

#135 “Why Fellowship Matters”

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The Bible clearly teaches the sufficiency of Christ (John 16:13, Philippians 4:13) and the sufficiency of His Word (John 17:17) such that even a believer isolated on a remote island (such as the apostle John) could still be comforted, encouraged, and enabled to grow in Christ. However, the Scripture does not in anyway advocate “lone ranger” Christianity. God’s desire is quite the opposite, in fact. His plan and purpose for building His kingdom is a corporate purpose (Ephesians 4:1-16). Granted, it is accomplished by individual believers who are held accountable before God for their individual roles of stewardship. However, God’s desire is that believers team up as the body of Christ to do His work.

The idea and essence of the church implies a sharing of lives, resources, encouragement, comfort, etc. Acts 2:44-47 says,

“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” The church had true fellowship, being a spiritual family whose head was Christ (Ephesians 4:15). As they studied the Word together, prayed together, and shared meals together, not neglecting the needs of any brother or sister, they enjoyed God’s plan of fellowship. This kept their focus right, their passion for the Lord fervent, and their growth in Christ stimulated. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” This passage correlates assembling together with other believers with stimulating or provoking one another to love and good deeds. Some believers were neglecting corporate worship, perhaps even choosing to isolate themselves from other believers in general. This was not a healthy trend, and God’s instructions were to get together, study the Word, pray, and encourage one another so that love would not grow cold and good works would be accomplished so that the glory of God could be seen (Matthew 5:16). Without true Christian fellowship, we are prone to coast along in our walk, we might miss out on opportunities to serve, and we are left to go without the unbiased instruction of Spirit-led preaching to our hearts. The absence of true, Biblical fellowship makes the Christian life much more difficult.

It should be emphasized that fellowship is exclusively Christian. It is not something the world can possess or know. They might have their clubs, societies,

groups, fraternities, gangs, or associations, but they cannot experience fellowship. This is because the world does not know the love of Christ, without which there can be no fellowship. They are still in darkness, and only those in the Light can have fellowship with others in the Light (1 John 1:7). Only with Christ is true love (John 13:34-35) and true unity (John 17:21) possible.

Yet even in the church fellowship that could be enjoyed with true believers can be undermined. We still need to work by faith on some things to keep fellowship as it ought to be. First, there needs to be authenticity. Authenticity is being real, genuine, not deceiving, not wearing a mask to church, and being open and vulnerable as wisdom and discernment allow. When people pretend, go through the motions, and hide their true selves and desires, dangerous and dark deceptions can emerge. This undermines fellowship and its benefits. Second, there needs to be a spirit of grace. There should be no judgmentalism, partiality, merit-based love, or a refusal to forgive a truly repentant brother or sister. “Holier than thou” thinking makes people feel unsafe to seek the help, counsel, and encouragement that they need, thus undermining fellowship. Third, there needs to be a corporate uncompromising pursuit of the truth. It is important to grow to “attain to the unity of the faith” rather than to be “carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:13-14). Doctrine has a unifying effect on the church, and the church must be willing to continue to be guided by the Spirit into all truth in order for unity to increase. This relentless pursuit of truth is utterly essential to vibrant fellowship.

Let us not forget that we are the body of Christ, with each of us having a part to play (1 Corinthians 12:14-27). It is only when these individual parts work in concert with one another that the church maximizes its testimony and effectiveness. Fellowship is critical to each believer’s growth and to the church’s overall mission in the world. May God give us people to enjoy fellowship with, and may He deepen and purify fellowship in His churches. It is something we as believers desperately need and something the world desperately needs to see.