Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

True Fellowship
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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I was raised as a preacher's kid. In fact, any of you who know me know I'm either the fourth or fifth generation of preachers. We can't quite remember that far back, but somewhere around the fourth or the fifth generation.

And I was raised in a church. I had so many quarterlies stacked up on my little shelf and eight zipper Bibles that every time I graduated somebody gave me another zipper Bible with my name in it.

And they used to say that I - in our church, when I grew up, we had little stickers they stuck on your head. If you were good, you got a gold sticker. If you were sort of average, you got a red sticker and if you were bad, you got a black sticker. And I can remember growing up with stickers on my head as a little kid and spending a great portion of my life in the church.

And if you were to ask me out of my own background to define the term fellowship, I'm afraid what I'd come up with might not be Biblical. Fellowship to me was a linoleum floor in the basement of the church with a shuffleboard court on it, red church punch and stale chocolate chip cookies.

And they called the place what? Fellowship Hall, right? And very little fellowship went on, mostly drinking stale - or drinking red punch and eating stale cookies. You got the message, anyway.

But that's not fellowship in the Bible. Fellowship isn't coffee and doughnuts. Fellowship is much more than that and I want you to see tonight as we examine the pages of the Word of God just precisely what the Spirit of God delineates to us as the truth about fellowship.

Now to begin with, just a definition, the word fellowship in the Greek is koinonia, a very familiar term to those of us who've been Christians for any length of time. The word koinonia is a common word in the New Testament. It is a common word that is translated fellowship. It is translated communion. It can be translated partnership. It could be translated togetherness. And all of those basically having to do with a commonness, a common partnership.

And fellowship as a concept is vital to the family of God, vital to the body of Christ. Way back in Genesis2:8 God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." God created man to be a fellowshipping preacher. He created man for a relationship with other men and other women for his fulfillment and, in fact, with God Himself.

So being alone is not the will of God. "It is not good," said God, "for man to be alone." God has designed that we have fellowship.

And I really believe that the church has to be a fellowship. It has to be more than coming in the back door, staring at the back of somebody's head for an hour and then leaving. It has to be more than that. There has to be a fellowship, not only from God's standpoint but I think from man's standpoint as well. I think we realize the problems of loneliness. We realize the problems of isolation and we desire to have meaningful relationships.

I was reading a book by a man named Larson who said this: "The neighborhood bar is probably the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his church. It's an imitation dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive, accepting and inclusive fellowship. It is also unshockable. It is Democratic. You can tell people's secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes, not because most people are alcoholics but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers."

Well, I think he's right. I think people are looking for somebody to talk to. Somebody to love. Somebody to be loved by, even if it's only one night. Even if it's only two hours. Man has a deep hunger for fellowship. He has a deep need to be with people in a meaningful way.

Now this I believe is basic to the church. We desperately need to be a fellowship and as I look at Grace Church becoming larger and larger, with all of the mass of people that God has sent to us and I see the tremendous increase in the family of God at Grace, my heart cries out that we would never lose the sense of fellowship, we would never become an organization and I can see this even happening in my own life.

The problem of trying to keep myself in a personal and close relationship with even the staff of Grace Church is a difficult thing. Because the bigger the church gets, the broader the spectrum of administration, the broader the spectrum of a superficial kind of involvement.

And the more well-known our church becomes and the more I am known, the more people say well, come over here and do this and come over there and do that and come over here and speak to this group, and pretty soon I begin to float away from the people I love the most and the people who mean the most to me and the people I need the most. The people who make up the team who serve Christ here.

In the last two weeks God has really spoken to my heart about some things very specifically. I wasn't feeling well, I went off to the doctor just to make sure I was all in one piece and the doctor's advice

was you'd better slow down.

And then the elders came and sat down with me and they said you know, you'd better slow down a little bit. You've got a lot of things going far away and you need to establish some priorities right here with the men of this staff who need your fellowship.

And so for the last three or four days I've been canceling meetings all over the place so I can be here and fellowship because I need to be enriched in my own life from those people that I love the most.

And so God has really been dealing with me about the need that I have to give myself to the staff and to the family that is Grace Church. And I've often taught you, and I've been reminded about what I've taught in the past and I'm not too sure I've been following through on it lately, but I remind myself of what I've taught you so many times that if you worry about the depth of the ministry, God will take care of the breadth of it.

And there's a new commitment in my heart to you as my beloved family to pour my life into this place and let God worry about how he spreads it through you. Because if I spread myself so thin then I can't be to you what God has primarily called me to be.

And so God has really dealt in my heart. As I mentioned this morning, four of us on the staff spent three or four days together this week just reiterating what our commitment has to be. We have to set the pace for you in reaffirming our love to each other, and reaffirming our honesty and openness with each other, and reaffirming the need that we have to hold each other up and to bear each other's burdens.

And that's the great burden that I have for all of Grace Church. That we would never become spectators. That this thing would never become a place where you go and watch it happen, but that this would always where you come and make it happen. Where you're involved.

And so with all of those things in my heart and mind, I want to talk to you about fellowship. And I want to talk to you about the basis of fellowship, the nature of fellowship, the symbol of fellowship, the danger, the responsibly and the result. Or any part of that.

First of all, the basis of fellowship. Look at IJohn 1. What is the basis of fellowship? Is there really a legitimate basis for fellowship? Do we fellowship simply because we're all the same socioeconomic status? Are we a part of a fellowship simply because we happen to live in the same place? Are we a part of a fellowship because we happen to dress the same way, or think the same way, or vote the same way or whatever? Do we really have common ground? Or when we talk about fellowship in the church, are we just trying to stir up ecumenical hash? Is there real fellowship?

