

FELLOWSHIP EXAMINED

As we saw last week, fellowship is often confused with normal expressions of fellowship. The breakdown doesn't seem consequential until people become confused over corrective church discipline.

Fellowship with each other is very important. As soon as they became Christians, the new disciples continued steadfastly in fellowship (**Acts 2:42**). If our fellowship with other disciples is not what it ought to be, then we lose our fellowship with God (**1 John 4:12-5:3**).

Fellowship in Christ includes having the same unselfish attitude toward each other that Jesus has toward each of us. Fellowship is sharing, and we must share with Jesus the same selfless attitude (**Philippians 2:1-11**). This passage in Philippians begins by saying since there is fellowship in the Spirit, we are to be like-minded, having the same love, one soul, one mind.

In Christ, fellowship means we share several other things. These are listed in **Ephesians 4:4-6**. We worship the **same God**, with the **same faith in His Son**. Based on that faith, we have been baptized with the **same baptism** for the same purpose. This baptism is by the **same Spirit** into the **same body** (**1 Corinthians 12:13**) where we have been added by the Lord Jesus in order to help each other grow and eventually get to heaven, our **common hope**.

All collective actions of the church are fellowship. What we do together in the assembly, even the act of assembling, is fellowship. We join our hearts and voices together in singing. We sing to the Lord but also teach and admonish each other (**Colossians 3:16**). We join our hearts and minds together as one leads us all in praying to our Father. We join our minds together to learn from the word of God (**Acts 2:42**). We gather together as a church to take the Lord's Supper (**1 Cor. 11:17-20**). When we partake (the verb form of "fellowship"), we **proclaim** the Lord's death to the ones **next to** us in the assembly (**1 Cor. 11:26**).

The collection is fellowship. Anything done with the collection, even outside of the assembly, is fellowship (**1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:4; Philippians 4:14-16**). By contributing to the collection, we share in whatever the church does with the money. If the collection is used for unauthorized things or in an unauthorized manner, then we have fellowship with iniquity (unauthorized activity). Each of us is responsible for knowing how the church uses the collection. We are to prove (test) all things to hold on to what is good and to avoid what is evil (**1 Thess. 5:21-22**). Just going along without knowing is not excused by God.

On an individual basis, the principle of support would still apply. **2 John 9** warns of those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ. They do not have God (they don't have fellowship with God). **2 John 10-11** is directed to us not to support or encourage such false teachers. **Verse 11** clearly warns that if we do help them or encourage them, then we have fellowship with their evil deeds (and forfeit our fellowship with God).

We have other ways to strengthen fellowship with Christians. **Acts 2:42** mentions fellowship in the context of spiritual, collective activities, while **Acts 2:44-46** describes the behavior of the Christians that reflected their new fellowship. They shared what they had, including their homes (**v.46**). This involved spending time together (**v.44**) and eating in each other's homes (**v.46**). Not only did they spend time in each other's homes; they did it gladly with everyone feeling the same way about each other (**v.46**). Others had possessions they sold so they could help needy saints (**v.45**).

This lifestyle of fellowship, which attracted the favor of outsiders (**Acts 2:47**), is not an option. **Galatians 2:11-21** shows us how expressions of fellowship are necessary for fellowship. Without them, actions (or lack of actions) send the wrong message. The proverb says that actions speak louder than words. This is true not only of actions and words carrying the same message; it is true when actions contradict the verbal message.

This is how Peter and the other Jews erred. They taught the right doctrine that Gentile Christians were equally acceptable to God as the Jewish Christians (**Gal. 2:1-10, Acts 15:1-29**). Peter's actions were consistent with that teaching when he associated with the Gentile brethren when he came to Antioch (**Gal. 2:12**). However, when certain other disciples came to Antioch, Peter and the rest of the Jews (even Barnabas) withdrew themselves from the Gentile brethren. As Paul said in his rebuke of Peter, this was the same as telling the Gentiles that they were second class Christians or, even worse, sinners (**v.15**).

Though eating is not fellowship in and of itself, a lack of such association with faithful Christians is an indication of a lack of fellowship. It is important for us to be involved in the kind of fellowship God wants us to have, and for us to strengthen by our involvement with each other.