

A Call to Fellowship

TEXT: Acts 2:42

THESIS:

INTRODUCTION:

1. **In Ac 2:42, we have this account of the early church:** “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
2. Today, many churches place great importance to being true to the Word of God, observing the Lord’s Supper, and being fervent in prayer
3. These things are certainly important, but what of “fellowship”?
 - a. Do we properly understand this facet of the Lord's church?
 - b. Are we practicing it in a way consistent with the example of the early church?
4. Beginning with this lesson...
 - a. I want to examine the subject of “fellowship” in the light of the Scriptures
 - b. With the objective in mind of ensuring a proper understanding and application of this Biblical subject
5. In the church, as a whole, there is:

DISCUSSION:

I THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS

- A Consider this appearance in a local congregation:
 - 1 What if an observer came to make a careful analysis of the church’s life in reference to fellowship?
 - a Someone who was a specialist in studying how groups work together
 - b Who intended to compare us with other groups that have some sort of interaction among its members (like civic clubs, garden clubs, etc.)
 - c Who would examine such things like:
 - 1 How we relate to one another when we assemble for worship
 - 2 How we interact with each other away from our assemblies
 - 3 Our group loyalties
 - 4 Our willingness to support each other in time of need
 - 5 The amount of time we spend in the company of others in the church, who is, seeking to learn how well those who sit by each other during the assembly Sunday after Sunday really know each other
 - 6 What would we expect him to discover?
 - 2 Several years ago, some churches allowed themselves to be analyzed in this way; here is what was discovered:
 - a The great majority of members knew a very small percentage of the people
 - b Those who gathered for worship were mostly an anonymous group of worshippers
 - c They were not a genuine community of souls prepared to bear one another's burdens

- d They expressed little interest in becoming more involved in each other's lives, that is, they came to worship only for the sake of their own spiritual life and personal salvation!
 - 1 It was said, "Many go to church as they would go to the movie theater"
 - 3 The bottom line was this:
 - a The churches that were analyzed consisted of members who were "self-centered"
 - b Therefore, very little fellowship of any sort was taking place!
 - 1 Now, I am not suggesting that the same condition exists here.
 - 2 For the most part, I think it does not.
 - 3 But as we grow in number, the potential is there for losing the kind of fellowship we should experience.
 - a The purpose of this study is to ward off the kind of "self-centeredness" which can destroy the spiritual fellowship God would have us experience in the church.
- B SOME REASONS FOR "SELF-CENTEREDNESS" IN CHURCHES...**
- 1 Most of us lived through the "Me Decade"
 - a The 1970's, viewed as being distinguished by self-centered attitudes and self-indulgent behavior
 - b A time in which there was...
 - 1 A rapid rise of crime against others - rape, theft, assault, murder
 - 2 An increased use of drugs and alcohol as a way of escape
 - 3 A turn to philosophies and religions which involve preoccupation with self:
 - a "Looking Out For #1"
 - b Transcendental Meditation (TM) and Yoga
 - 4 An emphasis on consumerism and materialistic gain
 - c A decade followed by the "Greed Decade" (the 1980's)
 - 1 Such cultural trends have produced many self-centered people!
 - 2 Now today, we live in a highly mobile society.
 - a New families move in, and others move away
 - b Many live great distances from the place of worship and from each other
 - c These facts do not prevent us from having proper fellowship, they just make it easier to become isolated from the fellowship unintentionally
- C Technology designed to bring us closer together, but can easily move us apart**
- 1 Phones, e-mail, etc., greatly increase our ability to communicate
 - 2 But we can become stretched out so thin through such technology that we do not develop any meaningful relationships
 - a And so, there is a failure to appreciate the Biblical teaching about "Our Life Together"
 - b And, while societal trends may be nourishing the spirit of self-centeredness, I believe God has designed the church to point us in a different direction...

II THE CHURCH: A FELLOWSHIP FREE FROM SELF-CENTEREDNESS

A This truth is emphasized in the apostle's doctrine.