Well, I think there is. I'm confident that there is as I examine IJohn1:3. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly," here's the basis, "our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

Now, listen. Anybody in fellowship with Jesus Christ is also in fellowship with anybody else in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Did you get that? Anybody in fellowship with Jesus Christ is also in fellowship with anybody else in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

That is our common ground. Our common ground is not social. It's not economic. It's not intellectual. It's not cosmetic. It's not any of those superficial things. Our common ground is that pulsing through the life of every Christian is the heartbeat of God. Our common ground is that we possess the common eternal life. Our common ground is that we are children in the same family, born of God. That's our common ground.

Coming back to the word koinonia, again. The literal and simple meaning of the word is commonness. Something we hold in common. Koinonia is commonness. Koinonoss, koinonoss is a partner. Koinonoss means a partner. Now listen to this. Koinonoss means a partner. Koinoneto, the verb, means to be a partner or a sharer or a partaker.

Now let me emphasize something people that I think is very important. I believe that fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ is not basically experiential, it is positional. We are in the fellowship therefore we are to enjoy one another.

But the fellowship is positional. Look again at Verse3. That's what that verse is saying. "That which we have seen and heard." And what is it? Well, it's the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He mentions it in the first two verses. "The Word of life, the Gospel, which we've seen and heard, we declare to you that you may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

Now, listen. The proclamation of the Gospel was not an end in itself. The proclamation of the Gospel was to have as its goal the creation of a fellowship. When the Gospel is preached, beloved, it is preached because God wants to make a fellowship. God wants to draw some people into His family. And into family with each other. Truly our fellowship is with each other and with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

So the fellowship is non-experiential. It's a fact of partnership. It's again ICorinthians 6:17. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." We're all in one family. We're all in one partnership. That's the essence of koinonia.

Now you often hear people say well, Brother SoandSo is out of fellowship. I don't think that's a scriptural statement. I don't think a Christian can ever be out of fellowship. If fellowship means partnership and you were saved and came into a partnership with Jesus Christ, that partnership is for how long? Forever. You can't be out of fellowship. To be out of fellowship, in the New Testament use of koinonia would be to lose your salvation. So when you say well, SoandSo's out of fellowship, that meant that he lost his union with Jesus Christ, which is an eternal union? No. No Christian is ever out of fellowship.

Well you say well, what do you, how do you describe it when a Christian just doesn't seem to have it? Verse4, 1John1. "And these things," that is, all the spiritual principles of 1John, "write we unto you," not that you may stay in fellowship but that your what? "Joy might be full." Now instead of saying well, SoandSo is out of the fellowship what we should say is SoandSo has lost his joy.

Now you remember David? And his prayer? He said restore unto me Thy salvation. Is that what he said? He said restore unto me what? The joy of Thy salvation.

You see, the believer doesn't forfeit the fellowship. Jesus Christ is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. One who said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Do you remember that man who gave his testimony last Sunday night when I baptized him? He said he received Jesus Christ as a small boy then he became an alcoholic, and was an alcoholic for 16years? And he wound up in prison up here and Rich Hines got ahold of him, and talked to him about Jesus Christ? And he said well, I received Christ 16years ago and Rich said to him, then Christ never left you. And the man bowed his head and found that Christ was there and recommitted himself to Jesus Christ. Christ had never left him. The fellowship had never been broken. But the joy had been lost because of his sin, you see?

And that's why He establishes in Chapter1 that the fellowship is the essence of what happens when you're saved and the joy is the essence of what happens when you obey the principles in the rest of this epistle, along with the rest of the New Testament.

That's important for us to realize, beloved, that everybody who's a Christian's in the fellowship. And everybody who's a
Christian has the right to our fellowship, to our concern, to our love, to our care, to our ministry.

What is the basis of fellowship? Salvation, in a word. Salvation. Everybody who's a Christian's in the fellowship. And there's no excuse in the Church for looking down your nose at somebody else because their social situation's different, their economic situation's different, their IQ is not quite what yours is or anything else. If they were all master-planned by the Divine God of the universe into His Church before the world began, they have infinite worth and if they have all been master-planned into

the body and enter into the fellowship, they have all the rights and privileges just like you do and they have the same common eternal life and if you love the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells in them, you ought to love them, too, right?

Fellowship. I just think we ought to realize that we have the same responsibility to everybody in the family of God. The basis of our fellowship is common eternal life. We possess that with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and with every other believer on the earth. All saved people are in the fellowship.

So you don't have to say well, of course, in our fellowship we believe in emersion. No. There are some in the fellowship who believe in emersion and some in the fellowship who believe in sprinkling. And we love them, even though they're wrong. But they're right other places.

There are some in the fellowship who maybe have their little distinctions, but listen. We don't want to separate the Christian family into the little denominations, you know, where you get everybody with his theological shotgun up on his ecclesiastical ivory tower ready to fire away at anybody who disagrees with him. We don't want that. We're all in the family. We're all in the fellowship if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And John contrasts all the way through, the believer with the unbeliever. And his first contrast in this Epistle is between who's in the fellowship and who's out. Let's look at Verse5. "This then is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Now some people find a great deal of difficulty in these few verses here. Let me help you to see them. What is he saying? All right, let's look at Verse5. And he reviews the Gospel. The message of the Gospel, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." By the way, there's no mixture with God. "In Him is light and there is no darkness at all."

And so having stated the Gospel, John recognizes that there are two kinds of people within the Church, the if we sayers and the if we doers.

