

A study on Fellowship

I. Definition: (A clear definition of the idea of fellowship is necessary)

A. Usage

1. We usually mean some sort of Social Activity when we use the word fellowship
2. We also used it to refer to our "ecclesiastical sanctions" - Hence "within our fellowship", meaning among churches of Christ
3. These do not present the whole picture of what the Bible teaches about fellowship

B. From the word: "koinos"

1. BAGD Greek Lexicon Definitions:
 - a. Communal, common
 - b. Used of what is in common
 - c. Common, ordinary
2. Examples:
 - a. "Common ground of hope" - 1 Clement 51:1
 - b. "had everything in common" - 1 Ephesians 1:2
 - c. "for the common good" - Barnabas 4:10

C. Greek: "Koinoneo" (verb)

1. BAGD Definitions:
 - a. Share, have a share in
 - b. Participate in
 - c. Give or contribute a share
2. Biblical Examples:
 - a. Hebrews 2:14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Peter 4:13 - "share"; Romans 15:27 - "shared; Philippians 4:15 - "shared with"
 - b. 2 John 11 - "participates"
 - c. Romans 12:13 - "contributing"

D. Greek: "Koinonia" (noun)

1. BAGD Definitions:
 - a. Association, communion, fellowship, close relationship
 - b. Generosity, fellow feeling
 - c. Used of a "sign of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity, even of a gift, or contribution"
 - d. Participation in something

2. Biblical Examples:

- a. I Corinthians 1:9; I John 1:3; Philippians 3:10; Galatians 2:9 - "fellowship"
- b. Job 34:8 (LXX) - "company"
- c. I Corinthians 10:16 - "sharing"
- d. 2 Corinthians 8:4 - "participation"
- e. Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 9:13 "contribution"

E. Greek: "Koinonos" (noun)

1. BAGD Definitions:

- a. Companion, partner, sharer
- b. Used of a partner in a business relationship
- c. Used of sharing in something
- d. One who participates together in something

2. Biblical Examples

- a. Hebrews 10:33; I Corinthians 10:18, 20; 2 Corinthians 1:7 - "sharers"
- b. 1 Peter 5:1 - "partaker"; 2 Peter 1:4 - "partakers"
- c. Matthew 23:30; Philemon 17 - "partners"

F. Fellowship is Translated by the English words

1. Fellowship
2. Contribution
3. Participation (Communing)
4. Sharing
5. *"The koin family of words which in classical and Koine Greek usage was essentially secular in usage, with occasional religious usages, was adopted by the New Testament writers to express rich spiritual relationships characteristic of Christianity. This family was appropriate for this because of "its capacity for conveying the sense of an inward union."*
- Glenn Gorden Kramar, *Koinonia and Its Cognates as Related to Fellowship in the New Testament* (unpublished Master's thesis, Abilene Christian College, 1966, p. 25)

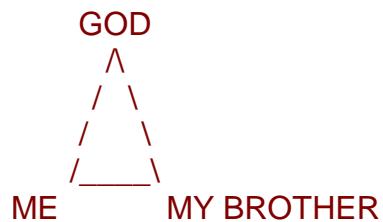
G. General Meaning in three senses

1. Business Fellowship - Luke 5:10
2. Domestic Fellowship - "a favorite expr. for the marital relationship as the most intimate betw. human beings" - BAGD, p. 438 (Though not used specifically for this in the New Testament, the idea is there)
 - a. I Peter 3:1
 - b. I Corinthians 7:12-16
3. Social Fellowship - I Corinthians 5:9-11

- H. "Koinonein is always used of active participation where the result depends on the cooperation of the receiver as well as on the action of the giver." - Harry Pickup Jr. The Fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord p. 7
- I. CONCLUSION: Fellowship is more than just social activity. It is a deep inward union.

