

Our Life Together - 1

A Call To Fellowship

As a fellowship of Believers, our Mission is tied up with our Vision; our vision is tied up with being, or becoming, the Church that the Lord wants.

This series touches that vision, which is one of '*Bringing a Sick World to Christ*', with our particular emphasis being placed on this nation of Luxembourg.

1. Introduction

'Fellowship' is known in the New Testament as 'κοινωνία', i.e. meaning, 'a close mutual relationship'; 'participation'; 'sharing in'; 'partnership'.

1. The early church had four main priorities. In Acts 2:42, we have this account of the early church: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' *doctrine* and *fellowship*, in the *breaking of bread*, and in *prayers*."
2. Today, many churches place great importance on being true to the Word of God (*doctrine*), observing the Lord's Supper (*breaking of bread*), and being fervent in *prayer*.
3. These things are certainly important, but what of "*fellowship*"? Do we properly understand this area of the Lord's church? Are we practicing it in a way consistent with the example of the early church?
4. So, beginning with this message :
 - a. We will examine the subject of "*fellowship*" in the light of Scripture
 - b. We'll do this with the objective of ensuring the proper understanding and application of this Biblical subject

2. The Problem Of Self-Centredness

Let's start by looking at '*self-centredness*', a characteristic that can significantly affect true fellowship, true 'κοινωνία'. By '*self-centredness*', we really mean an attitude that is looking inwards, not necessarily by deliberate choice, but one that can develop through time and circumstances. It is something we must guard against.

a) As can be manifested in a local congregation :

1. What if an observer came to make a careful analysis of the church's life in reference to fellowship, a person who would examine:
 - a. How we relate to one another when we assemble for worship
 - b. How we interact with each other away from our assemblies
 - c. Our group loyalties
 - d. Our willingness to support each other in time of need
 - e. The amount of time we spend in the company of others in the church, i.e. seeking to learn how well we know those whom we sit by each Sunday. What would we

expect him to discover?

2. Several years ago, some churches allowed themselves to be analysed in this way; here is what was discovered:
 - a. The great majority of members knew a very small percentage of the people, even in smaller churches
 - b. Those who gathered for worship were mostly an anonymous group of worshippers
 - c. They were not a genuine community of souls prepared to bear one another's burdens
 - d. They expressed little interest in becoming more involved in each other's lives, i.e., they came to worship only for the sake of their own spiritual life and personal salvation! The report said, "*Many go to church in exactly the same way they go to the cinema.*"
3. The main conclusions of the survey was:
 - a. The churches in the survey consisted of members who were "*self-centred*"
 - b. Therefore, very little fellowship of any sort was taking place!

Note: Please don't jump to conclusions. I'm not suggesting that the same condition exists here. For the most part, I think it doesn't.

But, as we grow in number, the potential is there for losing the kind of fellowship we should experience. The purpose of this study is to counter the kind of "*self-centeredness*" that can destroy the spiritual fellowship God would have us experience in church.

b) Some reasons for self-centredness in churches

1. Many of us lived through the "*Me Decade*"
 - a. The 1970's were viewed as being distinguished by self-centred attitudes and self-indulgent behaviour
 - b. They were a time in which there was :
 - 1) A rapid rise of crime against others - rape, theft, assault, murder
 - 2) An increased use of drugs and alcohol as a way of escape
 - 3) A turn to philosophies and religions which involve preoccupation with Self:
 - a) "*Looking Out For #1*"
 - b) Transcendental Meditation (TM), and Yoga etc.
 - 4) An emphasis on consumerism and materialistic gain
 - c. But worse was to follow. The decade of the 1970's was followed by the "*Greed Decade*" of the 1980's.

Such cultural trends have produced many self-centred people!

2. We live in a highly mobile society

- a. New families move in, and others move away
 - b. Many live great distances from their place of worship, and from each other
 - c. These facts do not prevent us from having proper fellowship, they just make it easier to become isolated from the fellowship unintentionally
3. Technology designed to bring us closer together, can easily move us apart
 - a. Phones, email, etc., greatly increase our ability to communicate
 - b. But we can become stretched out so thin through such technology, that we don't develop any meaningful relationships
 4. A failure to appreciate the Biblical teaching about "*Our Life Together*"

3. The Church: A Fellowship Free From Self-Centeredness

It is the last point, "*Our Life Together*", that I want to expand in this message. While social trends may be nourishing the spirit of self-centeredness, God designed church to point us in a **different** direction.

a) This truth is emphasised in the Apostles' doctrine

1. We are to be hospitable to one another - 1 Pet 4:9
2. We are to care for one another - 1 Cor 12:26
3. We are to pray for one another - Jas 5:16
4. We are to restore one another - Jas 5:19-20
5. We are to teach and admonish one another - Col 3:16
6. We are to serve one another in love - Gal 5:13

b) This truth was shown in the early church

1. By the church in Jerusalem - Acts 2:42-46
2. By the church in Antioch - Acts 11:27-30
3. By the churches in Macedonia - 2 Cor 8:1-5
4. By the churches in Achaia - Rom 15:26

c) Such fellowship is a natural consequence of the teaching of Christ

1. The kingdom consists of those who love both God and their brethren - Mk 12:28-34
2. So, the fellowship we are to enjoy in the church is both "vertical" and "horizontal"
 - a. With God:
 - 1) We enjoy a "*vertical*" relationship - cf. 2 Cor 5:20
 - 2) But, take care, for an overemphasis on this aspect can cause insensitivity to the needs of others
 - b. With fellow Christians :
 - 1) We enjoy a "*horizontal*" relationship - cf. Eph 2:14-16
 - 2) But again, an undue emphasis on this aspect may cause one to neglect God

As in all things, the key to true fellowship is to develop a Scriptural balance and understanding.

4. Conclusion

1. As we continue in this series, we'll further define:
 - a. The fellowship that God intends His church to enjoyed
 - b. The spiritual activities designed to nurture fellowship
 - c. Elements necessary to preserve our fellowship
 - d. Biblical limitations on the extent of our fellowship
2. But in this message, we've stressed:
 - a. The importance of fellowship in the local church
 - b. The danger of allowing "*self-centeredness*" to disrupt our fellowship
3. For now, here are some practical suggestions that will enhance our ability to provide proper fellowship:
 - a. Learn the names of **each** member (make use of the church directory!)
 - b. Take notice of the cares and the joys of fellow Christians (listen to the announcements!)
 - c. Pray for those with special needs, mentioning them by name in your private prayers
 - d. Let's aim for a transparent lifestyle, where you aren't afraid to let others know the '*real you*', and where people feel comfortable in your presence.