

Why Christian Fellowship?

As a people – God’s people – we have failed to fully grasp the importance that Christian fellowship can and should play in our lives. The beauty and privilege of Christian fellowship should be planted firmly and deeply within the heart of every believer. Multitudes are ignoring the intimacy that promotes a common bond between the Lord and ourselves; as well as between brethren. Why fellowship? Because fellowship is the fundamental facet of the Christian system that determines the receipt or denial of spiritual blessings.

As God’s people we must understand the topic of fellowship so that the bounties of God’s love will flow unfettered. The world and its trials challenge us daily, hoping to deprive us of the full benefits of Christian fellowship. Many are misinformed about fellowship; failing to realize the seriousness that is entailed in fellowshipping those in darkness. Far too many Christians seem confused over whether or not God commands the withdrawing of fellowship when a brother or sister in Christ refuses to repent. The fact is that God is very clear about who we may or may not have Christian fellowship with.

God only extends His fellowship to those who are following His commandments (1 John 1:6-7; 5:3). Scripture teaches that He will also remove His fellowship if we will not obey Him. Likewise, He requires His faithful to restrict their fellowship on the same grounds specified in His word (Ephesians 5:11). Only those who have put on Christ in baptism being added by God to the church of Christ are granted fellowship with God and His children (Acts 2:38-47). Everyone outside of Christ (those in the world, in denominations, sects, cults, etc.) cannot enjoy the fellowship found in God’s family.

Therefore, the doctrine of Christian fellowship must be understood and obeyed by all to enjoy the eternal hope of heaven. Why fellowship? Without it there can be no association with God or joint sharing in the love of God. The question should be asked – why not Christian fellowship?

Holy Hatred

Believe it or not God’s fellowship has its limitations. The Bible teaches that God neither accepts all unity, nor does He condemn all division (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). There are two very important laws created by God that every Christian must understand. (1) **The Law of Inclusion** which simply states there is a certain group of people who attain fellowship with God only when they have met all conditions of gaining salvation (John 3:1-7; Galatians 3:26-27). (2) **The Law of Exclusion** which in short says there is a certain group of people who maintain separation from God due to their choice of remaining in the world and not complying with God’s conditions of gaining salvation (Titus 3:10-11; Ephesians 5:11; 1 John 2:15).

It is these two groups (those included and those excluded from fellowship) that Paul was discussed in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16. Christians are to have a ‘*holy hatred*’ for anything that runs contrary to God’s will. The Psalmist said, “*I hate EVERY false way,*” “*I will set no base thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave unto me,*” “*I hate them with perfect hatred*” (Psalm 119:104; 101:3; 139:22). Hating with perfect or holy hatred is different than the hatred of the world. Holy hatred holds disdain for wicked and sinful acts. Holy hatred will not tolerate or accept changes in God’s pattern. To obtain and maintain fellowship ALL Christians must conform to the ONE pattern set forth in the New Testament alone. Go outside the lines, and holy hatred must move the faithful to; (1) rebuke, (2) admonish, or (3) withdraw (1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 15-16).

While it is not easy maintaining a holy hatred for the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), God has said that His commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3). If we truly love God, we will keep His commandments, even if it means withdrawing from friends, father, mother, brother, sister, son, or daughter (Matthew 10:34-38).

What is Christian Fellowship?

The Bible term “*Fellowship*” is derived from the Greek noun ‘*koineo*’ and the verb ‘*koinonia*’ which denote the idea of ‘*fellowship, joint sharing or participation, association with, contribution, and communion.*’ Fellowship is therefore a relationship between individuals that involves a common interest and an active participation in that interest. In the case before us, the common interest is imitating Christ, following His doctrine, bearing His cross, etc.

It is also the case in fellowship that when associating oneself with one or more individuals who maintain this common interest that we are then indorsing, or approving of everyone involved in that interest. Which in turn will make us companions of truth or error, and that is why this topic is so important. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 Paul states very clearly how Christians are to conduct themselves: (1) Not linking oneself with unbelievers, (2) Right standing with God has no business participating with lawlessness, (3) Light has nothing to share with darkness, (4) There can be no communion between Christ and the devil, nor (5) God’s temple and idols. Because these things are true, Christians are required to “*come out from among them and be ye separate*” (vs. 17). How much clearer does God have to be?

God has called all men and women to be a part of His fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:9). The mode in which humanity receives God’s fellowship is through being “*called into it.*” The way in which God issues this ‘*calling*’ is recorded by Paul, “*whereunto He called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Therefore, the gospel of Christ is the instrument through which God ‘calls’ humanity. This gospel calling includes our obedience to the conditions that are contained within Christ’s gospel. The end result is the blessed fellowship of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This state of fellowship remains as long as we do our part and comply with all of His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 4:16).

Amos asked, “*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*” (Amos 3:3). Unity is essential for true fellowship to be realized. Paul gave commandment concerning unity when he wrote; “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing,.....be perfectly joined together in the same mind and same judgment*” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Unless Biblical unity is maintained, Christian fellowship cannot be enjoyed. The thinking that we may have ‘*unity in diversity*’ is just another of Satan’s old lies. Jesus requires all to remain in the vine or be cut off and burned (John 15:5-7). True unity means “*a condition of harmony, a state of being one that leaves all elements of the system unchanged.*” Unity in diversity, Promise Keepers, Ecumenicism and the like cannot and do not meet this definition. When, as determined by His Word, a certain action or belief falls outside the bounds of His will, then His faithful children must abide by God’s wishes and withdraw fellowship (2 Thessalonians 3:6, Romans 16:17).