Now in Verse6, the if we sayers come along and say we have fellowship. We're in the fellowship. But if they walk in darkness then they lie because God is light and in him is what? No darkness. So anybody walking in the darkness isn't walking in God. Anybody walking in darkness is not a Christian. Anybody walking in darkness is not in fellowship with God. No matter what he or she says.

I believe in Verse6 you have nonChristians. You say well, don't you believe a Christian could walk in the darkness? No. Because I don't care what you do as a Christian you're in God and in Him is no darkness at all. Now by the way, you can do the deeds of the darkness but you do them in light. Just want you to know that. And God sees and you see, and the Church is to act and discipline as well.

Just let me help you to understand that, because you may be a little confused. Let me give you some verses. Don't try to look them up. Just jot them down. In Acts26:18 it says this, "That Paul was called by the Holy Spirit to open their eyes," the eyes of the Gentiles, "to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." In other words, now listen to me, salvation is turning someone from darkness to what? To light. All Christians are always walking in the light because they are in God.

Let me give you another Scripture. IThessalonians5:4. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness." It can't get any clearer than that. You are not in darkness. What's the next verse? Verse5. IThessalonians5:5. "Ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day." We are not of the night, nor of darkness.

When you were saved according to Colossians1:12, you were made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, it says. You were delivered out of the power of darkness. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever walks in this light shall never walk in," what? "Darkness." John8:12. Never. No Christian, no time, is in the darkness.

If you're in the fellowship, you're in the light. Now you may choose to sin in the light, but you're doing it in full light. With full responsibility, and full manifestation before God and your own conscience.

And so in Verse6, then, back to IJohn. He says there will be some come along, the if we sayers and they'll say, we're in the fellowship but you look at their life and they're not in Christ. They're not in God. They've never been saved. You see what he's saying is, the basis of fellowship is not denominational, it's not church membership, it's not socioeconomic, it is salvation. And when somebody comes along and says, I'm in your fellowship but they've never come to Jesus Christ, they're walking in the darkness, they lie or they're not in the fellowship.

Beloved, we have a unique fellowship. Verse7 speaks of us who are in it. "But if we are the ones walking in the light as He is in the light, then we are the ones having," what? "Fellowship." You see, the people having the fellowship are the people in the light because God is light and in Him is no darkness.

In other words, what He's saying is, the fellowship is made up of people who are saved. People redeemed. People who know God. We're the ones who've had the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanse us from all sin.

What's the basis of the fellowship? Salvation. Hey, listen to me. If you're saved, my friend, if you're saved, listen to this. You are in the fellowship. You can't sneak and out of the body of Christ. You can't slip in unnoticed and you're not going to be able to hang around with Christians incognito. We're going to get you. You're in the fellowship. That's the basis of the fellowship.

Let's look at the nature of the fellowship. The basis of it, salvation. The nature of it, for lack of a better word, togetherness. Acts2. You say okay, I'm in the fellowship, MacArthur. I'm saved. I received Jesus Christ as my Savior. I'm in the fellowship. What does that mean? What exactly are you trying to say to me?

Well, let me tell you. If you're in the fellowship you have some interesting responsibilities and they can all be summed up by the term togetherness, really. Let me show you.

Acts2:41. "Then they that gladly received His word," Peter's word on the Day of Pentecost, he's preaching here, "were baptized and the same day there were added to them about 3,000souls." So there was the birth of the church. Three thousand people on the first day. Isn't that great? Great way to start. Three thousand people. And they continued steadfastly.

I'll tell you one thing. When you get 3,000people saved and 3,000people who continue steadfastly, that's some kind of evangelism. And what did they continue in? The Apostle's doctrine and what? "Fellowship, and breaking of bread and in prayers." Fellowship.

Now this is the experiential element of fellowship. The positional element, salvation. The experiential element, how does it work out? Well here we find the beautiful picture of togetherness. No sooner was the Church born than it had fellowship. And how did that fellowship work? Well, he goes on to tell about it. They met for teaching, the Apostle's doctrine. Breaking of bread. The Lord's Table. And prayer. This is the way they fellowshipped.

And as you look at this text you find some wonderful things. Their togetherness had all kinds of elements. First of all, they were all saved. Verse42. "They continued steadfastly." Three thousand people joined the Church. Three thousand people continued in the faith. That's real salvation. By the way, it is the people who continue who are the genuinely saved, right? John8:31, Jesus said, well it says in John8, "Many believed on His name," and then in Verse31 Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you're my real disciple." Continuing steadfastly is a sign of real salvation.

IJohn2:19 says "They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would no doubt have remained with us but they went out from us that it might be made manifest they were not of us." True believers continued.

So first of all, the nature of their fellowship, they were all saved. And we've already made that point. They were all saved. They were real, true believers. There weren't any phonies in the bunch. You know, that's why the Bible warns the Church about the false believers and the false prophets and the tears among the wheat, because they can so debilitate the Church. They can so sap the strength of the Church. It's the old rotten apple in the barrel principle. The Church must be pure and the Church must be holy because its togetherness is based upon the reality of its redemption. You know, you've got to watch that.

I remember when I first came to Grace Church nine years ago and we had a little problem. We began to just kind of preach about what the church ought to be and somebody said, did you know that we've got several couples, two couples, I think, in the choir who aren't saved. They're not Christians. But we think if we let them sing, they'll come around. Well, I had a problem. So we talked about that a little bit. I was kind of new and, you know, wet behind the ears and my first church and all, I didn't want to blow the saints clear out of the saddle. And I knew they knew a lot more here than I did when I arrived so I was leaning on them heavily. But I realized that you can't do God's work with Satan's people. And so I said well, I just think we ought to use God's people to sing God's praises because I think that's the way a church has to be.

