice.
- 2) Table of Showbread (Ex. 25:23-30)
 - a. God’s dwelling place is where He has fellowship with His people; it is where He has spread His table
- 3) Mephibosheth eats at David’s table (2Sam. 9:1-13)
 - a. High privilege of fellowship
- 4) Lazarus at the table with the Lord Jesus (Jn. 12:1-4)
 - a. Fellowship is one of the primary privileges and activities of a believer along with worship and service
- 5) The Lord at the hearts door desires to have fellowship with us (Rev. 3:20)
 - a. Christ’s desire for fellowship with His people

II. Fellowship with God

A. With the Father and the Son (1Jn. 1:3, 1Cor. 1:9)

- 1) Established by receiving the Apostolic message about Christ (1Jn. 1-4)
- 2) God shares His life with us and He shares Himself with us.
 - a. Fellowship is knowing the Father and the Son (Jn. 17:3)
 - b. Fellowship is being in the Father and in the Son, “*That they also might be one in Us*” (Jn. 17:21)
 - c. Fellowship is the Father and Son being in us, “*I in them, and thou in Me*” (Jn. 17:23)

B. Fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2Cor. 13:14; Php. 2:1)

Lessons

- 1) Our fellowship with each other flows out of our fellowship with God
- 2) Fellowship with believers is the pinnacle of human relationships. What could be greater than redeemed human beings mutually enjoying God Himself and His truth?
- 3) God wants us to enjoy Him with other believers, “*that you also have fellowship with us*” (1Jn. 1:3)

III. Fellowship of Salvation

- A. Partakers of grace (Php. 1:7)
- B. Common salvation (Jude 3)
- C. Common faith (Titus 1:4)
- D. Fellowship in the body and blood of Christ (1Cor. 10:16)
- E. Fellowship of the Mystery (Eph. 3:6-9)
 1. **Fellow** heirs, of the **same** body, and **partakers** of His promise in Christ (Eph. 3:6)
- F. Fellowship of Christ’s sufferings –bearing reproach for Christ (Php. 3:10)

Lessons:

- 1) There is a fellowship that exists between all believers regardless of where they gather or their spiritual maturity
- 2) Enjoyment of fellowship with other believers depends on our spiritual condition and our understanding of God's word (1John 1:4)
- 3) Fellowship is not the same as friendship. Friendship develops over time, whereas I can enjoy fellowship with a believer who I don't know.
- 4) The Lord Jesus was a friend of sinners but He didn't have fellowship with sinners.

Challenge:

- 1) Are believers able to have spiritual discussions with me?
- 2) Do people feel free to share what they have enjoyed from God's word with me?
- 3) Do I share what I have enjoyed from God's word with other believers?

IV. Assembly fellowship (Acts 2:41-47)

A. Distinct and subsequent to the fellowship entered into by all believers at the moment of salvation

1. Gladly received His word (salvation)

- a. This is the moment positional fellowship is established
- b. This is the moment a person becomes the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13)

2. Were baptized -first step of obedience and public identification with Christ

3. Added unto them -reception into the local church

4. Continued steadfastly in:

a. The Apostle's doctrine -inclusive now of the whole New Testament

b. The fellowship

- 1) The definite article 'the' in the original proceeds the word fellowship indicating that it was a defined entity
- 2) Doesn't say they continued steadfastly as members of the church, but in the fellowship indicating that there was active participation and a sharing of both responsibilities and privileges of being a part of the local church.
- 3) The fellowship follows the doctrine because it is based on sharing common doctrine.

c. The breaking of bread

- a. This is the Lord's Supper which is one of the primary meetings of an assembly
- b. In addition to a remembrance of the Lord it is a physical expression of our fellowship with Christ's death and it expresses our fellowship with believers, "*We who are many are one*" (1 Cor. 10:16,17)
- c. Celebrated by the assembly. It is a privilege of being in the fellowship. Participants are those in the fellowship (Acts 20:6-12, 1Cor. 11:17-34)
- d. **The Prayers** -critical activity of a local assembly as it expresses the complete dependence of the assembly on God for power and preservation.

5. Practical expressions of fellowship (Acts 2:44-46)

B. The assembly is a doctrinal fellowship

1. Indicated by the order in Acts 2:41,42
2. Assembly is the pillar and ground of the truth (1Tim. 3:15)
3. God appoints elders in the assembly with the primary responsibility to feed and guard the flock of God. They are to guard against false teaching that could creep in and destroy the assembly (Acts 20:28-31)
4. Doctrinal error is to be corrected in an assembly and those bringing wrong doctrine are not to be received (1Tim. 1:19,20; 2Jn. 10; Rom. 16:17; Rev. 2:14,15)
5. There were common practices in all the churches (1Cor. 11:16)
6. All in the assembly are to all speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same mind (1Cor. 1:10)

Lessons:

- 1) Those who are a part of the fellowship must not only be saved and baptized but they must continue in the Apostle's doctrine.
- 2) Not a fellowship based merely on believers being in the body of Christ
- 3) It would not make sense to receive those into the fellowship who do not hold all of the Apostles doctrine if the assembly is the pillar and ground of the truth. What truth would be proclaimed and maintained?
- 4) If a denominational believer wants to come and participate in the assembly meeting for a Sunday and then return to his or her denomination then he or she is not continuing steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and the fellowship. Those who should be received are those who intend to continue.
- 5) Believers don't need to be theologians to be in assembly fellowship. They only need to have a teachable spirit and to accept the truth that the assembly holds.