- 1 We are to be hospitable to one another - 1 Pe 4:9
 - a It is impossible however, to maintain a loving and caring church unless believers are fellowshiping together in their homes.
 - 1 In Lk. 10:5-6, Christ taught us that we are to use our homes as centers of Christian love, fellowship and outreach.
 - 2 As Christians, we are to open our homes without grudging, murmuring or complaining.
 - b They are to be open joyfully expecting great things of God.
- 2 We are to have a care for one another - 1 Co 12:26
 - a When a member of the human body suffers, the whole body suffers. When one member is honored, the whole body rejoices and so it is to be in the church.
 - b The church is one body; therefore, it is to suffer and rejoice together.
 - 1 The body is to walk through the experience of life together—suffering and rejoicing with every member, looking after and caring for every member.
- 3 We are to pray for one another - Ja 5:16
 - a Praying for one another heals.
 - b James is pointing that praying heals the soul.
 - 1 Now, sure we want people to be healed, cured, revive and to recover from physical difficulties.
 - 2 But, when people have injured others, when they are tempted to sin or to have evil actions, we need to pray for them that they not be led into temptations.
 - 3 Thus, we pray for one another, to the throne of God that he bring to us solutions and comfort as we seek first the kingdom of God.
- 4 We are to restore one another - Ja 5:19-20
 - a When this happens, the believers of the church are to seek to convert him, that is, to lead him to repentance.
 - b The word convert means to turn, hence to take him by the hand and lead him to repentance.
 - c What a descriptive picture: loving one another so much that as soon as a believer slips into sin...
 - 1 We take him by the hand.
 - 2 We turn him around and lead him to repent.
- 5 We are to teach and admonish one another - Co 3:16
 - a This begins by letting the word of God make a home in the heart.
 - b And, we must be living the word of Christ knowing that we are not living in hypocrisy.
 - c We teach and admonish in our singing, talking about Christ, sharing the word of God with others, encouraging and warning each other.

- d The believer is to live and move and have his being in Christ, and he is to let Christ live and move and have His being in him filling hearts with the joy of the Lord.
- 6 We are to serve one another in love - Ga 5:13
 - a Christ loved the believer, served and gave Himself for the believer, and the believer knows it.
 - b Therefore, the believer loves Christ with all his heart and life.
 - c He wants to please Christ and do all he can to serve Him.
 - d And this is just the point: how can the believer serve Christ?
 - 1 By doing exactly what Christ did: loving and serving others.
 - 2 For, a person who loves does not act like a lord over people; he...
 - a Serves and helps
 - b Shows kindness and gentleness
 - c Expresses concern and care
 - d Demonstrates sympathy and empathy
 - e The person who truly loves identifies with a person, gets down where they are, even below where they are, and ministers to them.
- B This truth is exemplified in the early church.**
 - 1 By the church in Jerusalem - Ac 2:42-46
 - 2 By the church in Antioch - Ac 11:27-30
 - 3 By the churches in Macedonia - 2 Co 8:1-5,
 - 4 By the churches in Achaia - Ro 15:26, "For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem."
- C Such fellowship is a natural consequence of the teaching of Christ . . .**
 - 1 The kingdom consists of those who love both God and their brethren - Mk 12:28-34
 - 2 Thus the fellowship we are to enjoy in the church is both "vertical" and "horizontal"
 - a With God...
 - 1 We enjoy a "vertical" relationship. "20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:20, KJV.
 - 2 An overemphasis on this aspect can cause insensitivity to the needs of others
 - b With fellow Christians...
 - 1 We enjoy a "horizontal" relationship. "14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:" Ephesians 2:14-16, KJV.
 - 2 Of course, an undue emphasis on this aspect may cause one to neglect

God

CONCLUSION

1. You know, when we consider fellowship:

- a. It is something that is to be enjoyed by those in the church
 - b. The spiritual activities designed to nurture fellowship in the body of Christ
 - c. There are elements necessary to preserve our fellowship
 - d. Biblical limitations on the extent of our fellowship is important
2. But in this lesson I have sought to stress...
- a. The importance of fellowship in the local church.
 - b. The danger of allowing “self-centeredness” to disrupt our fellowship
3. Thus, we need to know more than the names of each other.
- a. Take notice of the cares and the joys of fellow Christians.
 - b. Pray for those with special needs, mentioning them by name in your private prayers
 - c. Allow yourself to have...
 - i. An “approachable personality” (where people feel comfortable in your presence)
 - ii. A “transparent lifestyle” (where you are not afraid to let others know the “real you”)