You know, I'll never forget a pastor who came to me at a pastor's conference and he said, after listening to all the teaching, you know, we're taught all week long. He says to me you know, I figured out my problem. I said well, what is it? He says, half my board is saved and the other half aren't. I said yeah, right. That is a problem. Because God does not work well with Satan.

The genius of the early church in Jerusalem, they were all redeemed. They all continued. And the legitimacy of their salvation gave impetus to the church so that the church grew. Verse47, people were added daily. Further on, the people were so upset, they said you filled Jerusalem with your doctrine in Chapter5, Verse28. You've literally taken over our town with this stuff. Praise the Lord. That's what we're supposed to do.

In Revelations 2, look at this for a minute, just expanding your thought for a second here. Revelation 2:14 says, our Lord, of course, here writing to the church at Pergamus or Pergamum, whichever, said "I have a few things against thee because there hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balack to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, apparently some immoral teaching from a bishop named Nicolas or a deacon named Nicolas, which thing I hate. Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

Now, it's interesting in Verse14 He says, "I have a few things against thee because thou hast there them." Immediately you've got the problem in the Pergamus church. You've got the these and the thems. And that was the problem. The these were the redeemed and the thems were the unredeemed. "And you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam."

And if you go back to Numbers22 to 25, you can read the doctrine of Balaam. Don't do it now but here's what it was. Balack, the king of Moab, wanted to get rid of Israel. So he paid Balaam, Balaam was a prophet for hire. You could hire Balaam and he'd go curse somebody for the right amount of money. So they hired Balaam to go curse Israel. And three times he tried to curse Israel and every time, he failed. You remember one time he couldn't get his donkey to go in the right place.

And Balaam was a failure at doing that so finally they decided if we can't curse Israel, we'll do it another way and they came up with a plot. The women of Moab, who were pagan, godless people, would intermarry with the Israelites in idolatrous orgies and intermarriages that would pollute and corrupt the stream of Israel.

And it worked. They couldn't get Balaam to curse them but they could get them to fall into immorality with Moabite women to intermarry and to pollute the stream of Israel that way. And the real issue in the church at Pergamus was spiritual intermarriage. What they had in that church that was so bad was they had the true and the false, the believing and the unbelieving, the Godly and the godless. And that's why he says in Verse16, "you'd better repent or I'll come unto thee quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

You see, God wants His Church pure. He wants His Church a redeemed Church. Togetherness starts with pure ranks. The basis of, listen, the basis of fellowship is salvation and the nature of fellowship is it's togetherness. But that togetherness begins on a practical basis with regeneration. I just can't get together in God's work with somebody who's not a believer and I think that's why we have to emphasize the Church is pure.

Grace Community Church has one requisite for membership. You know what it is? That you love the Lord Jesus Christ and have received him as your Savior. That's it. Because you're in the fellowship and if God accepts you in His fellowship on that basis, we're not going to set any higher standard or any different one.

And so, the early Church. Go back to Acts2. The early Church was together, first of all, because they were all saved. Secondly, we find not only were they a saved Church but they were a sharing Church. Verse43. I love this. "Many signs and wonders were done by the Apostles and all that believed were together." Boy, what a statement that is. All that believed were together.

ICorinthians1 says, "I wish you had the same mind, the same opinions, and you all spoke the same thing." You say oh, man. That's ridiculous. The Lord doesn't want to just stamp us out all the same. Sure he does.

In Romans15 it says that "We would with one mind and one mouth glorify together the Lord Jesus Christ." I would that you had the same mind, that you had the same attitudes, the same opinions and speak the same things. And they did.

They were together, and they had all things common. You know what? That meant that anything I owned was yours if you needed it more than I did. I mean, they were together. You say, is this communism? No, it's not that.

It's not where you go into the church and sell everything you've got and somebody takes all the money and doles it out equally? No, no, no.

Look at Verse45. "And were selling," this is an imperfect tense verb, "were selling their possessions," past, continuous action, not an eros verb where they all did it at once. They were doing it as often as people had need.

It wasn't, now that I'm a Christian I take all my money, dump it in the big church pot and they'll dole it back out and we'll all live on the same basis. No, no, no.

I don't even think that's the way it's to be with the pastor. I think that there are variations in pay for the pastorate. After all, ITimothy5:17 says that those who labor diligently and hard in the Word and doctrine are worthy of double honor. I believe that there are differences in needs in families where the children would make a difference, how many you had and what your responsibility to them was. I believe there are differences in what our economics are to be in the church. I don't think the church ever is teaching communism, where you dump it into one pot and dole it out equally.

What it's saying is, those people, out of their togetherness, were selling possessions to give money to people when the people had the needs. That's all. That's all. It was just a tremendous sensitivity. And you find over the fourth chapter where Barnabus sold a piece of land to meet somebody's need. I mean, they shared. That was it. They just had a wonderful, loving sharing response to each other.

"And they," continuing Verse46, "daily with one accord in the temple." Isn't that great? They were together. And if somebody had a need and you had a piece of land, you sold your land and gave them the money and said here, meet your need. They were together and it was manifest every day as they continued with one accord. They said the same thing. They thought the same thing in the temple, and they were breaking bread from house to house. How long has it been since you had somebody from the fellowship of Grace Church over to your house and you had dinner with them and

broke the bread around the Lord's table right there in your meal together? How long has it been since you did that?

They had all things in common and they shared. "And there was gladness," at the end of Verse46, "there was singleness of heart." Their hearts were knit like David and Jonathan's. It's got to be.

