

What is Fellowship?

By Michael Clark

Recently I had a wonderful chat with a sister on the Internet. We were talking about what does and does not make up "fellowship."

What is Christian fellowship? John wrote, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:7-8, NKJV). It would seem that the fellowship of the saints is defined by our walking in the light as Jesus did. And how did He walk? He walked in communion with the Father and did only what He saw the Father doing and spoke only what He heard the Father saying.



So then, if we as individuals are walking in the light of the Father as Jesus did, then we are also His sons as Jesus is and it is out of this fellowship with the Father that we also have fellowship with one another. Think how rich that fellowship would be if all were in tune with the Spirit of God as we should be. One person's light would be illuminating and kindling the other person's, until all were brightly shining and freely moving under the anointing of the Spirit.

Now we hear this word "fellowship" thrown around rather loosely in Christian circles. We have "fellowship meetings," "fellowship halls" and even "fellowship dinners," but a meeting or a building does not a fellowship make.

Paul spoke of the knitting together of the saints as the body of Christ. He used this analogy to define what our relationship is to Christ and to one another. In his teaching there was no room for any exclusiveness among the saints. In fact he said that it is the duty of each of us to lift up the weaker brethren until we all are on a common plane in unity with the Father.

I remember the day a brother in the Jesus People found an old hymn and grabbed his guitar and taught it to us. The words of the hymn were as follows.

In Christ there is no east nor west,
There is no north or south,
Just one great fellowship of love
Through out the whole wide earth.

Something about that song grabbed my heart. I knew that there was more truth in those words than I had yet seen in practice in the Church.

So then, how does Paul's analogy of our fellowship in Christ to the human body enlighten us as to how we relate to one another? In 1 Corinthians he writes, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually; if one member suffers, all the members suffer with [it]; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with [it]."

If you were to drop something like a clothes iron on your toe, would the rest of your body ignore the pain in that toe and keep on standing on it? I think not. You would grab your toe with your hands and hop around in circles on one foot, crying out in pain! That is, unless your body has leprosy or some other sickness that keeps the pain centers from sensing what is happening to its members.

How often have you seen a member of the body of Christ with whom you have "fellowship," suffering from unemployment or sickness and not come to their aid? I have seen this type of non-feeling leprosy take over in the body of Christ from the leadership down. Much of it came in with the so called "prosperity doctrine."

This teaching has people focus on getting rich by giving to the pastor or visiting minister. After all, does not the Bible say, "Give and it shall be given unto you"? Everything goes to the professional ministers. The needs of Lonnie Lunchbox and Wanda Widow are to be met by giving what little they have to the professional preachers.

Is this how it was done in the early Church? What happened there? Did the apostles and prophets harangue the new converts about giving money to them so they could live in luxury as it happens today? Let's look at the text.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47, NKJV).

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:32-35, NKJV).

I am afraid that this is a sad indictment of where the Church of today has fallen short and why it is powerless in the world by which it finds itself surrounded. Notice the sense of "body" here among these people. When they saw a member suffering, they did what they could to bring that suffering to an end and then they all rejoiced together just like your healthy human body functions. Do you say to your squashed toe, "Stupid toe! It is your sin and lack of faith that has brought this upon you. 'Be warmed and filled. I will pray for you.' Now get with it and support the rest of the body." No, you nurture it and even take the load of the body off of it as necessary until it is healed.

Notice that the monies gathered in the above passage were laid at the apostles' feet. The apostles never put it in their pockets! Look at the sequence of these verses.

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45, NKJV).

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them

his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." (Acts 3:1-6, NKJV).

No, the money was not collected to build a garish building to worship in or to pay the professional ministers' salaries. It was there for all in the body who had needs so that "none was lacking."

On another note, have you ever noticed how we in the western Church sever relationships so quickly over almost any offence that comes along? Paul wrote, "[The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'](#)"

Can you cut off your wounded toe and not have any feeling or consideration for it? Yet this is what we in the western Church do every day. We isolate from one another at the drop of a hat. I once heard that there are over 6,000 "Christian" denominations in the US alone, not including all the so-called non-denominational churches. Face it folks, we are not a body, but a fractured fairy tale that starts out "Once upon a time and far, far away." What we have today masquerading as the Church is not, and for the most part, is not what Jesus and Paul had in mind.

The same sister that I have spoken of wrote: "I think I know what I have been feeling. I'm feeling left out, ignored, like my portion is not valuable. And it's a very familiar feeling, and I don't like it."

