

“Fellowship”

Philippians 1:1-6

In 1773 a young preacher at a small, poor church in Wainsgate, England was offered a job at a larger, wealthier church in London. As he loaded his wagons for the move, many of the congregation came to bid him and his wife farewell.

There were many tears during the loading process.

During the good-byes, his wife Mary cried “John, I cannot bear to leave”

The preacher, John Fawcett, replied “Nor can I”

So they unloaded the wagon and stayed for another 54 years.

After that experience John wrote a hymn

The name of that hymn was “Blest Be the Tie that Binds”

Today I want us to think for a few minutes about one of the greatest of all Christian relationships...our fellowship in the gospel. (vs. 5)

Usually when we think of “fellowship” we tend to think of potluck dinners and social events after our worship times.

Those are good and important, but I’d like for us to go much deeper as we think about this thing called “fellowship”.

Fellowship is defined as participation, association and sharing...
It is a union under a common cause.

In Philippians 1:5, Paul uses an interesting phrase

He says “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, **for your fellowship in the gospel** from the first day until now...”

The word translated “fellowship” here in some versions and “participation” in others is the Greek word “koinōnia”

It means association, community or joint participation.

Our highest goal in life should be to please God to one day join Him in Heaven... and our fellowship plays a big role in reaching that goal!

One of the keys to our fellowship is our sameness in purpose!
 1 John 1:7 says “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”

There are at several different ways this unity that is described in the New Testament

I would like to take a look at just a few of those examples:

First, Fellowship has to do with a singleness of heart!

Don't you think people enjoyed keeping their money and property as much in the first century as we do today?

We hold on to our things. We see them as ours, and we are not very quick to give them up.

Look at Acts 2:44-47

“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.”

The early church obviously had a singleness of heart that fed their fellowship. They helped one another

They were joined beyond just an association; they were unified in purpose.

And that attitude caused the church to grow!

They shared with one another and even with other congregations to carry out the work of spreading the gospel!

Next... we have One Hope!

In Ephesians chapter 4 Paul gives 7 essentials for unity among believers when he lists things of which there is only one.

He declares that there is “one hope of your calling”. (Eph. 4:4) that is what ties us together.

When our country was attacked on September 11, 2001 we saw people working together in ways we would have never imagined previously, but now they had a common cause!

And Christians should be drawn to love one another by the cause that we all share.

We join together with Jesus, who frees us from our sin and gives us our hope of Heaven.

It is “the tie” in the song we sing “Blest be the tie that Binds”

Colossians 2:2 says “their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love...”

We have but one hope, that hope is in Jesus the Christ!

Fellowship is all about a **common cause**

The third chapter of Ephesians begins, “For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles...”

Paul was speaking of the cause of Christ...

The cause of saving souls

The cause of keeping the church strong

This cause was **the** driving force in Paul’s life

He writes in Philippians 3:13-14

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but **this one thing** I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”

As Christians we are to enjoy this fellowship of the Gospel because we all believe in “The Cause”.

Our preaching and teaching ought to be designed to create this kind of individual and collective commitment to the Truth.

We have a common cause and we are **one family**.

In my years as a Christian I have noticed a trend that bothers me a bit...

When I was a young man in the church we called each other brother and sister... I don't hear that too much anymore. I think we need to get back into that habit.

Remember what Jesus said about this? "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"
Matthew 12:50

By the way, the word *brother* is in our New Testament 104 times, and most of the occurrences have **nothing to do with blood kin!** It is most often used in reference to the fellowship that we have in the Gospel.

Then too we discover that... We Are One!
Paul, in 1 Corinthians, dealt with a problem of Christians following men...
What is his lesson to them?
His message is one of "Fellowship in the Gospel"
"Now he who plants and he who waters are **one** and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." I Corinthians 3:7

We are ONE in the gospel!
Many...joined together as one, with a single heart,
A single hope ...
A single cause
Because of the Gospel, we have become a Christian unit, a fellowship of believers.

Now let's take a minute to consider some things that **contribute** to our fellowship.

1 We need to “Challenge our members to study the Bible”

It is not enough to know what we believe.

Genuine conviction comes when we know **why** we believe it.

We are told to be ready to give an answer for the hope we have

We must make our faith our own... and when we do that, we will be drawn ever deeper into a special fellowship with others of like faith and that will create love between us.

Public school teachers have curriculum and plans in for their classrooms... and we need goals in our own Bible study.

Remember what the inspired Paul tells Timothy in 2nd Timothy 2:15
 “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

We need to challenge memorization among our members!
 In ministering to children we challenge them to memorize Bible verses... We need to make the same challenge to our adults!

David writes in Psalm 119:11 “Your word I have hidden in my heart,
 That I might not sin against You”
 Memorization of God’s word can prevent us from sinning!