As members of God’s only true body of Christ, we are obligated to believe, teach and obey God’s doctrine on fellowship. We are obligated to work together in ‘*singleness of heart*’ (Acts 2:46). We are obligated as fellow heirs to be faithful servants (Revelation 21:7). As fellow laborers God has obligated us to use our talents, our time, our money, our bodies for God and one another (Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:24; 4:5; Ephesians 4:1). We have also been given the obligation to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), our faithfulness (2 Corinthians 13:5), and to be on the lookout for wolves (Acts 20:29). Our fellowship requires that we bear fruit, which then brings glory to the vine. As a community of believers, we are to desire the company of one another so that we may (1) Admonish one another (Romans 15:14); (2) Serve one another (Galatians 5:13); (3) Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2); (4) Edify one another (1 Thess. 5:11); (5) Be members one of another (Rom. 12:5) and (6) Prefer one another (Rom. 12:10). As fellow citizens of our heavenly home Christian fellowship should now give us a taste of what life in heaven will be eternally.

Vertical Christian Fellowship

“When is Christian fellowship with God and God’s faithful people reached?” The Bible plainly teaches that one must first become a Son of God before ‘vertical Christian fellowship’ can be achieved. What is ‘Vertical Christian fellowship?’ John best described it when he wrote, *“that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:3). Before fellowship can occur between Christians, it must first be obtained between ourselves and God (vertical fellowship).

The New Testament teaches that a person must first be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-5). It is clear that the Bible teaches that before and without baptism a person cannot be found ‘in Christ,’ and if not found in Christ he is not a Son of God, but remains a child of the devil (2 Timothy 2:10). God will not extend the right hand of fellowship to anyone who has not been baptized in accordance with New Testament teachings. Likewise, all faithful sons of God cannot extend Christian fellowship to those who are not Christians, that is, sons of God.

Sadly there are those who would have us reject the distinction between sons of God and children of the devil. A distinction that God requires (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11). Paul has rightly stated, *“be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14).

There are some that seek to make sons of God out of anyone claiming to believe in Jesus. While it is true that God’s love is universal and desires that ALL men and women repent and be saved, there are conditions to receiving salvation (Titus 2:11; Acts 17:30).

Our vertical fellowship with God is totally dependent upon our willingness to walk daily in the light (1 John 1:7). Without vertical fellowship, there is no horizontal fellowship with God’s family.

Horizontal Christian Fellowship

Let every child of God be warned not to rebel against God and His will. Extending the right hand of fellowship to anyone outside of Christ is a sin! John said, *“If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another....”* (1 John 1:6-7). Our fellowship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as well as with other Christians is conditioned upon our walking in the light! Walking in the light is a daily, continual duty that establishes not just Biblical, but spiritual Christian fellowship. It is walking in the light that determines the extent of fellowship that God will offer and that Christians are authorized to offer to others.

Without God’s approval, Christians may not extend fellowship to anyone not baptized into Christ and added to the church of Christ by God. Why? Because they remain children of the devil until they meet all of God’s conditions for salvation and fellowship. To attempt to extend spiritual horizontal fellowship to anyone still a child of the devil is to rebel against God. Even extending fellowship to those who have been baptized for the remission of sins but who are members of a denomination constitutes rebellion (i.e. Disciples of Christ, First Christian, etc.). For they too remain children of the devil until they have been properly taught to obey only the law of Christ and to be added to the one and only church of Christ.

Horizontal fellowship is not to be taken lightly. We dishonor God and His law of inclusion when we freely fellowship anyone claiming to be a son of God or faithful member of the Lord’s church but who are not. Tolerating the sins or rebellion of others will certainly bring the wrath of God upon our own doorstep. Not bidding God’s speed to those outside of God’s fellowship ring is a command that every faithful Christian must heed (2 John 9-11). When sin separates a person from God, it also severs fellowship with God and His family (Isaiah 59:1-2). Fellowship is not only a privilege, it is an obligation. As faithful sons of God we are obligated

to offer horizontal fellowship to those within the body of Christ who themselves are faithful. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, the family of God (1 Peter 1:22-23). We are to care one for another as *“brothers keepers”* (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:25). As sons of God we are obligated as fellow laborers to strive together in unity (Colossians 1:13; 4:11; Ephesians 2:10). Our fellowship with God (vertical) obligates us as fellow prisoners to be faithful unto death and prepare ourselves for every possible affliction, or trial that will come our way (Revelation 2:10; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-19).

As Christians, our heavenly citizenship not only brings a bounty of blessings, but responsibilities also. We must be willing to extend our fellowship to all those who live faithfully in Christ Jesus. While at the same time being prepared to withhold fellowship from anyone still a child of the devil, or from those Christians who walk out of step from God’s pattern. May we maintain the proper attitude concerning Biblical Christian fellowship and obedience toward God.

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Fellowship



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