

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/15/04 Brad Brandt

Value #6—"Fellowship: Committed to Being Connected" **

Main Idea: Just what is fellowship and why is it so important? There are three things the Bible makes clear about fellowship.

I. Fellowship is a fact.

A. In Christ, we have fellowship with God (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Pet 1:3-4).

B. In Christ, we have fellowship with one another.

1. Jesus prayed for it (John 17:11, 20-21).

2. Jesus' death accomplished it (Eph 2:11-22).

3. The Holy Spirit's baptism made it a reality (1 Cor 12:12-13).

II. Fellowship is an act.

A. It involves *sharing* (Acts 2:42, 44).

B. It involves sharing *something* (1 John 1:1-4).

C. It involves sharing something with *someone* (Rom 12:4-5, 13).

1. We are to be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10a).

2. We are to honor one another (Rom 12:10b).

3. We are to live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16).

4. We are to love one another (Rom 13:8).

5. We are to stop judging one another (Rom 14:13).

6. We are to do what edifies one another (Rom 14:19).

7. We are to accept one another (Rom 15:7).

8. We are to admonish one another (Rom 15:14).

9. We are to greet one another (Rom 16:16).

III. Fellowship is under attack.

A. We must deal with sins against the doctrine of the church (1 Tim 6:3-5).

B. We must deal with sins against the purity of the church (1 Cor 5:1ff.).

C. We must deal with sins against the unity of the church (Rom 16:17-18).

Make It Personal: Two questions to consider...

1. Are you connected?

2. Are you committed?

Review Quiz: Trace your hand on a blank piece of paper, just like you used to as a child! Then see if you can write down from memory the seven values of a strong church, with one or two appropriate references for each.

Life changed around our home about a year ago. My daughter, Julie, found a stray street cat, brought her to the house, begged to keep it, caught her parents in a weak moment, and there you have it, now we're a two pet family!

I've never seen a cat quite like Chloe (I call her Chloe Monster). Aggressive is an understatement. Everything's a game to this feline. Her favorite pastime is to play war with our dog, Blackie. It's a one-sided contest, for the dog never fights back. Blackie loves to do what most eleven year old dogs love to do, find a comfortable spot and take it easy. Chloe's agenda is quite different. She loves to find the dog in a sleep mode, sneak up, and then beat the daylight out of the yelping dog.

Like I said, it's been nearly a year now and not much indication of a truce. The dog ignores the cat and the cat attacks the dog.

It's funny when pets do that. With people it's another story.

You can put two pets in the same room but you can't force a good relationship. Their nature won't allow it. Is it the same with people? Can two people who are self-focused sinners by nature experience a good relationship? The answer, to the glory of God, is yes. The reason, of course, is because when God saves us, He gives us a *new nature*. What's more, He connects us to others with the same new nature in the Body of Christ.

That brings us to value #6—*fellowship*. Strong churches and strong Christians are those who are committed to being connected. They value fellowship.

The word "fellowship" appears about 100 times in the NIV Bible (17 in the KJV). But just what is fellowship and why is it so important? There are three realities the Bible makes clear about fellowship.

I. Reality #1: Fellowship is a fact.

We're living in a fragmented society. A few months ago one of our neighbors lost his wife suddenly to fast-spreading cancer. I didn't even hear about it for two months and yet I can see his house out our back window.

What's true in the world shouldn't be true in the church. Sadly, it often is, and if that's to change we need to value *fellowship*. The first step to valuing fellowship is to recognize reality #1. Fellowship is a *fact*. It's something we have.

Specifically, if we're in Christ we have two types of fellowship.

A. In Christ, we have fellowship with God (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Pet 1:3-4). Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 1:9, "God, who has called you into *fellowship with his Son* Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." Note that God initiated this relationship. He *called* us. Note also that the fellowship mentioned here is specifically with the second person of the triune godhead—He called us into *fellowship with His Son*.

Indeed, the Scriptures teach that we have fellowship with all three persons of the Trinity. 1 John 1:3 states that we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. 2 Corinthians 13:14 indicates we may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Let this sink in. The infinite God of the universe took the initiative so that finite creatures like us could enjoy a relationship with Him! Peter explains this in 2 Peter 1:3-4: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

In Christ, then, we have fellowship with God. The key words, of course, are *in Christ*. If you are not in Christ, you have no access to God. You are under His wrath. To be reconciled to God you must come to know the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

B. In Christ, we have fellowship with one another. Again, I emphasize that we *have* it. Granted, as we'll see in a moment, we must maintain it, but it is a fact. Those who are in Christ *have* fellowship with one another. I know so because of three divine actions.