Next... we need to take seriously the challenge of getting Christians together **outside of worship**.

Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”.

Now... how can we bear one another’s burdens if we only see one another across the room in worship?

The answer is simple ... we can’t!
 That gives real meaning to gatherings outside of our worship times.

Christians need to be together often to be close.

I think one of the ways that Satan has hurt us in connection with our possessions is by feeding us the idea that we cannot have others into our homes without careful planning and everything in the home being just right... it is not a home inspection, it is fellowship!

We need to stop making excuses and start inviting other Christians into our homes, and we need to stop making excuses when we are invited! It should be a priority!

There is something special about being with people who love Jesus.

In Titus 2 beginning at verse 12 Paul records these words to Titus: "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present age, **looking for the blessed hope**, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ".

We need to be together... looking for the blessed hope and encouraging one another to hold on!

Then... Sacrificing for the cause of Christ develops fellowship among believers.

When I was younger, my Dad and I stopped at a red light beside a car with a big engine
When the light turned green we were treated to a screeching sound as the young man behind the wheel peeled out
My father looked at me and said "He does not buy his own tires."

The point he was making was that a boy who sacrificed to buy a car, and the tires on it, would be more cautious and show more concern. Sacrificing for things will cause us to place value on them.

And so it is with the church and the fellowship of the Gospel.
If I have put my time, my heart, my prayers, and energies into the fellowship of Christ, I will value it highly.

And our leaders do well when they challenge the church to sacrifice.

You know it must be said...Something else that builds the fellowship in the Gospel is our faithfulness to worship.

Remember what Paul taught about the assembly in Ephesians 5?
 “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things to God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting to one another in the fear of God”

And Hebrews 10:23-25 tells us NOT to forsake those assemblies in part because **they build fellowship**

Our fellowship is also strengthened by Promoting Communication between Christians:

Things like writing of letters of encouragement!

Those letters and cards not only make us feel good, they do much more...

They express that we are on the same team, that our hearts are connected, and that we care about each other.

Don't wait until someone is sick or dying; send them a note of encouragement just to encourage them!

If you want to mess with your elders this week write them a note and tell them you appreciate them... they have probably never had that happen!

Notes, calls and cards can express the joy of fellowship we have in the gospel.

Let's also take a minute to consider a couple of Things that can **hurt our fellowship**:

It seems strange to me that Christians would do things that destroy the fellowship... but we do...

When that is done, we are destroying the very thing we should be working hard to develop and grow.

What kinds of things can you think of that damage our fellowship?

One of the first things that comes to my mind is often referred to as “Church Politics”

You see...sometimes, people in the church develop a loyalty to others and accusations are made about other individuals or other congregations of the church.

Some people will believe what is said without any further investigation.

In their minds, because a particular brother or sister said it, it must be “the truth.”

Now, I am not discounting the value of heeding a caution...but some folks in their thirst for attention or position can lose their balance! Then they find themselves in the unhappy position of having verbally bloodied someone!

What must the Lord think of that?

Think also about what a negative impact it has on **our fellowship, our communities, and our evangelistic efforts!**

I traveled for OVU as Director of the Center for Church Care...

I meet with brethren from New England to Delaware and from Kentucky to Michigan.

I will tell you that some of the conversations that I heard were harmful to our fellowship. We must not **listen to**, or **participate in**, that kind of talk!

That kind of behavior is contrary to God’s plan... it destroys our fellowship!

Proverbs 26:20-21 says “Where there is no wood.... the fire goes out and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases!

As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.”

Let's never feed those fires!

Then ... Materialism destroys our Fellowship

You know our possessions require attention.
 Money needs investing, Lands need managing, Houses need repair,
 Businesses need employees and payrolls.
 But sometimes in our stewardship of those things we can lose our
 focus without even realizing what has happened!

I suspect that in many of our congregations there are those whose
 obligations to this world take precedent over the obligations of the
 next.

And if we are focusing our thoughts on the material things of life we
 are not going to be too interested in the fellowship of people who do
 not share those priorities.

The last thing I would suggest in this listing of things that harm the
 fellowship is...

Adults who are half-hearted in their service to the Lord!

Our children are recording the words and the actions of parents and
 other adults.

Sometimes what they are learning is that fellowship is unimportant!

Children can see that other things are more important to their parents
 and grandparents by the words and actions of those individuals.

Let me ask:

What kind of dedication is there going to be in the next generation of
 our families?

Joshua said in chapter 24 verse 15

“Choose this day whom you will serve” As for **me** and **my**
household, we will serve the Lord”

Today...Let me challenge each one of us to love the Lord

To love His church
And let's be sure we teach our children the importance and the joy of
our fellowship!

Fellowship in the gospel!

What a great blessing...

Let us determine to grow our fellowship... and to protect the
fellowship in the gospel