



“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,” I John 1:7.

Fellowship

Lesson Aim: To set forth the fact that believers find in Christ the basis of fellowship with one another.

L447. Date: March 1976. **Text:** I Corinthians 1:9-13; Philippians 2:1-5.
Topic: Church Covenant; Fellowship: Of Believers.

Covenant: “We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love . . .”

“What is fellowship?” The question was proposed to the Junior class in Sunday 'School. A lad thoughtfully replied, “I guess it means two fellows in the same ship.” In a sense, he was right. Fellowship means “mutual sharing, a common relationship.”

Fellowship expresses itself in many areas of life. It is seen in fraternal orders, political parties, athletic teams, and other groups. People share fellowship because they are interested in the same things, working toward the same goals, sharing in the same ideals.

The finest of all fellowship is Christian fellowship. It is enjoyed by those who share a common relationship to Jesus Christ. That is the fellowship which believers enjoy in the church.

The church is “the body of Christ” in a particular locality. Members of the church are each members of “the body of Christ.” Each belongs to Him, and each is joined to Him. By virtue of their common union with Christ, they are joined each to the other. As members of His body, they are members of one another.

The Apostle Paul drew an analogy between the physical body of man and the spiritual body of the church (I Corinthians 12:12-28). He showed

how each member ministers in behalf of every other member and for the good of the whole body. He emphasized that each member is important, has a function to perform, and is depended upon by the rest of the body. That is how it is in the church. Be an active and cooperative member of the church in the same way you want each member of your physical body to perform well. Maintain the fellowship of your church!

I. FELLOWSHIP SHARED (I Corinthians 1:9, 10)

Christians are so different. They differ in age, interests, wealth, education, citizenship, language, culture, and in so many other areas when seen in terms of the flesh. How can people so different ever live together in peace and harmony? The answer is answered simply in Ephesians 2:15. God makes “one new man” out of the differing persons who trust Jesus. Their human differences are obliterated by their spiritual oneness established in Jesus Christ.

That is what Paul meant. **“God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,”** verse 9. How does one enter Christian fellowship? God calls him into that fellowship. What is the secret of that fellowship? It is “the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” Christian fellowship is established upon the basis of mutual relationship to Jesus.

When Christians live in fellowship with one another, they are acknowledging a common relationship to Jesus Christ which was established by God when they were saved. When Christians break fellowship, they are ignoring their common relationship to Jesus Christ which was established by God in salvation. It is important, therefore, that Christians live in fellowship with one another as a testimony of their redemption in Christ.

Christian fellowship is not always permanent. Differences arise among brethren. It is the duty of each believer to guard and maintain fellowship with other believers. How is that fellowship maintained? Paul declared that it is by guarding one's speech, watching against divisions, sharing the same thoughts, and reaching the same decisions as one's fellow Christians (verse 10). It takes work to maintain fellowship.

One great part of Christian fellowship is association with believers. Everyone has known persons who have been dear friends at one time in life; but when years and miles separated them, the dearest friends lost interest in one another. The same often occurs in the spiritual realm. That is one reason that God commands believers to keep on meeting together, strengthening and encouraging one another (Hebrews 10:25). Church attendance is

important to church fellowship. One way by which one can maintain the fellowship of his church is by faithful attendance at her meetings for study, prayer, and worship.

God wants your fellowship to be strong and vital. He is faithful in His relationship to you. He expects you to be faithful in your relationships with other believers. In that manner alone will true fellowship be experienced.

II. FELLOWSHIP BROKEN (I Corinthians 1:11-13)

It is possible for fellowship to be broken, even among Christians. Broken fellowship always indicates a backslidden heart. Broken fellowship must break the heart of God.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “. . . **It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren . . . that there are contentions among you,**” verse 11. How tragic! How it must have broken the apostle's heart to hear of it. How it must have grieved the Spirit of God to witness it, convict of it, call to repentance for it, and yet be rebuffed by its continuation.

Fellowship will be broken when it is based upon preferences among men. Look at that case in Corinth. What was the problem? The church was in a fuss over preachers! God forbid, but it was true. Some were saying, “I am of Paul.” Others declared, “I am of Apollos.” Yet others insisted, “I am of Cephas.” Still others piously announced, “I am of Christ.” Can you imagine believers breaking their unity in Christ by their preferences for preachers? **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God giveth the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one . . .”** I Corinthians 3:5-8. Believers could fall out with one another over Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, but those brethren were in fellowship. When preachers become more important to Christians than Christ, broken fellowship results. When Christ is of most importance to Christians, full fellowship is enjoyed. Be careful that you do not become a party to broken fellowship in your church or association by your being “for” or “against” any person.

Broken fellowship ignores the unity of believers in Christ. “Is Christ divided?” Who was crucified for you — Christ or your favorite preacher? In whose name were you baptized — Christ's or Brother So-And-So's? If you were saved through faith in Christ and baptized in the name of Christ, why let preacher preferences break your unity in Christ? “. . . **As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . for ye are all one**

in Christ Jesus,” Galatians 3:27, 28.

III. FELLOWSHIP RENEWED (Philippians 2:1, 2)

How can broken fellowship be restored? Believers may renew their devotion and loyalty to Jesus Christ. Each Christian bears a relationship on two planes. On the horizontal plane, he shares fellowship with men. On the vertical plane, he shares fellowship with God. Fellowship on the horizontal plane is the result of fellowship on the vertical plane. Any time a believer is out of fellowship with another believer, it is an indication that he is out of fellowship with God. The way to restore fellowship with a brother is to strengthen fellowship with the Saviour.