And they were praising God. Having favor with the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Now, you know, we have a lot of people at Grace Church but I wish we had 100,000 more that knew Jesus Christ as part of the crowd in here. That's the way I feel. Or crowded in somewhere where they could get taught.

And if we want Grace Church to grow, it isn't so much that we've got to go out and put up big posters and stuff and put up big sign boards, Repent or Else. That isn't it. If we want to just knock the world off their pins, all we've got to do is just get together. And if we begin to love each other, Jesus put it this way, "By this shall all men know that you're my disciples if you have," what? "Love one for another."

And Jesus even defined that. He said, "Love one another as I have loved you." And how had he loved them? By washing their feet. As soon as we start bending down and washing each other's feet, the world's going to take notice of us.

Aristides' writing on Christianity in the second century wrote these words. He was an observer of Christians, he said. "They obtain from all impurity in the hope of the recompense that is to come in another world. As for their servants or handmaids or children, they persuade them to become Christians by the love they have for them. And when they become so, they call them without distinction brothers. They do not worship strange gods, and they walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them and they love one another. And when they see the stranger, they bring him to their homes and they rejoice over him as over a true brother for they do not call brothers those who are after the flesh but those who are in the Spirit and in God.

And there is among them a man that is poor and needy and if they have not an abundance of necessities, they will fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with his necessary food. And they observe scrupulously the commandment of their Messiah. They live honestly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them. Every morning and all hours on account of the goodness of God toward them, they praise and laud Him and over their food and their drink they render him thanks.

And if any righteous person of their number passes away from this world, they rejoice and give thanks to God and they follow his body as though he were moving from one place to another. And when a child is born to any of them, they praise God. And if again it chances to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily as for one who has passed through the world without sins. Such is the law of the Christians and such is their conduct."

Boy, what a statement. That was the character of the early Church. They cared for each other. They hungered for fellowship. They hungered for love.

And beloved, this is simply stated. The key to unity in the Church is fellowship and the key to fellowship in the Church is love and the key to love in the Church is humility.

Philippians3. "Having the same love." How are you going to have the same love? And earlier in the second chapter he says, I want you to have fellowship and I want you to have the same love. And you say how? Let each consider others what? Better than themselves. Humility. It's when you really look up to other people. It's when you see them better than themselves that you care and you sacrifice.

What is the basis of fellowship? Salvation. What is the nature of fellowship? It's togetherness. Togetherness. Where we have one heart and one mind and one mouth. And we all hold in common all our possessions and they're just as loose as they need to be, and they slip through our fingers when anybody has a need. And they'll come back to us when we have a need.

You can't be possessive in this family. You can't lock your doors in this house and bar everybody out. They have a right to your fellowship.

The symbol of fellowship. What is that? Look at ICorinthians 10. ICorinthians 10. What is the symbol of fellowship? Oh, this is good. The symbol of fellowship is in Verses16 and 17. Paul writing to the Corinthians says, "The cup of blessing, which we blessed, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread."

You know what he's saying? What is the symbol of our fellowship? You tell me. What is it? It's Communion, isn't it? It's the cup and the bread. That's the symbol of our fellowship. You see, it's the symbol because it pictures that act which provided the basis of our fellowship. It was the death of Jesus Christ that provided the basis of our fellowship. So the Communion which reminds us of that death becomes the symbol of our fellowship.

You know, I like to preach. You know that. I love to preach. But there's something I love better than that. I love, I love to come to the Lord's Table better than I love to preach and that's saying a lot because I really love to preach. But I love to come to the Lord's Table because I just love the reality of

the focus on the very emblem of our fellowship. I love to come to the Lord's Table.

My only regret, I suppose, is that I don't come to the Lord's Table as often as I should come. I know why that early Church came to the Lord's Table every day. It says they were daily breaking bread. I know why. Because they had such an overwhelming love for Jesus Christ they were driven to celebrate the pouring of that love and they had such a great love for each other, they were driven to commune at the very basis of that fellowship, the Cross of Christ.

And by the way, when Jesus said in Luke22:19, "This do in remembrance of me," there was a lot more to it than that. Oh, yes. It's in remembrance but more than just a kind of a memorial ceremony, I believe when we come to the Lord's Table we literally commune with the living, resurrected Christ. I think that's what Verse16 is saying. Look at it. The cup of blessing which we bless. Is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The breach which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? Listen, He's not just saying is it not the remembrance of it, it's the very fellowship of it. When you come to that table, you commune with Christ and you commune with every other believer gathered there.

When I go to the Lord's Table, I kind of feel like one of the 12 gathered about the table at the Last Supper. The night before Jesus was crucified. And He's the real host, see? He's the real host. Jesus is. And we're there with him at His Table, communing.

And, you know, we all just kind of fall at the same level, don't we? We come to the table, there's no rich and there's no poor, there's no smart and no dumb, no big and no little, no black and no what, no nothing. Just all sinners with nothing to offer and nothing to bring, saying before God, we have this in common. The Lord Jesus Christ died to redeem us. It's the symbol of our fellowship. And I really think that we need consciously and continuously to be obedient to the Lord in sharing at His Table.

Paul Tillich, who was a well-known theologian to some, said "Fundamentalism has spelled the death of the sacraments." It's an interesting quote. Fundamentalism with all of its zeal, fundamentalism with all of its evangelism, has maybe gone flying right on by the whole concept of worship, the whole concept of communing with Jesus Christ at his table. We must come together for that purpose.

