

Our Life Together - 4

'Enhancing Our Fellowship'

1. Introduction

1. So far we have looked at the doctrinal basis of Our Life Together by:
 - a. Noticing the **intimacy** and **interdependency** of our fellowship in the local church
 - b. Examining **acceptance** and **freedom** in Christ
 - c. Reviewing what is said about the **limitations** of our fellowship
2. In this week's message, we'll look at the application of our studies to fellowship in our church:
 - a. What can we do to strengthen our life together?
 - b. What sort of things enhance the fellowship we enjoy in Christ?
3. Let's take a look at various acts of worship that we do in our public assemblies, which are designed to build and improve our fellowship in Christ

2. Improving Fellowship Through Prayer And Worship

Let's start by examining two acts of worship that we engage in at every service.

a) Consider the example of the early Church

1. They were quick to join themselves together in prayer
 - a. They continued steadfastly in prayer - Acts 2:42
 - b. Especially in the face of persecution - Acts 4:18-23; 29-33; 12:1-12
2. They had fellowship in worship:
 - a. While enduring imprisonment - Acts 16:25
 - b. Note the connection of worship with praying

b) How prayer and worship improves fellowship...

1. Through the benefits of prayer, especially collective praying
 - a. Prayer is a wonderful source of strength and peace - Phil 4:6,7
 - b. But there is also a special value when Christians pray together
 - 1) Jesus taught the value of collective prayer - Mat 18:19,20
 - 2) James taught the value of the prayer of a righteous man; how much more the value of many righteous people praying - James 5:16
2. Through the benefits of worship, especially collective worship

- a. Worship can certainly be an individual expression of praise - James 5:13
- b. When done together, it also helps us build up one another - Col 3:16
- c. This can lead to increased blessings, for such collective worship can:
 - 1) Nurture a heart of thankfulness to God - Col 3:16
 - 2) Help us be “*filled with the Spirit*” - Eph 5:18,19

3. Enhancing Fellowship Through The Lord’s Supper

The early church certainly took advantage of the full blessings to be found in prayer and worship; they not only prayed and worshipped as individuals, but collectively as well. This helped to strengthen the fellowship they enjoyed in Christ. What about us today? Do we allow prayer and worship to strengthen our fellowship in the body of Christ? Do we see the value in devoting much of our service to prayer and worship? Let’s now take a look at an act of worship we engage in – ‘Communion’, or the ‘Lord’s Supper’.

a) There are several important aspects of Communion

1. It is a memorial - 1 Cor 11:23-25
 - a. Instituted by the Lord Himself
 - b. To commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins - Mat 26:26-28
2. It is a proclamation - 1 Cor 11:26
 - a. In which we proclaim our faith in the effectiveness of Jesus’ death in our behalf
 - b. To be done until He comes again (so it is also a proclamation of our faith in His Second Coming)
3. It is to be a period of extreme reverence - 1 Cor 11:27,29
 - a. It is to be observed in a worthy manner
 - b. Out of respect for the supreme price Jesus paid for our sins
4. It is a time for self-examination - 1 Cor 11:28
 - a. Where we can reflect on our own spiritual condition in relation to the sacrifice of Christ
 - b. We can check if we’re living in a manner that makes His sacrifice worthwhile?
5. It is a communion (sharing, fellowship) - 1 Cor 10:16
 - a. With the blood and body of Christ
 - b. And in a vertical relationship and fellowship with Christ and the Father by the Holy Spirit

b) There is also the element of fellowship with others

1. It also has something to do with our oneness in the body of Christ.

- a. Though many, we are one bread and one body - 1 Cor 10:17
- b. Why? *“for we all share of that one bread”*
- c. There are at least two possible ways to view this...
 - 1) Sharing of the one bread together reminds us of our oneness, i.e., our fellowship
 - 2) Sharing of the one bread together strengthens our oneness, or fellowship

Both views are right, and both are accomplished.

- d. In this way the Supper is an act of worship in which there is both:
 - 1) A vertical fellowship - communion with the Lord’s body and blood
 - 2) A horizontal fellowship - communion with one another
- 2. This helps us to see some implications in several passages
 - a. e.g., Acts 20:7 - *“...when the disciples came together to break bread...”*
 - b. e.g., 1 Cor 11:33 - *“...when you come together to eat, wait for one another...”*
 - c. The Supper is designed to be a communal meal (even as the Passover, from which the Lord took elements to institute the Lord’s Supper, was a communal meal)

4. Enhancing Fellowship Through The Weekly Offerings

Communion, or the Lord’s Supper is more than just a personal act of devotion between a Christian and his Lord. As we share together, it should remind us of our fellowship in the one body of Christ, and by such remembrance strengthen our sense of fellowship. Now let’s take a look at an act of worship which may be considered by some as the least spiritual and therefore least likely to build fellowship.

a) How some may view the offering

- 1. It’s a way to pay the bills
 - a. As a mere mechanical detail necessary to raise money to pay the bills
 - b. As a rude intrusion of secular necessity into an otherwise spiritual service
 - 1) i.e., worship, prayer, Bible study...these are spiritual activities
 - 2) But – in the offering - what does taking up money (mammon) have to do with worshipping God?