II. A Biblical Theology of Fellowship

- A. Non Christian Associations
 - 1. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
 - 2. I Corinthians 5:9-10; Romans 16:23; I Corinthians 7:13-15
 - 3. These Relationships are not wrong in themselves, but the demands may be to the point they involve compromise with our fellowship with Christ
 - 4. Fellowship in the Gospel involves worldly associations: I Corinthians 9:19-23 (note v. 23 "fellow-partaker" is the word "sugkoinonos")
- B. The Basis of Christian Fellowship
 - 1. Galatians 3:26-28; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18
 - 2. James 1:18; I Peter 1:23; John 3:3, 5; (Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5)
 - 3. Philippians 3:8; 1 John 1:6-7
 - 4. Ephesians 2:13-16
 - 5. I Corinthians 12:13
 - 6. Christian Fellowship is therefore Triune in Nature, God, Yourself, and the Brethren (I John 1:6-7)
 - a. To break Fellowship with God is to break fellowship with brethren
 - b. To break Fellowship with a brother is to break fellowship with God



- C. Brotherhood and Fellowship
 - 1. A person becomes a brother at conversion (Gal 3:26)
 - a. There are not different levels of brotherhood in church (Gal. 3:28)

- b. There were barriers in the early church that had to be torn down. They were based on race, economics, and master-slave relationships (Gal. 2:12-14; I Cor. 11:22; I Tim 6:1-2)
- c. *"The basis of fellowship is with God and not man. A Christian does not determine who is in fellowship. He only recognizes what God has determined. It is not a matter of the will of men but the recognition of the will of God. One does not choose his brother. He only recognizes him as a brother. Horizontal fellowship (between men) is always determined by perpendicular fellowship (between God and men)." quoted from a book by - Jimmy Jividen, Caring Enough to Correct. p. 67*
- 2. Brotherhood is wider than fellowship
 - a. There are "erring" brethren (James 5:19; Galatians 6:1)
 - b. Paul did not deny that a person living in sin was a brother (I Cor. 5), yet he was to be removed from fellowship
 - c. The prodigal son did not cease to be a son, he was prodigal, but still a son (Luke 15:29-30) -In context, we often miss the point of this parable. It is about the brother and his reaction, not the son or the father
- 3. Fellowship is Narrower than Brotherhood: *"Fellowship is narrower than brotherhood. Brotherhood involves all those who are children of God by rights of birth. Fellowship in Christ does not include anyone outside the brotherhood, but neither does it include all who are in the brotherhood. Immoral brethren, erring brethren, sinful brethren and those who have chosen to leave the fellowship are excluded. They are not excluded by the authority of the church. They are excluded from Divine fellowship by the authority of God. The church only recognizes what God has done." quoted from a book by Jimmy Jividen, Koinonia, p. 15*

D. Fellowship in the Early church/ Expressions of Fellowship

- 1. Hospitality and Sharing
 - a. Acts 2:44-46
 - b. Acts 4:32
 - c. I Peter 4:9-10
 - d. Hebrews 13:1-3
 - e. Early quotations:
 - *"It is our care for the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. "Only look", they say, "look how they love one another...Look how they are prepared to die for one another,"* - Tertullian in Apology, xxxix
 - *"Those who are well to do and willing, give as they choose each as he himself purposes; the collection is then deposited with the president, who succours orphans, widows, those who are in want owing to sickness or any other cause, those who are in prison, and strangers who are on a journey."* Justin Martyr
 - f. The early Christian's "Love Feasts"
 - 1. Took place every first day
 - 2. Was similar to our modern day pot luck
 - 3. The Lord's Supper was taken in conjunction with the love feast

4. This was only practiced in the early centuries of the church
- g. Problems in Hospitality
 0. 2 Peter 2:13; Jude 12
 1. 2 John 10-11 - Hospitality to false teachers supported their false teaching. Preachers received support and livelihood by means of the hospitality of the brethren.
 2. John 13:18 (Psalm 41:9) - Deceit
 3. Galatians 2:9-14 - Peter withheld fellowship from the wrong people
2. Contributions
 - a. To support the poor saints
 0. I Corinthians 16:1-2
 1. Romans 15:26-27 - "Contribution" Grk: koinonian
 2. 2 Corinthians 9:13 = "Contribution" Grk: koinonias
 - b. To promote the preaching of the Gospel
 0. Phillipians 1:5 - Participation - Grk: koinonia
 1. Phillipians 4:14-15 - Share - Grk: koinonia
 - c. "Christians who were on mission journeys or business journeys enjoyed the hospitality of Christians in whose city they dwelt. This provided protection, lodging and food when one was away from home. Particularly this was needed in a time when there were not public accomodations for travelers."
 3. Lord's Supper
 - a. I Corinthians 10:16 - "Sharing" - Grk: Koinonia
 - b. Matthew 26:29 (Acts 20:7)
 - c. I Corinthians 11:17-22
 - E. Fellowship Means giving preferential treatment to one another. Fellowship with one-another in Christ transcends all social and ethnic barriers
 1. 1 Peter 1:22-23
 2. 1 Timothy 6:2
 3. Acts 2:44-45
 4. I John 3:16-17
 5. Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20
 6. I Corinthians 12:25-27