Beloved, when we have a communion service here, you ought to be here. I don't hesitate to say that. I don't care what your plans are, you ought to be here. That's the symbol of our fellowship. If you're in the family, you ought to be here, gathered with the rest of us worthless sinners, drowning in grace at the foot of the Cross. You ought to be there. That's the symbol of our fellowship. And we ought to just remind ourselves that that's what started it all.

You know, when you come to the Lord's Table, it kind of visualizes the fellowship. Christ is the head and we're just all the family gathered there. Everybody does the same thing. We all take the cup; we

all take the bread, because we're all the same.

You know, when folks don't come to the Lord's Table I get anxious in my heart for them because you know another thing it does when you come to the Lord's Table? Boy, you've got to face your sin. Because you can't study ICorinthians11 and you can't come to the Lord's Table unless you come worthily. You remember that one? Because if you come unworthily, you bring upon yourself crima in the Greek, which means chastening. In other words, you can't say oh, yes, I want to celebrate the Cross while you're entertaining sin in your heart because that would be a mockery. How could you entertain the very sin for which He went to the Cross? So it's a purifying thing.

Kevan in a very fine book on the subject says this. "He was absenting himself from the worship and from the Lord's Table. The pastor went to see him and after they had talked over the issues involved, as they were sitting by an open fire, the pastor took the tongs from the hearth and separated the flaming coals and spread them all around the outer circumference of the open grate in the fireplace. In a few moments, the flames died out. In another few minutes, the coals lost their brightness and grew ashen and dull. The pastor looked at his member and said, do you understand? The man had grace and wisdom enough to say yes, pastor, I understand.

Then he took the tongs again and taking the coals from the outer edge of the grate he put them all together in one stack and you know what happened? They had not been together many moments before they began to glow once more and then they came up in flames and the fire was strong. And again the pastor looked at his erring member and said, do you understand? Let nothing divide you in your fellowship with your fellow believer because you will both be the losers. Not only will you both be the losers, but so will the integrity of the Church. The flame will go down and the fires of revival will depart. We are together in Him and the Lord's Supper draws us together, and the nearer we are to the Lord at His Table, the nearer we must be to one another. Keep the fellowship real."

Good. It's a Holy Table. We need to be there. It's the symbol of our fellowship and you might as well get used to us, folks. You're going to have to spend forever with us.

Fourth. We've seen the basis of fellowship, salvation. The nature of fellowship, togetherness. The symbol of fellowship, Communion. And the danger to fellowship, number four. The danger.

What is it that fouls up the fellowship? What is the real danger to fellowship? Well, it's simple. One word. Small word. Three letters. The middle letter is "I". What is it? Sin. Sin really fouls up the fellowship.

Since God is holy - now listen, this is simple. Since God is holy and according to Habakkuk, "of pure eyes and to behold evil, cannot look upon inequity." Since God is holy, sin violates your relationship with him. It doesn't put you out of the fellowship; it just messes up the fellowship. It restricts the joy.

We've got four kids in our house. Most of the time they're pretty good. Now and then, they misbehave. Four or five times a day. And you know something? No matter what they do and no matter how sternly they're disciplined, and no matter how many times they are spanked and no matter how they violate the relationship they have with mom and dad by disobedience, they are still our what? Children. So it is with God.

You see, it's His children Hebrews tell us that he scourges. It's His sons that he chastens. That's never changed. Never out of the fellowship. Just lose the joy of the relationship.

And so sin is a real issue. Beloved, I would just say this to you. If you're a Christian and you're in the fellowship, you can't sin without affecting the fellowship. Your sin affects everybody. Why? Because for one thing, it debilitates you from ministering to somebody else. And that's to their loss, because you're uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit to minister in a special way.

For another thing, you lose the joy of your salvation so you can't help to cause joy in someone else. I'm not saying sin is unforgiven. No, all your sin is forgiven for His name's sake, it says in I John 2:12. All your sin is forgiven. That isn't the issue.

But where you continue in sin without really dealing with it and repenting of it and turning from it, you put yourself in a situation where you violate the fellowship with God and you violate the fellowship with other believers.

Now remember, it's not a question of salvation. It's just a question of the fullness of joy in that relationship. And the fullness of potential for ministry to one another.

I'll give you an illustration. If I had some sin in my life, if I started doing something on the side that, you know, I don't know, get in some crooked business deal and I'm making money on the side and all of sudden sin starts taking over my life and I stand up here, believe me, I will not minister in the power of the Spirit of God. So what's going to happen is all of you are going to be affected by my sin. And on any level, that'll happen. Any level.

You can't be the family priest, dad, and minister in holiness to your family unless you live in holiness. Mom, you can't be all that you need to be to that man and those kids if your life isn't right. If there's sin in your life, it's going to cripple and debilitate your ministry to them.

Sin always messes up the fellowship. Always. That's why Ephesians 5:8 says, "You are now light in the Lord so walk as children of light." I mean, you're in the light so live it out.

Sin will just shatter the unity of the body. It'll just fracture everything.

You see that's why when a Christian sins, he's to repent. And if he doesn't repent, somebody's to go to him and them somebody else is to go to him and then the church is to go to him and then if he still doesn't repent, he's to be disciplined. Because the church can't tolerate that kind of thing.

Go back to ICorinthians 10. I'll illustrate it to you again. ICorinthians 10:20. "I say the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons," to no God. In other words, he's saying, Gentile religion is not just neutral, it's demon-worship. You know, if a Gentile wants to worship a rock then a demon will impersonate the god he thinks is in the rock and do enough stuff to keep him stuck to the rock and that'll affect his mind.

So Gentile, false pagan systems of religion are demon-worship. That's what he's saying. And he says I would not that you should have fellowship with demons. You can't drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can't be a partaker of the Lord's Table and the table of demons. Do you want to provoke the Lord to jealousy? If you do, you better be stronger than Him or you're going to get it.

