

**Intro:**

This week I read an article on the blog of a friend of mine. This article prompted me to take a session of our Bible study time to address a vital topic for us as a church. Next week we'll get back to Basic Theology and begin a unit on Angels.

Our subject today is *fellowship* — specifically, *Christian fellowship*.

What does *fellowship* mean? [I think we will find we have been labouring somewhat under a misconception concerning the primary meaning of the word.]

[If answers like 'enjoying one another's company', or 'game nights', or 'having a meal together' – ask: what is that then when you do the same thing with a non-believer?]

So Christian fellowship is something more than just pleasant social interaction, as valuable as that is to a local church.

Basic meaning of Gk φιλία, 'fellowship':

“φιλία a, an abstract term from φιλία and κοινωνία, denotes 'participation,' 'fellowship,' esp. with a close bond. It expresses a two-sided relation ... As with κοινωνία, emphasis may be on either the giving or the receiving. It thus means 1. 'participation,' 2. 'participation,' 3. 'fellowship.'”<sup>1</sup>

- Used of the legal, contractual obligations and privileges of a business partnership
- Used of a group possessing something in common, owning shares in something

You see, there is such a thing as friendship (the spirit of pleasant social interaction) and there is such a thing as fellowship (more than friendship, a joint-partnership in something on the basis of a common interest).

Here is how my on-line friend makes the word distinct:

“The Bible's word for 'fellowship' is identical to the word 'partnership' (Philippians 1:5). If two people were to start a business together, they would enter into a partnership. There would be a greater

<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). 3:798.

reality (i.e., the business) which would bind them to each other. Within that reality, certain activities and attitudes would almost certainly take place (i.e., communication, honesty, sacrifice, etc.).”<sup>2</sup>

To begin, let’s look at 1 Jn 1.3, where the word fellowship occurs twice:

Read 1 Jn 1.3

**Proposition:** Christian fellowship is giving and receiving spiritual benefits from a relationship forged by our common bond in Christ.

## I. The predominant idea: “to share with someone in something.”<sup>3</sup>

A. What is being shared in the following references?

1. Lk 5.10: a business, a partnership, a livelihood [note: they are ‘partners’ or ‘fellows’ whose activities in common are a ‘fellowship’ — as someone said, ‘two fellows in a ship’]
2. Heb 2.14: a common nature – children || parents; humanity || Christ (here a participle fr. the verb \_\_\_\_\_, ‘to share in’)
3. 2 Pt 1.4: a sharing of the divine nature such that the believer escapes the corruption of the fallen nature ( \_\_\_\_\_ – ‘fellows’, ‘partners’, ‘partakers’)
4. Rm 11.17: a sharing by an engrafted branch in the life of the root || a sharing of the NT Christian in the rich root of the people of God ( \_\_\_\_\_ – ‘fellow with’, ‘partner with’)

B. An elevated and specialized notion of sharing in something

1. 1 Cor 1.9: called into the fellowship of Christ

A different class of words, the ‘with’ verbs:

- a. Rm 6.4: buried with [so we might walk with]
- b. Rm 6.6: crucified with
- c. Rm 6.8: dying with; living with
- d. Rm 8.17: inheriting with; suffering with; being glorified with
- e. Eph 2.5: made alive with

<sup>2</sup> Champ Thornton, “Together for What?” posted on *EX VILIS CATHEDRA*, 4.4.08, <http://fromthecheapseatsblog.com/?p=49>

<sup>3</sup> Kittel, 3:804.

- f. Eph 2.6: raised with; seated with
- g. Col 2.12: buried with; raised with
- h. Col 2.13: made alive with
- 2. 1 Cor 9.23: participant in the gospel
  - a. Phil 1.5: participants in the gospel
  - b. Phil 1.6: participant in the faith
- 3. 1 Cor 10.16-20: participant in Christ
  - a. 10.16: we are in ‘communion’ with the person of Christ (how?)
  - b. 10.17: we partake in one bread and so become one body, just as...
  - c. 10.18: Israel eating sacrifices are ‘fellows’ [partakers] of the altar
    - 1) They are not ‘one with the altar’
    - 2) But identified, in communion with, the dead sacrifice on the altar
    - 3) *i.e.*, their sins are judged, condemned, expiated, in the death of the victim by vicarious substitution
  - d. 10.20: Gentiles sacrificing to devils are in communion [fellowship as ‘fellows’, ‘partners’] with devils

Our union with Christ by faith is represented by our partaking of the common bread and the common cup – a physical analogy of the spiritual union.