 - F. "One-Another" (allelon - a reciprocal pronoun...signifying of, or from one another... one another... one to another... or one with another. - Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words)
 1. Devoted to one-another in brotherly love... (Rom 12: 10)
 2. Give preference to one-another in honor... (Rom 12:10)
 3. Be of the same mind toward one another... (Rom 12:16)

4. Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
5. Care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25)
6. Serve one another (Galatians 5:13; John 13:14)
7. Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
8. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving... (Ephesians 4:32)
9. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs... (Ephesians 5:19)
10. Be subject to one another ... (Ephesians 5:21)
11. Bear with one another, Forgive one another (Colossians 3:13)
12. Teach and admonish one another... (Colossians 3:16)
13. Encourage one another and build up one another (I Thessalonians 5:11)
14. Seek after that which is good for one another (I Thessalonians 5:15)
15. Encourage one another... (Hebrews 10:25)
16. Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another (James 5:16)
17. Fervently love one another from the heart (I Peter 1:22)
18. Be hospitable to one another (I Peter 4:9)
19. Love one another (John 13:34-35)
20. Members of one another (Rom 12:5)
21. Build one another up (Rom 14:19)
22. Admonish one another (Rom 15:14)
23. Greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16)
24. Wait for one another (I Cor 11:33)
25. Do not lie to one another (Col 3:9)
26. Live at peace with one another (I Thess 5:13)
27. Stimulate one another to love and good deed (Heb 10:24)
28. Do not speak against one another (Jas 4:11)
29. We have fellowship with one another (I John 1:7)

G. Reasons why fellowship is not practiced today

1. Misuse of the term fellowship
 - a. One can have fellowship in the broad sense, but not have fellowship in Christ
 - b. Example: I Corinthians 7:13-14 - Domestic fellowship in marriage but not fellowship in Christ
 - c. I Corinthians 5:9-10 -
2. Ignorance of the depth of involvement in Fellowship in Christ
 - a. It is not being a "member" of a social club
 - b. It is a spiritual family tie that binds us together for all eternity
3. The risks of fellowship
 - a. 3 terms associated with fellowship - caring, sharing and bearing,
 - b. Each of these involves taking a risk of being hurt, becoming involved, expending energies for the sake of others, and becoming transparent.

H. The Restoration of New Testament Fellowship

1. Fellowship in Christ is a mark of identity of the restored (ing) church of Jesus Christ (John 13:35)
2. Restoration is incomplete without the restoration of fellowship in Christ
3. Hindrances to restoration of fellowship
 - a. Traditions
 - The Pharisees built fences around the law to keep people out (Matthew 15:2-9)
 - Paul had to rebuke Peter for letting the culture traditions break fellowship (Gal 2:11ff)
 - Today we can see this in more than one congregation in the same town or area refusing to have anything to do with each other.
 - b. Fear and Suspicion
 - Preachers, journals and papers have promoted this attitude
 - Comes from a desire to have control over a segment of the brotherhood
 - Proverbs 6:19b
 - c. Subjective basis for fellowship instead of Christ Only those who are considered worthy included

III. Additional Study on Fellowship Issues (the scope, breadth, etc.)

A. Standards of fellowship

1. False Standards
 - a. Feeling
 - b. Ethnic, social, gender, etc.
 - c. Results of not recognizing God's standard and not extending fellowship to those who are in fellowship with God (Matthew 25:31ff)
2. God's standards for fellowship
 - a. Identity (2 Peter 1:4; 1 Corinthians 12:13)
 - "In Christ" fellowship can only be had with those in Christ
 - While we may have fellowship with un-believers in other endeavors, such as jointly cooperating on a community moral issue or a beautification project, we do not share fellowship "in Christ"
 - b. Doctrine (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 1 John 4:1-3) *"...specific doctrinal affirmations function as boundaries for fellowship. The most simple statement of an exclusive boundary is that we must confess the lordship of Jesus and believe in His Resurrection (Romans 10:9). But the best-known summary of doctrinal boundaries is found in Ephesians 4:4-6. The seven ones are constitutive of the church and foundational to its unity: God, Lord, Spirit, faith, baptism, hope and the body. The denial of any of these parts destroys the unity of the body and"*