With this view, some might think to themselves: *“Hurry up and pass the plate, so we can get on to more spiritual matters.”*

- 2. A private act between the Christian and his God
 - a. There is a real spiritual side to the offering:

- 1) Giving is an act of devotion to God
 - 2) I am giving back to Him as He has prospered me
- b. Yet may view the offering solely as a private matter between a person and His God, with no bearing one's fellowship with others

b) The biblical view of the offering

1. A brief survey of giving in the New Testament church may give us a better understanding of giving (Luke 6:38)
 - a. The church in Jerusalem
 - 1) There was a marvellous spirit of giving for Christians in need - Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35
 - 2) This evidently was a freewill offering, not something required - Acts 5:1-4

Here we have Christians in one congregation helping each other

- b. The church in Antioch
 - 1) Responding to a prophecy about a coming famine - Acts 11:27,28
 - 2) They sent relief "*according to their ability*" to Christians in Judea , Acts 11:29,30

Here we have **one** church helping **many** churches

- c. The ministry of Paul
 - 1) He was asked to remember the poor - Gal 2:9,10
 - 2) Which he was careful to do - 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-5

Here we have **many** churches helping **one** church

2. A careful study of these verses reveal the Biblical view of the offering
 - a. A means of supplying need:
 - 1) The needs of poor Christians
 - 2) Also the needs of preachers - Phil 4:15,16; 2 Cor 11:9
 - b. A means of building and strengthening fellowship. Note how Paul viewed:
 - 1) The support received from Philippi - Phil 4:15,16
 - 2) The offering the Gentile churches were sending to their Jewish Christians
 - a) The Gentiles had been sharers (fellowship) in spiritual matters with their Jewish Christians, now they were simply sharing (fellowship) with them in physical matters - Rom 15:27
 - b) The effect of such sharing was to create longing for one another; i.e. more spiritual fellowship together - 2 Cor 9:12-15

- 3) In the church at Jerusalem, such sharing was evidence that:
 - a) They were of “*one heart and one soul*” (possessing true fellowship) - Acts 4:32
 - b) They had true love for one another - 1 John 3:16-18

5. Conclusion

1. Every act of worship is designed to enhance our fellowship in the body of Christ...
 - a. Yes, there are elements of personal devotion in each of them
 - b. But we come together for a reason, and that reason includes enhancing our fellowship through activities which bind us closer together in Christ
2. The fellowship we enjoy in Christ...
 - a. Was made possible only by His death on the cross
 - b. But is strengthened whenever we assemble and participate in such activities as:
 - 1) Worship and prayer
 - 2) The Lord’s Supper
 - 3) The offering
3. If you seek to truly enjoy Our Life Together:
 - a. Never forsake the assembling of ourselves together - Heb 10:24,25
 - b. Take advantage of the tools that God has ordained to draw us closer to Him and to one another

Scriptures For ‘Our Life Together - 4’

- i. **Acts 2:42** *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Acts 4:18-23;29-33 *Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” 21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. 23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. 32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his*

own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Acts 12:1-12 *It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was **earnestly praying** to God for him. 6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. 8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. 11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating." 12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where **many people had gathered and were praying**.*

Acts 16:25 *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.*

- ii. **Phil 4:6,7** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Mat 18:19,20 *"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

James 5:13 *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.*

Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Eph 5:18,19 *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,*

iii. **1 Cor 11:23-25** *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.'* 25 *In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'*

Mat 26:26-28 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'* 27 *Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'*

1 Cor 11:26 *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

1 Cor 11:27,29 *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.*

1 Cor 11:28 *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

1 Cor 10:16 *Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*

iv. **1 Cor 10:17** *Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*

Acts 20:7 *On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.*

1 Cor 11:33 *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.*

v. **Luke 6:38** *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Acts 2:44,45 *All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*

Acts 4:32 *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as had need.*

Acts 5:1-4 *Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. 3 Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for*

yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

Acts 11:27,28 *During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)*

Acts 11:29,30 *The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

Gal 2:9,10 *James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*

1 Cor 16:1-4 *Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.*

2 Cor 8:1-5 *And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.*

vi. **Phil 4:15,16** *Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.*

2 Cor 11:9 *And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.*

Rom 15:27 *They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.*

2 Cor 9:12-15 *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out*

to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Acts 4:32 *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.*

1 John 3:16-18 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

vii. **Heb 10:24,25** *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*