1. *Jesus prayed for it* (John 17:11, 20-21). Listen to the request the Lord brought to His Father the night before His crucifixion in John 17:

Verse 11 "I will remain in the world no longer, but they [the disciples] are still in the world, and I am coming to

you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so *that they may be one* as we are one." Jesus prayed for the unity of His disciples, that they would experience the very same oneness that He Himself enjoyed with His Father.

But that's not all. Jesus took His request a step further in verses 20-21, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message [this request pertains to all future believers, including us], *that all of them may be one*, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Jesus prayed that His people would experience oneness. Was His prayer answered? Absolutely. Here's how...

2. *Jesus' death accomplished it (Eph 2:11-22)*. Adam's sin in the garden did something terrible to the human race. In a word, it's called *alienation*. Because of sin we enter this world alienated from God and alienated from each other.

But the death of the Last Adam, Jesus the Christ, reversed the curse. At the cross God formed a new humanity, a new people called the church. The apostle Paul explains this in Ephesians 2:

Verses 11-12—"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were *separate* from Christ, *excluded* from citizenship in Israel and *foreigners* to the covenants of the promise, without hope and *without God* in the world." Note what we *used to be*: separate, excluded, foreigners, without God. In a word again, *alienated*. But a change occurred.

Verse 13—"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." Because of Christ's death on the cross, we who are His people were *brought near*. Near to whom? To God. But that's not all.

Verse 14—"For he himself is our peace, *who has made the two one* [referring to Jews and Gentiles] and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." But why?

Verses 15-16—"...His purpose was to create in himself *one new man out of the two*, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which *he put to death their hostility*."

Let this sink in. At the cross Christ not only died so you as an individual person could go to heaven. Christ died in order to form a new people, made up of people who were once enemies and cut off from each other. On the cross He put to death the former enmity. On the cross He died to make a new humanity. What's more, divine action #3...

3. *The Holy Spirit's baptism made it a reality (1 Cor 12:12-13)*. You say, "Where is this new humanity?" You're looking at it. It's the *church*. The church is the *ecclesia*, which means "called out ones." By means of the cross, the Spirit of God is calling out a people from the world and making them one.

Indeed, what Jesus prayed for in the upper room and accomplished on the cross, the Holy Spirit made a reality when He came to the world on the Day of Pentecost and baptized the church into existence. 1 Corinthians 12:13 explains, "For we were all *baptized by one Spirit into one body*—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." What did the Spirit form? One body, the church.

So in one sense, fellowship is a fact. We who know Christ are already one. In God's eyes we are knit together as one body. This union is symbolized in the Communion service. It's also why we extend the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9).

Answer this. Can Christians experience true fellowship with non-Christians? The answer is no. Why not?

The basis for fellowship is the atonement of Christ and the baptism of the Spirit. No text makes this point clearer than 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what *fellowship* can light have with darkness?"

Young people, take note. Here is why the Bible forbids you as a believer to marry a non-believer. The Lord knows you will never experience true oneness with another person unless you have Him in common.

Reality #1—fellowship is a fact. But what we have we must *value*. So...

II. Reality #2: Fellowship is an act.

Frankly, fellowship is one of the most misunderstood, misused terms in the church. The following occurs in pulpit after pulpit. The pastor announces, "We'll be having a time of fellowship in the gym after the evening service. Everyone's welcome." And what happens? Members of the congregation mingle around food tables and chat. They talk about the weather, work, how their favorite ball team is doing, perhaps share a few criticisms of the president is handling the economy. Then they shake hands and go home, with these parting words, "What a great time of fellowship! We should do it more often."

But is that biblical fellowship? No. It's not that what I just described is wrong. It's just not true fellowship. Biblically defined, fellowship involves three characteristics.

A. It involves **sharing** (Acts 2:42, 44). That's what the Greek term means, in essence, "to share" or "to have in common with." Concerning the early church Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and *to the fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The word is *koinonia*. The root term *koinos* means "common" (in the sense of "common ownership"). *Koine* Greek refers to the language spoken by the people in Jesus' day (the Greek language was common to all). The term *koinonos* refers to a "partner" (as in Luke 5:10 where James and John are referred to as "Simon's partners").

Titus 1:4 speaks of a "common faith," Jude 3 of a "common salvation," and Acts 2:44 (and 4:32) indicates the early disciples lived a "common life," stating, "All the believers were together and had everything in common."

Note two characteristics of the believers in Acts 2:44. They *were together*—they spent time together; they lived life together; they weren't lone ranger Christians, they were connected. And they *had everything in common*—they pooled their resources; they didn't live with a "what's mine is mine" mentality, but a "what's mine is available to you if you need it" mentality, realizing it all belonged to the Lord anyway.