C. An Exclusive fellowship (1Cor. 10:14-22)

My friend invites me for a Sunday to his denominational church, should I go? Paul establishes a principle in 1 Cor. 10 that gives us guidelines.

1. The principle: Participation in a religious service establishes fellowship with the whole system.
 - a. Participation in the Lord's Supper expresses fellowship with the Lord, v16
 - b. Participation in the sacrifices established fellowship with the alter, which stood for the whole sacrificial system. Paul is showing the principle that any kind of participation establishes fellowship with the system, v18
 - c. The Corinthians were eating in pagan temples, which established fellowship with demons which were behind the idols, v20
2. The Lord's Table versus other tables, v21
 - a. A table stands for fellowship. The Lord's table is where He has made provision for us and we come and enjoy that provision. It is a table where He is Lord and His Lordship is acknowledged. It is the fellowship of His Son that we read of in 1Cor. 1:9. The Lord's Supper is one of the provisions of the Lord's Table. It is bigger than the Lord's Supper but does include it.
 - b. There are other tables or fellowships.
 - 1) There is the obsolete table of Judaism which in Hebrews believers are called on to come out from. They are to go unto Him without the camp (Heb. 13:12,13).
 - 2) There is the table of demons and Paul says you cannot partake of the Lord's Table and the table of demons
 - 3) All the professing churches within Christendom represent tables or fellowships. The question is where is the Lord's table? The Lord's table is where He is Lord of the fellowship. It is where all the New Testament teaching is carried out. Just because the mechanics of the Lord's Supper is carried out in a religious group doesn't make it the Lord's table.

Lessons

- 1) Participation in a "church" service establishes fellowship with the whole system
- 2) My responsibility is to eat at the Lord's table. I don't want to provoke the Lord to jealousy by eating at a table of demons, or a table that is obsolete, or a table of human organization, or a table where His Lordship is not fully acknowledged.

D. Reception to the fellowship

1. Initial Reception
 - a. Only those saved and baptized and who accept the Apostles doctrine (Acts 2:41)
 - b. Must be morally and doctrinally fit (1Cor. 5; 2Jn. 10)

- c. The level of knowledge is not important. What is most important besides being saved and baptized is that the person has a teachable spirit and has some understanding of his or her responsibilities.
- d. The pattern in the NT is that those received continue steadfastly. If a denominational believer comes and wants to fellowship this Sunday but go back to the denominational church next Sunday, then he or she would not be following the pattern of continuing. The same holds true for a person with no religious affiliation.

Lessons

- 1) Reception is to the fellowship of the assembly, not to a particular meeting of the assembly such as the Breaking of Bread
- 2) The expectation is that there will be continuation

2. Reception of visitors from another assembly (Rom. 16:1,2; Acts 20:7)
 - a. The person is received to the fellowship of the assembly not merely to the Lord's Supper. The visitor can actively participate in all of the assembly meetings.
 - b. Should be commended by letter if unknown (Rom. 16:1,2; 2Cor. 3:1)
 - c. Should receive the same care as if permanently in that assembly, "*Assist her in whatever she has need of*" (Rom. 16:2)
 - d. The visitor is ultimately responsible to his or her home assembly but is also subject to the guides of the assembly being visited. In Acts 15 when certain men came from Jerusalem to the Assembly in Antioch with erroneous teaching, the issue went back to the assembly in Jerusalem.
3. Permanent reception from another assembly
 - a. Essentially the difference between being received on a visiting basis and a permanent basis when coming from another assembly is that the person being received is responsible fully to his or her new assembly of residence and no longer to the assembly he or she left.
 - b. Letter of commendations are used to give assurance to the receiving assembly that the believer being received is indeed in the fellowship and in good standing (Acts 18:27)
4. Reception of one who has been put out of the fellowship (2 Cor. 2:3-11)

E. Responsibilities of fellowship

1. Participation. That the assembly is referred to as the fellowship implies that it was not merely a sharing of a common salvation and doctrine but a sharing of responsibility and work. In Christendom often what ought to be a shared responsibility is hired out to a professional who comes and teaches, preaches, leads the worship, prays, visits, and councils.
 - a. Sharing in prayers (1Tim. 2:1-8)
 - b. Sharing in priestly act of leading the assembly in worship (1Peter 2:5; 1Cor. 14:16)
 - c. Sharing in teaching (1Cor. 14:26-33; 2Tim. 2:2)
 - d. Sharing of burdens (Gal. 6:2, 1Cor. 12:26)
 - e. Sharing of resources (Acts 2:44-46; Rom. 12:13; 15:26)
 - f. Sharing of work (Acts 6:1-6; Php. 1:5,27; Rom. 16:3,6,9,12,21)
 - g. Using our gifts to serve and build up others (Rom. 12:6-13)

Lessons/Challenge:

1. Am I truly in fellowship, or am I only in fellowship nominally?
2. Am I in fellowship because my friends and family are, or because it's a spiritual fellowship where I can enjoy with other believers all of God's provision?
3. Being in the fellowship involves work
4. Being in the fellowship requires moral and doctrinal purity
5. Being in fellowship is the highest privilege that can be experienced on earth