undermines the truth for which the church stands." -John Mark Hicks, "Is Fellowship Open to All?", Gospel Advocate, August 1993, p.16

c. Practice (Matthew 7:21-23)

- Moral behavior & Relational Behavior
- Christian Service *"I have brethren whom I will never meet nor see this side of heaven. There is a sense, however, in which I participate jointly with all faithful Christians in the grace of God and forgiveness of sins. ...we are thus laborers together, with God, in His work. If we are to preach the Gospel to every creature in all the world, as we are commanded (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15), it will necessarily involve such fellowship among many who never know each other personally and may not even know of the work each other is doing."* -Cecil May Jr. "Levels of Fellowship", Gospel Advocate, August, 1993 p. 22

B. Barriers to fellowship

1. Valid barriers are barriers set up by God. See above
2. Invalid barriers are attitude barriers *"If an estrangement of fellowship occurs between my brother and me, it must be corrected before I can approach God in worship. Jesus said that when your brother has something against you, you are to correct it before you offer a gift at the altar."* -Jimmy Jividen, "Koinonia", Gospel Advocate, May, 1989 p. 16
 - a. Hatred and animosity (3 John 9)
 - b. Fear (see Acts 9:26) we need more men like Barnabas!
 - c. Ignorance (Acts 15:1)
 - d. Selfishness (Acts 2:44) fellowship costs! (see also Romans 15:2-3)
 - e. Indifference and negligence
 - Does indifference breed poor fellowship or is it the other way around?
 - Hebrews was written to a tired worn out discouraged, negligent church. One of the causes was likely from a loss of fellowship
 - Hebrews 13:1-3 - Neglected hospitality
 - Hebrews 10:32-34 - Neglected benevolence
 - Hebrews 10:24-25 - Neglected Christian assemblies

C. The breadth of fellowship

1. Peace through the cross (Ephesians 2:13-16)
2. False notions of fellowship in the early church that compromised the breadth of fellowship
 - a. Judaizing Christians
 - Built fences around the law and rejected those who didn't keep their traditions
 - The idea of building fences came from rabbinic traditions

- The idea was to keep men from even coming close to breaking the law
- Acts 15:1; Galatians 2:12, 16-17
- Colossians 2:8; Galatians 5:1-4
- A person was forbidden to bind any un-authorized practice on the church. The effect would have been division if this practice were bound on the church.
- Binding human traditions and practices will divide the church
- b. Gnostic heresy
 - Characteristics of the Gnostics from the writings of John
 - I John 1:8-10 - They were above sin
 - I John 2:3-6 - Did not keep commandments
 - I John 2:19 - Had "outgrown" the fellowship
 - I John 3:17-18 - Refused to be benevolent
 - I John 4:2-3 - Did not believe in the incarnation
 - They believed there were 2 kinds of Christians
 - Those that had the special "knowledge" intuitively which was better than the word of God. They felt they were a cut above other "unspiritual" or "un-enlightened" Christians. things like keeping commandments, the scriptures, benevolence, etc. were beneath them. They had a Greek "dualism" belief. They believed that flesh and spirit were two separate entities and that one did not affect the other. Therefore they could indulge the flesh, because it was flesh and didn't have anything to do with the pure spirit. The other poor slobs did not have this elite knowledge.
 - "Earthly" Christians did not have the special knowledge and were 2nd rate Christians. They were redeemed by "faith". they were concerned with the scriptures, commandments, and other such "lowly" things
 - This doctrine started likely with an attitude problem
 - John emphasizes love , benevolence and keeping God's commands every bit as much as he does the doctrine of the incarnation.
 - I John 2:18-19 & 2 John 9-11 -
 - Those who left had already broken fellowship
 - They were not instructed to withdraw fellowship, they couldn't withdraw what was already withdrawn
 - If fellowship meant anything in the first place, they would not have "gone out from us"
 - When someone leaves, we do not withdraw, but instead recognize that fellowship has been broken

3. The scope of "in Christ" fellowship must include all redeemed people:
"Fellowship is more than an agreement with an idea. Participation, the giving of something to another or sharing in an action, is necessary before fellowship exists.