Hebrews 13:16 exhorts us, "And do not forget to do good and to *share with others*, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Fellowship is sharing. That's characteristic #1.

B. In involves sharing **something** (1 John 1:1-4). What is it we share? We see the answer in 1 John 1:1-4: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 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. We write this to make our joy complete."

Don't miss this. There's a content to fellowship. John says that what we share is what he as an apostle had seen and heard, that is, the person and work of Christ.

Granted, we share other things as believers. For instance, according to Philippians 4:14-15 we share our troubles and even our resources. But we share these things because fundamentally *we share Christ*.

Let me be specific. You must share more than a coffee pot and a box of donuts to constitute genuine fellowship. Fellowship involves sharing the Lord Jesus Christ. I'll share a concern. I'm concerned about churchgoers who seldom talk about Christ. Before and after worship services they talk about work, last night's ballgame, and everything else (so I know they know how to talk), but these words are absent, "Let's talk about the Lord and what He is doing in our lives."

C. It involves sharing something with **someone** (Rom 12:4-5, 13). As the story goes, a man was answering questions for a national poll. When asked for his church preference, he responded, "Red brick."

God never intended church merely to be a place we *go*. It's who we *are*. If you view church simply as a building that offers services—like a grocery store—you misunderstand God's intent for the church.

The church isn't a place. It's a people, a *fellowship* of people. My favorite definition of fellowship is "two fellows in a ship." We're in this together. We are connected.

Romans 12:4-5 "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and *each member belongs to all the others*."

I am not my own. I need you and you need me. That's why Romans 12:13 emphasizes, "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

You can have the potential for fellowship and still not experience fellowship. Think of it this way. Fellowship is a verb as well as a noun. We have fellowship (the noun), that is, we are in a relationship with one another because of Christ. But we must choose to fellowship with each other (the verb).

Amos 3:3 asks a vital question, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"

Perhaps it goes without saying, but you cannot have fellowship *by yourself*. You must have a relationship. Strangers do not fellowship. Enemies certainly do not fellowship. There must be a bond. Fellowship involves sharing something with *someone*.

Which raises the question, "If fellowship is an act, what kind of action does it take?" The answer is found in the "one another" commandments in the New Testament. The one another commands are the fuel that makes the Good-Ship-Fellowship run. There are over forty such commands in the New Testament. I'll mention nine found in Romans.

1. *We are to be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10a)*. "Be devoted [KJV 'be kindly affectioned'] to one another in brotherly love..."

2. *We are to honor one another (Rom 12:10b)*. Above ourselves, in fact.

3. *We are to live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)*. This takes work.

By the way, please realize that past fellowship is no guarantee of future fellowship. For instance, in Psalm 55 David describes a friend who turned from the Lord and turned against him [Ps 55:12-14], "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom *I once enjoyed sweet fellowship* as we walked with the throng at the house of God."

4. *We are to love one another (Rom 13:8).*

5. *We are to stop judging one another (Rom 14:13).* "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." This instruction is given in the context of Christian liberties.

John Newton once observed, "When people are right with God, they are apt to be hard on themselves and easy on other people. But when they are not right with God, they are easy on themselves and hard on others."

6. *We are to do what edifies one another (Rom 14:19).* In other words, do what will help you brother and your church grow to spiritual maturity.

7. *We are to accept one another (Rom 15:7).* The text states, "Accept [KJV 'receive'] one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." There are to be no cold shoulder treatments in the church, and certainly no cliques. Rather, we're to reach out to each other just like Christ did with us. But accepting one another doesn't mean we are to tolerate sin...

8. *We are to admonish one another (Rom 15:14).* "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct [*noutheteo*—can mean "to warn, counsel, or admonish"] one another." Paul says we are competent to engage in this kind of interaction.

9. *We are to greet one another (Rom 16:16).* "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings."

So fellowship is a fact—we have it in Christ. Fellowship is also an act—it takes obedient effort on our part to experience what we have. One more reality.

III. Reality #3: Fellowship is under attack.

There are many barriers to fellowship, such as personal sin (1 John 1:6), self-centeredness and pride (Phil 2:3-4). The attitude, "I don't need anyone," will restrict fellowship. So will, "My time is too important to get involved in my church."

And remember, the Evil One is real. He hates the Lord, and to get at Him Satan assaults His people. Fellowship, which is so precious to the Lord, is under attack.

That's one of the reasons the Lord gave His church instructions concerning church discipline. Fellowship makes church discipline essential.

The New Testament calls for action against three types of sin in particular.

A. *We must deal with sins against the doctrine of the church (1 Tim 6:3-5).* "If anyone *teaches false doctrines* and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction [i.e. false doctrine undermines the fellowship of the church]..."