In other words, what he's saying is, you don't have the strength to defend yourself against what God's going to do to you if you start messing around with evil.

I don't want you to have two fellowships. I don't want you to have fellowship with God and fellowship with demons. I don't want you messing around with righteousness and messing around with sin. Look at Israel of old. They tried to do that, didn't they? Play off one against the other. It was disastrous.

Oh, the fellowship is always marred, always marred, always marred by the same thing. Sin. Sin. In the Corinthian church, some of them sinned so frequently and with such unrepentance that the Lord finally just took them home and got them out of the way because they were just fouling up everything. And in Verse30 he says, some of you have continued in sin to the point where you're weak and sickly and some of you are just dead. We just got you out of the road.

So the symbol is Communion and the danger is sin. And that's why when you come to the Lord's Table you confess your sin. Verse38 of 11 says, "examine himself and then eat."

You see another reason, beloved, that the Lord wants you at His Table is because when you come to His Table you've got to face the issue of your sin because you're at the foot of the Cross again. You're looking at a crucified Christ who was crucified for your sin, and you've got to deal with the reality of that. And man, I don't know about you but I need to be at the foot of the Cross a lot. A lot. Because I face my sin and I turn from my sin and then I'm free to fellowship with meaning and blessing.

The basis of fellowship? Salvation. The nature of fellowship? Togetherness. The symbol of fellowship? Communion. The danger to fellowship? Sin.

Fifth, the responsibility of fellowship. The responsibility of fellowship. Now, we're not going to take time to develop all of these but I am going to run them by you for a moment. This is fabulous. What is the responsibility? You say boy, John, you've got me going. You told me if I'm saved, I'm in the fellowship. Okay. You told me the nature of the fellowship is togetherness and sharing. Great. The symbol is Communion. I'm ready. The danger is sin. I want to watch that area. But what do I do? Give me something practical to do. I'm going to give you right now lots of them.

I believe - now watch this. This is so vital. I think many Christians miss this. I believe that the responsibility of fellowship is delineated specifically in the Scripture. What am I to do to you, with you, for you, at you, to show my fellowship? Are you ready? These are all what I call the one anothers of the New Testament. The one anothers of the New Testament. Let's look at them. Don't look them up, just jot them down and listen because otherwise you'll be running around, getting lost.

James 5:16. There's the first one I'll share. It says this: "Confess your sins one to," what? "Another." That's the first thing you do. You're open and honest about your sins. The word there, by the way, is not false. That's sort of a little - eases the word a little. It's just plain old allAmerican sins. Confess your sins one to another. That's one of the responsibilities of fellowship. It's hamarqi. It's the basic word for sin.

Now by the way, you know, I preached on this one time and somebody came to me and said, well you know something? Our pastor did that. He made Wednesday night confession night and people stand up and confess their sins. And you wouldn't believe it. The attendance is rising. Right. People are sitting there saying boy, you don't want to miss this, Alice. Whoo, hoo, hoo. Hot stuff, see? You should have heard last week.

No, it doesn't say stand up in front of the whole church. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said "it's a shame to speak of things done in secret."

But what it does say is to confess your sins one to what? Another. That's simple. One to another. Now, there's no priest here. It doesn't mean go down and stand and talk into a little box. It doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean go through a lot of Hail Mary's and beads and things. Confess your sins one to another? Which one? Any good one. Any Christian. Any brother and sister, particularly if there's one whom you have personally offended.

Now, I believe we need to encourage each other to be honest. I believe we need to confess our sin. You know, what we'll find out? You may say well, I don't want anyone to know. Listen, you're not going to tell anybody anything they don't already guess. Because they know you're not perfect.

You know, whenever I get in a situation where somebody's very honest I always say, you too? We're all on the same ground. We've all sinned. We all have the same struggles. It's not so shocking, and it's an amazing breakthrough that we can have when we're really honest. All Christians ought to have somebody that they can unbear their heart to, who can pray for them in the areas of their weakness. Very important.

Confess your sins, one to another. That's simple enough, isn't it? That's what we're here for. Don't just come in here and slip out. I don't want anyone to know about me. Oh, if they ever find out. Then if they never find out, maybe they can't hold you up and love you and pray for you. You didn't invent sin. It's been around.

The second principal, and I don't even have time to deal with all of them, but here's another one. Forgive one another. Forgive one another. Colossians 3:13 says, "Forbearing one another and forgiving one another."

You ought to be forgiving, particularly the first one has reference, I think, to someone who has sinned against you and when they come and they confess it, what should your response be? I forgive you. And you remember, Peter says Lord, shall I forgive seven times? You know, he was feeling so self-righteousness. Oh, I'm so magnanimous. Seven times? And the Lord says no, 490times. Oh. Forgiveness. Forgive one another.
2Corinthians 2:68 says, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted by the many so that on the contrary ye ought rather to forgive him and comfort him lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. I wish that you would confirm your love toward him."

Listen, if the guy's confessed the sin, then don't rub it in. Forgive him and affirm your love to him. See?

You say, but how much should we forgive? There's a limit. Okay? You want a limit. Here's a limit. "Be ye kind," Ephesians4:32, "one to another. Tenderhearted. Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." There's the limit. You forgive as much as God forgave you. Hmmm. Listen, that's a lot and it's still going on.

Let me give you a third thing. Bear one another's burdens. Another one anothers. Galatians 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Spiritual sympathy. Carry the cares of each other. Boy, you know, I just have been convicted in my own heart that I get so busy in my own mind with my own cares and my own anxieties that my back doesn't have enough room for somebody else. And so I've got to get a bigger back, because there are a lot of people that I want to carry some of their cares.

