

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42

The Essentials: Fellowship

Today we want to talk about fellowship. The pastoral staff considered that fellowship is a very good topic for this particular homily on this particular Sunday, because in one sense, at the most basic level, we are sharing a meal, much as the early Christians did, (going from house to house), But they also fellowshiped in the Lord and with each other.

Throughout these 40 days of prayer, we are thinking through the Essentials of the Church--the distinguishing characteristics that should be true of any New Testament congregation. In these verses, we see that the early believers were devoted to the apostles' teachings, prayer, and communion. The rest of the paragraph tells us they were also devoted to worship and witness—essentials we have already considered.

“But they were devoted “to fellowship.” *Devoted* here means that fellowship is a priority in their life—It means they gave fellowship much time. We are to give plenty of time to these essentials and to prayerfully seek to cultivate these realities of prayer, worship, witness, and fellowship, in our life together as a congregation.

What is Christian Fellowship?

Fellowship comes from a Greek word that you are likely familiar with, *Koinonia*. It simply means, “to have in common.” Or, to participate in common, or to hold in common. “Mingled together,” is another way of looking at it. Fellowship is to share common beliefs, common practices, and common experiences. We share a common life together of giving and receiving.

In her book, *Up with Worship and Art*, Anne Ortlund talks about fellowship that is not really fellowship. And then gives a good picture of what real fellowship looks like. She asks her readers to imagine a bag of marbles. The marbles click and clatter. They glitter. They scratch each other. But they don't mingle. They just rub up against each other. And sometimes we call that fellowship. But it is not. On the other hand, she says, imagine a bag of grapes and you take the bag, and you really shake it up and the grapes turn mushy and drippy. It looks a mess, but those grapes are mingling. They are close together. They are bleeding into each other. And that's a

pretty good picture of what fellowship is. We blend together, we share in common. We wonderfully bleed into each other's lives. That's what fellowship is. It is to share in common.

What do Christians share in common?

We share in common everything that God has ever done for us and everything that God continues to do for us; everything He continues to say to us through His Word.

- We believe the same gospel.
- We embrace the same salvation.
- We love the same Lord Jesus Christ.
- We are filled with the same Holy Spirit and cultivate the same fruit of the Spirit.
- We meditate daily in the same Holy Scriptures.
- We belong to the same spiritual family, the church.
- We are citizens of the same eternal heaven.
- And we make it our purpose to pursue the same chief end, which is to live for the glory of God.

We share all these things in common, but let's dig a little bit deeper, and put some real thought into this. Here are four that I want us to consider.

We have a shared salvation.

"My true son in our common faith, grace, and peace from God, the Father and Christ our Lord" (Titus 1:4.) We share a common faith. We are saved by God utterly and wonderfully. All that God has done to save one of us, He has done to save all of us. There are not different kinds of salvation. We believe the same Christ crucified and risen for us. Our salvation is a shared salvation.

Consider these words from Jude, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 3.) It could be easily translated, "My initial burden was to write to you about our common salvation." But he was stopped in his tracks by the Holy Spirit and urged to write about contending for the faith. We have salvation in common. We are saved by the same gospel and by the same Lord who purchased forgiveness for us. We have in common, The Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We have a shared experience.

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3.) Isn't that wonderful? Our salvation is more than a salvation whereby we are forgiven and go to heaven someday. It is also a shared relationship with the triune God. There is only one God, who exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are co-equal and co-glorious. And we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, we read that wonderful, wonderful benediction "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of

God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Fellowship with God is intimate fellowship. We share a common experience of enjoying God in all his wonder.

We share loving and living for one another.

One of the best ways to see what fellowship looks like is to consider the so-called “Reciprocal Commandments.” There are about 30 of them—those “one another commands.” We can break them down into a negative and a positive list.

Negative reciprocal commands

- Do not judge one another
- Do not envy one another
- Do not speak evil against one another
- Do not lie to one another
- Do not grumble against one another
- Do not provoke one another to anger

Positive reciprocal commands

- Be kind and tender-hearted to one another
- Pray for one another
- Bear one another's burdens
- Encourage and exhort one another
- Comfort one another

The consequences of judging, grumbling, lying, and so on, destroy fellowship. They don't just hinder fellowship; they completely wipe it out.

But look at the positive commands. Besides those listed above, we also have the words of Jesus, “Wash one another's feet,”—just after He has performed this lowly task. Fellowship then, is humbly serving one another. Or we have these words in 1 Peter 1:22, “Love one another sincerely and from the heart.” Love without hypocrisy.

Colossians 3:12-14 describes fellowship impressively. “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Then he adds, “and over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together. In what? Perfect unity, perfect fellowship.”

When we dress up in these virtues, when we put on these qualities, these graces, far from damaging fellowship, create a robust and joyous, shared life together.

We have a shared Mission from God

At the end of Mark's gospel, he gives the great commission, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the world.” You see, true fellowship does not turn us into an isolated commune. First, fellowship is fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Second, it looks inside the church to love, care for, exhort, and encourage. But that fellowship must look out to the world as well. One place where we see this is in Paul's writing to the Philippians, he writes that he

enjoys their partnership with the gospel. The Philippian church enjoyed a supportive partnership in Paul's mission to share the gospel.

Philippians 1:3-5. "I thank my God every time I remember you in all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy." Why is he so excited about the Philippian's beliefs? Why does he care so much? "Because," he says, "of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now." They are faithful in supporting the spread and progress of the Gospel.

This is very much the heart of Jesus as well. In John 17, just a few hours before Jesus is arrested and crucified. He is praying alone. And he prays for you and me! "My prayer is not for them alone," (the disciples.) "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." And those people are you and me if we put our faith in Christ for salvation. But why? "That all of them may be one." A united, common, shared life. "Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."

Isn't this an astonishing thing? He wants us to have fellowship that resembles the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Jesus says, "may they also be in us. So that the world may believe that you have sent me." You see, the world is never going to believe a message that originates from people who live divisive, gossiping lives and don't seem to like each other. But in unity and a shared life, the world will look and believe that Jesus was sent by the Father to be the Savior. It's a remarkable petition that Jesus prays.

All Christians need fellowship with God. We cultivate this through His Word. We study Scripture to see what it teaches us, and we pray and seek the Lord's help. We pray to know intimacy with Him, to enjoy Him, and to have fellowship with him.

All Christians need fellowship with each other. No believer is spiritually self-sufficient. God desires to build His church around people who love each other and care for each other, people who love sincerely and from the heart. And we desperately need that kind of loving fellowship in our relationships together.

Heavenly Father, you are so glorious and so gracious to us, and we thank you. It is an astonishing thing just to read in your Word that we can have fellowship with the Trinity. And enjoy the sweetness of your presence, the wisdom of your truth, and the graciousness of your heart. Let us press on to know the Lord, to increase in knowledge of you and communion with you, and fellowship with one another. We thank you and praise you for such redeeming love and Christ's name, Amen.

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