There's a powerful movement in religious circles called ecumenism. The thinking that drives the ecumenical movement is, "God is one, so we should be one. We need to get everybody together. We can't let little things (like doctrine) keep us apart."

It sounds right, at least at first. But think about it. What we believe [doctrine] does matter. In fact, what did we

learn is the basis for true fellowship? It's the person and work of Christ. In Philippians 1:5 Paul referred to the "fellowship [NIV partnership] of the gospel." It's the gospel makes true fellowship possible. If a person or church doesn't believe the gospel, we can't fellowship together.

That doesn't mean another church has to cross every "t" and dot every "i" the same way we do. We can differ over personal preferences (such as Bible versions, music styles in church, etc) and still have fellowship. But if we differ over the gospel, there's no basis for fellowship.

"But all churches believe the gospel, don't they" you ask. No, they don't. Some believe it—at least on a doctrinal statement—but they don't preach it. Others simply no longer believe it.

Let me illustrate. In some "churches" Jesus Christ is presented merely as our example, not as our redeemer. If you listen to their sermons you'll hear that Jesus came to show good men how to live, not to save depraved men from their sins. In other "churches" Christ is presented as Savior, yes, but they suggest we receive His salvation by means of the sacraments rather than by grace through faith alone.

Should we partner with them? The apostle John offers this counsel in 2 John 9-11, "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him *shares* in his wicked work."

B. We must deal with sins against the purity of the church (1 Cor 5:1ff.). That's what Paul told the church in Corinth. Notice 1 Corinthians 5:

Verses 1-2—"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have *put out of your fellowship* the man who did this?"

What should happen when a member of a church refuses to repent of and forsake personal sin? The church is to exercise church discipline to the point of putting him *out of the fellowship*. Sounds harsh. Why such drastic measures?

Verses 6-7—"Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

Sin spreads. Sin corrupts the fellowship of the church. Is a church supposed to discipline everyone? No...

Verse 11—"But now I am writing you that you must not associate *with anyone who calls himself a brother* but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."

There is a condition to fellowship. It's called *walking in the light* in 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." What happens if we *don't* walk in the light? We don't have fellowship.

C. We must deal with sins against the unity of the church (Rom 16:17-18). "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

It's a serious thing to divide what Christ died to reconcile. When a person does that, Paul says to stay away from him. Don't fellowship with those who attack our unity.

Realize this. A person can hurt the unity of the church in more than one way. You can do it by attacking it, for sure. You can also do it by doing *nothing*. That's right. *Neglect* will kill fellowship, not to mention your own spiritual health (Heb 10:24-25).

Friends, it's supposed to mean something to be a part of a New Testament local church. To have your name on a church roll doesn't impress the Lord one iota. But to make priority in your life what the Lord died to redeem pleases Him greatly.

That's why we seek to keep an active membership roll at WBC. On a regular basis we remove the names of people who say by their actions that the church is not important to them. I'm not talking about missing a service once in awhile due to sickness or travel. But if a person fails to fulfill their church covenant responsibilities in a six month period, our by-laws indicate that person is to be removed from active membership.

Some have taken this to mean that if I show up for church at least once every six months I'm okay. But our constitution doesn't support (and the Bible certainly doesn't) this kind of legalistic interpretation. Here's what it actually says:

"Resident members who willfully violate the Church Covenant obligations for a period of six months, and who are unable to show satisfactory reasons for the same, shall be placed on an inactive list by the vote of the Church."

You say, "Just what are our church covenant obligations?" Let me remind you. The following statement is the promise we each made when we joined this church:

"Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and on the profession of our faith having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now, in the presence of God, the angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this Church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to faithfully attend its regular services; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of those in need, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions, to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger; and to be temperate in all things, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the cause of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling, and courtesy of speech, to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour, to secure it without delay.

We more over engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word."

Yes, fellowship is a fact. Fellowship is an act. Fellowship is under attack.

Make It Personal: Two questions to consider...

1. *Are you connected?* Chuck Colson writes in *The Body*, "...Membership in a confessing body is fundamental to the faithful Christian life. Failure to do so defies the explicit warning not to forsake "our assembling together." His understanding of this prompted Martin Luther to say, "Apart from the church, salvation is impossible." Not that the church provides salvation; God does. But because the "saved" one can't fulfill what it means to be a Christian apart from the church, membership becomes the indispensable

mark of salvation.

"So highly does the Lord esteem the communion of His church," Calvin wrote, "that He considers everyone a traitor and apostate from religion who perversely withdraws himself from any Christian society which preserves the true ministry of the word and sacraments."

So are you connected, first to Christ, and then to a local church?

2. *Are you committed?* I urge you. Be committed to the fellowship of your church.