My friend, whose article motivated this study, refers to a ‘passive sense’ of our fellowship: “First, the biblical concept of fellowship carries a somewhat **passive** sense—it’s not something they themselves do. This sense can be commonly designated as “*having a share*.” For example, believers are made partners in the life Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9) and of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:1).”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Champ Thornton, “Together for What?” posted on *EX VILIS CATHEDRA*, 4.4.08, <http://fromthecheapseatsblog.com/?p=49>

- C. “Fellowship with Christ necessarily leads to fellowship with Christians, to the mutual fellowship of members of the community.”<sup>5</sup>
1. Phil 1.17: Who are ‘fellows’ (‘partners’, ‘partakers’) here? What should Onesimus then be to Philemon?
  2. 2 Cor 8.23: What is Titus to Paul?
  3. Rm 15.27: What is a result of ‘having a share’ with others in Christ?  
A sense of obligation to minister to one another...

## II. The idea of ‘giving a share’ as a fruit of ‘having a share’:

- A. Phil 4.14-15: What did the Philippians give to Paul? What were they sharing and how were they participating in it? (see also Phil 1.7)
- B. Rm 15.26: What were the believers giving to other believers? (see also 1 Cor 16.1-4, 2 Cor 8-9)
- C. Rm 12.13: of the overflowing fruits of salvation, ‘distributing’ = ‘sharing in’ the needs of saints
- D. Gal 6.6; 1 Cor 9.11: the reciprocal fellowship of teachers and disciples = ‘giving a share’ to one another
- E. Gal 2.9: symbolic gesture of the fellowship of Jews and Gentiles in one Christ

## III. The idea of sharing a way of life in common with the common bond

- A. A fellowship in a particular way of life (Phil 2.1-5)
  1. Phil 2.1: If a communion of the Spirit exists, then...
  2. Phil 2.2: Then fulfill apostolic joy by displaying
    - a. By one-mindedness
    - b. By one-love-ness
    - c. By ‘spiriting with’ [*i.e.*, one-spirit]
    - d. By one-purpose-ness
  3. Phil 2.3: by doing things in the body without a sense of ‘what do I get out of it’ but a sense of ‘what can I give to the needs of others’
  4. Phil 2.4: by making the needs of others ‘top of mind’

<sup>5</sup> Kittel, 3:807.

5. Phil 2.5: by mimicking the mind of Christ

B. A fellowship in an exclusive community

1. There is activity which can make one partakers [in fellowship] with evil
  - a. 1 Tim 5.22: sharing in other's sins [by your ill-advised endorsement of another]
  - b. 2 Jn 1.11: sharing in someone else's evil deeds [by communing with them in something as small as a common greeting]
  - c. Mt 23.29-31: scribes and Pharisees denied their participation in the long ago murder of the prophets but by their antagonism to Christ were full partakers, full partners with them
  - d. Mt 27.25: the blood of Christ to this day has been on the heads of the unbelieving children of the scribes and Pharisees
2. Consequently, the fellowship of the saints is called to an exclusive attitude and character:
  - a. 2 Cor 6.14-7.1
    - 1) No partnership (            – sharing, participation) (14)
    - 2) No fellowship (            )
    - 3) No concord ('sounding-with' = agreement) (15)
    - 4) No part (            )
    - 5) No agreement (            = 'putting together'; 'a joint deposit'; 'a placing together' [of votes into an urn, hence, consent with, vote for])
    - 6) Therefore:
      - a) Come out, be separate (6.17)
      - b) Cleanse ourselves (7.1)
  - b. Eph 5.11: no partners with, but rather exposers of unfruitful works of darkness

At the very least, a clear distinction between the walk of darkness and the walk of the light is called for.

Christian fellowship is in the light, not in the darkness.

## Conclusion:

“Consequently, ‘fellowship’ is much more than warm societal interaction. At least in Scripture, ‘fellowship’ expresses itself in more sacrificial (e.g., giving, suffering, etc.) than merely enjoyable ways (e.g., golf, potlucks, etc.). So, when Acts 2:42 says that the early church believers ‘were continually devoting themselves . . . to fellowship,’ it means that instead of merely enjoying each other’s company, these men and women were also giving of themselves to help their partners in the Gospel.

“So, fellowship cannot happen if you are isolated from other Christians. Fellowship with other Christians should center on what you have in common. What do you have in common? Your partnership with Christ in the Gospel! What if what has united you with others in your church is something other than the Gospel? (E.g., dynamic youth program, excellent music ministry, quality child-care, plenty of others who are at your same stage of life, people who hold some [secondary] doctrinal particular that you value, etc. . . .)”<sup>6</sup>

- In other words, there should be a ‘purposiveness’ and a ‘self-sacrificialness’ to Christian fellowship.

Are you a member of this church on purpose?

Is your purpose to fellowship in the gospel with us?

Or are you here only for what you get out of it?

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<sup>6</sup> Champ Thornton, “Together for What?” posted on *EX VILIS CATHEDRA*, 4.4.08, <http://fromthecheapseatsblog.com/?p=49>