

## Essential Truths I: Living With God

# 14

## Fellowship

One of the marks of the Christian life is the quality of relationships experienced with other Christians. The Bible calls this ongoing commitment of relationship between believers “fellowship.”

### Read Acts 2:42

Note that the early believers “*devoted themselves...to the fellowship.*” The *King James Version* describes how they “*continued steadfastly...in fellowship.*” *The Message* probably sums up the meaning of fellowship the best by phrasing **Acts 2:42** in this way:

“They committed themselves to...the *life together.*”

In **John 17:20-23**, Jesus’ prayer reveals God’s plan for the kind of fellowship he desires:

“My prayer is...that all of them may be one, Father, *just as you are in me and I am in you.* May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: *I in them and you in me...*”

This prayer of Jesus, just prior to his crucifixion, reveals the depths of his heart and the desire for his Church to experience true fellowship. This fellowship is described by Jesus in terms of two things:

- The *quality* of fellowship
- The *basis* of fellowship

### ***The Quality of Fellowship***

“...*just as you are in me and I am in you.*”

Our fellowship together is linked to the quality of fellowship experienced between

The Word

God

Origins

Jesus

The Cross

The Blood

Resurrection

Repentance

Faith

Grace

Water Baptism

Holy Spirit

Temptation

**Fellowship**

Generosity

Kingdom of God

Worship

Prayer

Eternity

Second Coming

The Call

the Father and the Son. The depth of this love and unity is outworked by the Holy Spirit as we meet in regular fellowship. Christian fellowship then becomes a reflection of the fellowship of the triune Godhead. Just as Jesus could describe himself as one with his Father (**John 10:30**), so we are called to be one *together*.

After describing the quality God has planned for fellowship – “just as you are in me and I am in you” – Jesus goes on to describe that quality of fellowship with these words:

“May they be brought *to complete unity* to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

The high standard that God sets for fellowship is truly amazing – it is nothing less than complete unity! In fact, God’s standard against which he measures true fellowship is so high, it can only be fulfilled in one way – through the power of God’s Spirit!

### ***The Basis of Fellowship***

“...*I in them and you in me.*”

Christian fellowship only works because we have the same Spirit, making us one body. It is only because Christ is in us, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, that we are able to relate to one another in the same way that the Father and the Son relate to one another.

#### **Read Galatians 4:6**

This is a description of how your life has been linked to the relationship that Christ has with his Father. We now echo the prayer of Jesus himself, who calls out, “Abba, Father” (**Mark 14:36**). But God never intended this to be an individual expression. This same prayer – “Abba, Father!” is now echoed *corporately* by the body of believers together! It is only as we experience the depth of true fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit, that we are then able to experience true fellowship with one another.

#### **Read 1 John 1:3**

## **The Body of Christ**

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 12:14,20**

Paul constantly describes both the quality and the basis of our fellowship in terms of being “the body of Christ.” In **1 Corinthians 12:12-13**, Paul declares:

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

God has a goal – not just for your life in an individual sense, but for the body of

believers together.

### Read Ephesians 4:13-16

It is important to understand that as members of the one Body of Christ, we already *have* unity in Christ. This unity is defined by the very fact that we are part of his Body. In **Ephesians 4:3**, we are told:

“Make every effort to *keep* the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is *one* body and *one* Spirit – just as you were called to *one* hope when you were called – *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

From the foundation of this “oneness” in Christ, we are now encouraged to move toward:

- The unity of the faith
- The unity in the knowledge of the Son of God

Once these two expressions of unity is attained, through the working of God’s Spirit, we will...

“...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

## Meeting Together

But for this to happen, we must meet together! **Hebrews 10:25** gives every Christian a vital injunction:

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Much of what is called fellowship today is little more than attendance. It is not just “meeting together” that is important, but it is “meeting together” and “encouraging one another.” This is what real fellowship is all about – a fellowship based on:

- A common commitment (**Romans 12:10**)
- A common love (**John 13:34**)
- A common focus (**Philippians 2:1-2**)

## The Early Church

The first century Church was an example of practical fellowship in action. They experienced their fellowship by:

- Sharing all things (**Acts 4:32**)
- Laying down their lives (**Romans 16:3-4**)
- Serving one another (**1 Corinthians 16:15**)
- Building up one another (**Romans 1:11-12; Colossians 1:28-2:2**)
- Being a channel of supply (**2 Corinthians 8:14; 1 Corinthians 16:17**)
- Sharing in suffering (**Philippians 4:14**)
- Giving sacrificially (**2 Corinthians 8:2-3**)
- Practising hospitality (**3 John 5; Hebrews 13:2**)
- Giving totally of themselves (**1 Thesalonians 2:8; 2 Timothy 3:10-14**)

Through this quality of fellowship, two vital things happen:

- The believer grows in Christ (**Ephesians 4:15-16**)
- God is glorified to the world (**John 13:35; 17:23**)

## **Walking in the Light**

John links true fellowship with the phrase “walking in the light.” In **1 John 1:6-7**, he writes:

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.”

True fellowship embraces the need to be open with one another. This is not something that is a prerequisite for fellowship. Rather it is a result of the trust that develops out of fellowship. This kind of transparent fellowship includes:

### ***Removing the pretenses***

#### **Read 1 Peter 1:22**

So much of the world’s “fellowship” is hypocritical – acting out a role. We can only know people to the extent to which they are prepared to reveal themselves. As we take off the social masks that we put up as barriers between each other, true fellowship begins to have an effect on each person. The love of Christ can then be expressed, not just in word, but from the heart.

#### **Read 1 John 4:7,11-12**

### ***Confessing our sins to others***

#### **Read James 5:16**

Part of our fellowship to one another is a mutual sense of responsibility. When we confess our sins to each other, this is the highest level of trust. We can then become the instruments of God’s forgiveness and cleansing to one another.

### ***Forgiving each other***

#### **Read Colossians 3:13**

For us to experience the continual flow of God’s forgiveness into our lives, we must forgive one another.

## **Results of Fellowship**

In **Acts 2**, we see that true fellowship results in:

- An awe of God (**2:43**)
- Glad and sincere hearts (**2:46**)
- Favor with all the people (**2:47**)
- Addition of new believers (**2:47**)

## ***Encouraging one another in obedience***

### **Read Hebrews 10:24**

Walking in the light means walking in obedience to the Lord (**John 15:10**). Fellowship has been designed by God so that each believer is continually encouraged not just to hear the word, but also to do it (**James 1:21-22**).

## ***A genuine concern for one another***

### **Read Philippians 2:3-4**

No hidden motives of self gain should underlie our fellowship. Our desire should be to give, not to get.

## ***A laying down of one's life***

### **Read John 15:12-13**

Life involves more than physical life. It also includes our material possessions, our personal interests and preferences (**James 2:15-16**). This means a willingness to share one's self. In **Acts 4:32**, we see this principle outworked in the life of the early Church:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had”

### **Read Acts 2:44-45**

The unity in fellowship experienced by the New Testament Church was expressed on three levels:

- One heart – a bond of love
- One mind – a bond of purpose
- All things in common – a bond of concern

This is the outworking of true fellowship – not of outward rules and regulations. This depth of fellowship is a result of “walking in the light,” and is the answer to the prayer of Jesus:

“...that all of them may be one, Father, *just as you are in me and I am in you.*”