Although having fellowship with others may imply approbation in the thing shared or jointly engaged, it does not imply "blanket agreement." A mistaken idea that to participate in some activity endorses that individual is a barrier to proper fellowship in some instances. Fellowship is the joint action of two or more individuals toward the accomplishment of a common goal." -Gaylord Cook "Expressions of Fellowship", Gospel Advocate, August 1993, p. 17

- a. All types of people:
 - Galatians 3:28
 - I Corinthians 12:13
- b. Those with different opinions
 - This causes the greatest strain in fellowship: *"Paul and Barnabas...These two, so close in the work they had done, close to the Lord, determined to preach the Gospel in mission areas. In spite of their many areas of agreement, they had a sharp disagreement. They did not break fellowship, but they determined to do the work that needed to be done by each going his own way....The fact that individuals or even congregations do not agree on the details of a work does not mean they cannot have fellowship one with another. In this case...they each had to center upon their mission of proclaiming Christ rather than upon the lack of agreement in details. --Gaylord Cook, "Expressions of Fellowship", Gospel Advocate, August 1993 p.18*
 - I Corinthians 7:25 - Paul distinguishes difference between faith and a matter of opinion
 - Things about matters of opinion to distinguish them from matters of faith
 - Opinion is a private matter, not to be bound on others. (See Romans 14:3)
 - Opinion is binding on the person who holds it but not on others. (See Romans 14:22-23)
 - There should be acceptance of those holding different opinions (See Romans 15:1-3, 7)
- c. People at different stages in maturity
 - However, certain behavior is not acceptable for neither the mature nor the immature
 - But their level of maturity will dictate a different response
 - Immaturity should not go without correction, young church "babies" will grow up to be old church "babies"
 - We are to help them grow, not cut them off
 - See Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3
- d. Those with some doctrinal misunderstandings
 - Examples:
 - Aquilla & Priscilla and Apollos (Acts 18:26)
 - Paul and Corinth (I Corinthians 15). Paul called those who questioned the resurrection "saints", but brought them to a better understanding

- Those who continued to practice circumcision (Acts 15). This was tolerated until they bound it on others
- However, it is different when false teachers teach a faith-destroying doctrine, such as Hymenaeus and Alexander
 - 1 Timothy 1:19-20
 - 2 Timothy 2:16-18
 - Those teaching faith-destroying doctrine are to be disciplined
- Jude 8-23 (especially v. 16-20) - Note the characteristics of false teachers

BUT: v.22-23 - Have mercy on those who are doubting and save others!

- Note: People are withdrawn from because of what they practice. Example: Instrumental music. In earlier days, some thought that it was okay, but the church did not split or withdraw from anyone. It wasn't until some insisted on the practice, that the church had to split.
- e. *"A distinctive element of true Christianity is that it brings men together. Barriers which normally separate men into different parties are broken down. Ethnic characteristics which make men different are superseded by internal spiritual qualities which make men one. Diversity in backgrounds, interests and temperament-instead of being factors that divide, become strengths to aid the unity of the whole -Jimmy Jividen in Koinonia, p. 77*

D. The importance of true fellowship

1. Proverbs 27:17
2. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
3. *"How does Jesus define a real church? ... (John 13:35; 17:20-23) ... I hear the Son of God saying that the way we treat each other will identify us as a real church. ... Yeakley's research indicates that a person needs seven or more friends to insure retention. Yet the vast majority of Christians have only three friends or less in the church. If a personal crisis struck the life of an unattached (unbefriended) Christian, how likely would we be able to retain him or her?...Let us never abandon our doctrinal stance. Let us, instead, take our focus off the organization and place it on the organism. ... It is time to teach friendliness as fervently as we have taught about the weekly observance. It is time to teach the "one another" passages with as much urgency as we have taught all of the pet doctrines of our past." Randall Douglas Moody, Image, May/June, 1993, p. 17 (Vol. 9 No. 3)*