The whole system and even our so called "services" are set up to make us feel insignificant, second class citizens in the kingdom of God. We still have that unbiblical division of clergy-laity that separates the body of Christ in our minds and makes us all feel like our portion is not valuable. Even when no clergy are present in our fellowship, we vie for position and power over one another. Lord help us all.

Paul used the word "need." Do we really *need* one another as one member of your body needs another? If you answered, "Yes," then why is it that each of us spends so much of our resources trying to be independently secure, instead of freely sharing the things we "own" with one another? Or do we just need others to satisfy our lust for position, money and power and even sex? I have a hard time seeing the difference between what is called the Church today and any other worldly organization.

I remember how disillusioned I was when I found that the Church was just as dysfunctional as my birth family was. I had thought that I had at last found a real family love relationship that was always missing as I was growing up. I soon found out that the words of love I was hearing were for the most part empty words designed to attract the weak, but not to fulfill their needs.

I think that there is an underlying cry for intimacy in each of our hearts that is not being fulfilled. Wives long for it from their husbands and are not getting it, so they spend hours watching soap operas and reading romance novels. Husbands often look for it from their wives and end up in pornography or an affair. Children join gangs to get what is missing at home. Girls fall prey to predators looking for that touch from daddy that is missing. The world is a mess because we do not know how to show intimacy. And intimacy is only safe in the heart of Christ as His heart is manifest through us.

Intimacy Must First Be with Jesus

The sister went on to say,

"Your fellowship must be with Him, and theirs must be with Him, and mine must be with Him, and together we must look to Him. And not become weak by weak faith that looks to man; we must look to Him because as we do, we will see how trustworthy He is and our faith will increase in Him and it is our faith that overcomes the world...."

"As Madam Guyon was told, 'You're looking for something outside that is within you.' When people who are grounded in Him come together, the fellowship will be there automatically.

"As one writer said, 'We don't find the body by looking for the body, we find the body by holding fast (to) the Head.'"

She is so right. As that pop song said, we are all "looking for love in all the wrong places." Paul said, "holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase [that is] from God." Jesus is the head from whom we are nourished and knit together and it is in this vertical knitting that we will all grow and be knit together horizontally.

She continues, "My vision is that as each of us gets lined up with the Lord (under His headship) right where we are, in the situations He has given us, He will put us into the body as it pleases Him. Although I haven't always experienced it, the peace and comfort were unspeakable when I did have this experience of coming under my husband as he came under Jesus, etc., and then of meeting with other saints in the same way: all of us under His headship. That's all I see as necessary now. If we will let Him be the Head (of every aspect of our lives, as He grants us light) He will bless us whether we're meeting with other saints or not. And we'll know we are blessed. We won't have to look for someone else to make us feel better. Then when He does bless us further by bringing other saints into our lives, we are full and ready to minister to them, not weak and tired and hungry and in need."

Paul spoke this thought again in Ephesians.

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16, NKJV).

First the head, then the body, every member doing its part and growing as it edifies itself in love. This is the answer.

This sister went on to tell me a story of something she experienced not long ago. She wrote:

"He wants us to ask Him and seek for Him and knock at His door... many give up too soon. I had a good example just last week.

"I was expecting an email or a PalTalk chat with someone, and it was important to me and I didn't know when it would be happening, so I left them both on all day. And all day my ear was turned to my computer. Listening for each little sound. Even (when) I would try to sit and spend time with the Lord I would jump up and run to my computer if I heard it, and leave the Lord sitting there. So I turned it off a couple times out of conviction.

"But it showed me where my heart was. If my heart was that much for knowing Him and hearing His voice, I would spend my days with an ear to Him that way. I want to live that way."

I answered, "*That* is what 'waiting upon the Lord' means. That is where we will find our strength being renewed."

So, it appears then that the lack of true heart felt love and fellowship that I spoke of earlier in the body of believers is a result of a lack of a true and heart felt love relationship with Jesus.

So, saints, thanks for bearing with my ramblings and pondering. I know what I must do. To find what I long for, I must continue to seek His face first and not that of a human.

Father, change our selfish hearts and give us new ones, hearts that truly love your Son the way you do. Then Father we will have the witness in our fellowship with the saints as did the infant Church in the love they shared those many years ago. Amen.

May the Lord bless and keep you as you seek Him out in your daily lives.