A great blessing attends true Christian fellowship. The believer enjoys a strengthening, consoling and encouraging of his spirit as a result of his mutual dwelling in Christ with other believers (Philippians 2:1). No one grows to spiritual maturity alone any more than one member of the physical body could grow to physical maturity alone. Separate a finger from the body, and it ceases to grow, even ceases to live. Separate a believer from the fellowship of other believers and he, too, ceases to grow. Strength is derived from fellowship with other Christians.

Think about what you share in Christ with your fellow believers. There is encouragement from your relationship to one another in Him. There is the persuasive incentive in love. There is participation in the Holy Spirit which believers share in common. There is deep affection and compassionate sympathy each for the other. What blessings are yours in Him!

Live in the light of your blessings. Let the mind of Christ govern each believer. Let the purpose of God guide each life. Let the love of the Spirit (Romans 5:5) motivate and control each spirit. The result will be glorious. Each believer will live in full accord with every other believer. The harmonious mind, intention, and action of Christians will be a vibrant testimony to the world of the reality of Jesus Christ in the lives of men. Let your life reflect your privilege of being a Christian.

Examine the terms Paul used to describe the relationship of believer with believer: “consolation, comfort, fellowship, mercy.” Under the illumination of the Spirit of God, honestly examine your life by asking the question, “Does that describe my attitude and actions toward my fellow Christians?” No one else can answer for you, but the Holy Spirit will reveal the answer to the sincere heart. If you do not meet that standard, ask God to make you that kind of Christian.

IV. FELLOWSHIP MAINTAINED (Philippians 2:3-5)

“Do nothing motivated by a factional motive or party spirit.” That is the principle set forth in Philippians 2:3. Any motivation in that area is immediately suspect and should be abandoned at once and forever.

Contentiousness, strife, selfishness, conceit, and empty arrogance are so contrary to the spirit of Christ that the believer knows to flee from them.

A. Do not follow the course of pride (verse 3). Think how often the fellowship of the Lord's church has been broken simply because someone was filled with pride. Pride began with Lucifer's desire to set his throne above the stars of God in order to be like the Most High (Isaiah 14:13). Each instance of pride in human experience arises from the same satanic source. No wonder God commanded, **“Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory . . .”** verse 3. Watch for that attitude in you life.

“That was my plan. I thought of it. It was not right for the pastor, or committee, or church not to follow it.” That is sinful pride speaking. “I was ignored. I worked hard, but no one noticed it.” Pride speaks again.” After teaching that class all these years, they elected another teacher and kicked me out,” Pride again! “I will take the office and do it better than anyone else. I will show them what I can do.” Sinful pride once more. Watch out!

B. Keep free of the Spirit of selfishness (verse 4). Each Christian should be as concerned about the interests of others as he is about his own affairs. To live for self alone is to live in a spirit contrary to the spirit of Jesus. He gave Himself for others even to the point of going to the cross to die for the guilty. God will not expect you to go to death, but He does expect you to live unselfishly. Insist upon your rights and privileges, and you will be miserable. Live in the spirit of serving others, and you will be happy.

C. Sacrifice fleshly ambition (verse 5). “Let this same attitude and purpose and (humble) mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus — Let Him be your example in humility.” That is the way the Amplified Bible expresses Philippians 2:5. It is a simple call to the sacrifice of self for the good of others and the glory of God.

What is the example of Jesus? Philippians 2:6-8 explains. He was the very essence of deity (possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God), but He did not consider that equality with God a thing to be selfishly grasped and retained at all costs. He voluntarily surrendered all the privileges of deity so as to become a bondsman in being born as a human being. He not only humbled Himself in appearing in human flesh; He further abased Himself by going to the extreme experience of death. More than that, His death was by crucifixion — the most horrible and shameful of all

methods of execution. His death was in the stead of sinners whose guilt He carried as if it were His own. What an example of personal sacrifice!

Are you willing to follow the example of Jesus in order to maintain fellowship in your church? Would you endure a slight (accidental or intentional) rather than raise a fuss? Would you be overlooked and uncomplimented, forgiving and forgetting, rather than to set one member of the body against another? Would you assume the spirit of a servant rather than to insist upon the privileges of the master? The answer to those questions will indicate the extent of your spiritual maturity.

Fellowship! What a blessed spirit to enjoy with one's fellow believers and fellow members. It is worth all it may cost to establish and maintain.

Review the teachings of the lesson. (1) Fellowship is based upon believers' unity in Christ (I Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 2:1). (2) Fellowship may be broken by sin (I Corinthians 1:11). (3) It is the duty of each Christian to maintain fellowship with other Christians (I Corinthians 1:10). (4) Broken fellowship is absurd and sinful (I Corinthians 1:11-13). (5) Fellowship is maintained when believers follow the example of Christ (Philippians 2:2, 5). (6) The Christian spirit is one of selflessness upon which all fellowship is founded (Philippians 2:3, 4). Having learned those truths, go forth to practice them in your church.

Questions

1. What is fellowship?
2. How does church fellowship differ from Christian fellowship?
3. What does I Corinthians 1:9 teach about fellowship?
4. Why is fellowship sometimes broken?
5. How does believers' unity in Christ restore broken fellowship?
6. What blessing attends fellowship (Philippians 2:1)?
7. How can Christians guard their fellowship from disruption?
8. What does Jesus' example teach about selfishness?
9. How can you improve the fellowship of your church?
10. What does it mean to you to be a member of "the body of Christ" in your community?