Bear ye one another's burdens. Paul says in Acts 20:35, I have shown you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said it is more blessed to give than receive. What did he say? Support the weak. Help him stand up. Carry him. Share their burdens.

Fourth, another one. Rebuke sin in one another. Ephesians5:11 says "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them or rebuke them." ITimothy5:20 says you're to rebuke those who sin among the church leadership. Titus1 and Titus2 both talk about that. Galatians2, Paul rebuked Peter to his face because he was to be blamed and the spirit-filled Christian is under the mandate of God, within the framework of fellowship, to rebuke and reprove sin in the life of somebody else.

You know, it's a responsibility of fellowship for you to go to someone who's sinning and say, you're sinning. You're sinning against God. I've done that. I know, no one knows this situation and I can tell you something of it. A dear individual in our church onetime left and went off to go to bed with some woman. And so his wife said well, what's the deal? Oh, what's happened? It's awful. And then she called me and I said, what's your name? I looked it up in the phone book and I dialed the number and he answered the phone. And my first line, what are you doing?

Well, he got real nervous and shaky and he began to weep and I said, go home right now. And I'll never forget what he said to me the next time I saw him. But sure as he did, he was home in a half an hour. His wife called me up and said he's home, he's home. He said to me, he said, I really never thought anybody cared that much. Simple thing.

We owe it to each other, don't we? You know, you get tempted and you get trapped but you need somebody to say hey, hey, hey. I'm with you. I want to help you. I want to rebuke you at that point. Don't do that.

Boy, I tell you, when it comes to purifying the Church, you've got to do that. God's given me responsibility for the family and I'm giving it a shot.

There's some other things. Galatians6:1 says, "If a brother be taken in a fault, restore such a one in love." Another thing you're to do is restore a sinning brother. Listen, when somebody's overtaken in a , a fall, they trip and fall into sin, pick them up and hold them up and build them up, he says, in Galatians6.

Man, we are to do all these things. We are to confess to one another. To forgive one another. To rebuke one another. To hold up one another. To build up one another.

In Romans 14 it says we're to care for one another. Some of the weaker brothers, they are to be cared for. They're to be loved. They're to be nourished.

So many places in the New Testament it says, we're to love one another. IPeter 1:22 says, "Love one another with a pure heart fervently," ectanase in the Greek. Stretch your muscle to love as far as your extremity will reach. That's the way we're to love.

We're to comfort one another. The book of Hebrews tells us to comfort one another or exhort, it's the same word. To counsel one another. To admonish one another with a view to change in behavior. We're to pray for one another.

All of these things, and they just go on and on and on in the New Testament. We're to edify one another. We're to teach one another, according to Colossians 3:16, in psalms and hymns and songs.

All these things we're to do for one another. That's the responsibility of fellowship. Listen, beloved, Grace Church by God's design is to be a fellowship of loving, caring people whose relationships are not superficial. How's the weather? Hi, how are you? Nice dress, nice suit. How are your kids? Nice car. Nice day.

There's got to be more. There's got to be more to the whole relationship than that. Now, I don't mean it can't start that way. It ought to start that way. And I don't mean there's anything wrong with saying those kinds of things, but don't stop there. We need to make commitments to each other. Now, I don't think you have to talk with everybody at the same depth you talk with everybody else but somewhere along the line we've got to be willing to share our lives with the people God brings into our lives.

I don't share everything with everybody at the same level, but there are some people I do share with. It all begins in the home, where my wife and I share. And then the degrees, perhaps, of the depth go out from there.

One last thought. The result of fellowship you already know, because I told you. What's the result of fellowship? "These things are written that your joy might be," what? Full. The result of fellowship is full joy. Full joy. Oh, man, wouldn't it be great to have a happy church, a joyous church. I think we have that. You know, sometimes on a Sunday, you people emit joy, do you know that? Sometimes it just sort of comes up here. Jack and I were talking about that this morning. There was just a kind of an exuberance, a kind of a joy that was just coming up.

You know, when we had The Messiah a few weeks ago there was a man playing in The Messiah who is a great conductor. One of the greatest, Jack says. And he was Jack's friend and Jack's teacher. And Jack invited him to participate. He was the only one in the whole thing that didn't know Jesus

Christ and he was playing one of those horns. And Jack told me about it and asked me about it. And it got all done, the man I noticed during the thing that his head was up like this because he was weeping. Afterwards I said to him, thank you for being here and he said I've never, I've never felt anything like this. What do these people have? What do these people have? He said, I've known Jack for 22years, I've never seen the sensitivity or the joy or the expression in his direction I saw then. I never heard a choir that sounded like that, and I've never seen people who have something like these people have. Well, I said, I'll tell you what it is. It's the Holy Spirit, you know? It's the Holy Spirit.

But you see what happens is that when we have a rich fellowship and we love each other and we share with each other, we emit joy because we are fulfilled in relationships. Do you understand that? Because God said in the very beginning, "It is not good for man to," what? To be alone. And when the fellowship is fulfilled, he has joy.

Well, I've already said more than I know, so let's pray.

Our Father, we do know that you want us to have fellowship with each other, with You and with the Father. And that's what we want, too. What you want for us. And so bless and make Grace Church a real fellowship, like the early Church. A real fellowship. And even if we have 20,000 like they had in Jerusalem, keep it real. And Father make Your Church, not only here but everywhere around the world, a real fellowship that Jesus may be made manifest through His Church. We pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

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