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

The Pattern for Biblical Fellowship, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-395

Tonight I want to talk to you about the doctrine...what the Bible teaches about fellowship...fellowship. You might not think that fellowship is a doctrine, but it is. It's a clear teaching of Scripture. Doctrine is just a stiffer word for teaching, I guess you could say. So we want to talk a little bit about fellowship, what fellowship really is. Fellowship is a word that's been thrown around the church as long as I can remember, having been raised in a church as a pastor's kid. I always...I always heard the word "fellowship," virtually every church I was ever in had a place called Fellowship Hall. I assumed that whatever happened in that place was fellowship because that was Fellowship Hall. And my definition of fellowship had to do with stale cookies and red punch and the smell of old coffee because that seemed to be what went on in that place.

But there's much more to the biblical concept or the biblical doctrine of fellowship. It is indeed a very, very rich reality.

I want to read a portion of Scripture that will get us off to a good start. First Corinthians chapter 12...1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 12, and here is an analogy that will act as a kind of initiation point for our discussion of fellowship, gives you a very, very vivid description of the church. First Corinthians 12:12, "For even as the body is one...that's the human body...and yet has many members, and all the members of the body though they are many are one body, so also is Christ."

Now that is the foundational analogy of understanding fellowship. They were all a part of one body. We all share in common life and we are all dependent on each other, although we differ, like members of the body do.

Verse 13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member but many. If the foot says, 'Because I'm not a hand, I'm not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.' And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?"

"Now God has placed the members, each one of them in the body just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members but one body and the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'

On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor and are less presentable members become much more presentable."

In other words, while we make much of the features that can be seen, it is the organs that are invisible that are the most important part of the body. Whereas our more presentable members, verse 24, have no need of it. "But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body and individually members of it." We'll stop at that point.

The analogy is pretty clear. A body in order to be whole and functioning, has to have many different parts. While we make much about the visible parts, it is the invisible parts that are the most necessary and the most important and should actually get the greatest amount of care. And so it is in the body of Christ. Those who may be most visible may not be most necessary. There's a wonderful balance. Those that might be less presentable in public view are more necessary. Those who have the privilege of being seen in the reality are less necessary.

The point our Lord is making here is the true church is one body and all that are members of that body are inextricably connected by spiritual life principle to each member. And no one can escape the mutual responsibility and mutual accountability that we have to each other.

Now this particular picture of the church as the body, the body of Christ it is identified as, is a very unique picture. In fact, there are other metaphors in the New Testament that are used to represent the church. All of them convey something about the church's life, something about the church's nature, something about the church's relationship to God, but none of them is as powerful in conveying the truth about our relationship with each other as this metaphor of the body.

Metaphors like this to describe the people of God are not new, they appear in the Old Testament. For example, in the Old Testament, God viewed His people Israel as His wife. God talks about Israel in her maidenhood, being betrothed to Israel and taking Israel as His bride and entering into a marriage covenant with her. Ezekiel talks about that. Hosea talks about that.

God also speaks of His people Israel in agricultural terms. Israel is a vine, planted by God in the land of Canaan where she took root and filled the land, so it says in Isaiah chapter 5. God also identified Israel as a flock, as sheep, Himself being the shepherd of that flock, Isaiah 40, Isaiah 63, Psalm 23.

Now each of those figures demonstrates God's relationship to Israel stressing some facet of His direct dealings with His people. He chose Israel as His bride. He planted Israel as His vineyard. And

He shepherded Israel as His flock.

In the New Testament, Jesus boldly transitions these metaphors and these analogies and applies them to the church. In Ephesians chapter 5 verses 22 to 32, the church is the bride of Christ, Christ is the bridegroom. In John 15 Christ is the vine and believing Christians are the branches drawing life from Christ. In John 10 Christ is the good shepherd, saving, giving His life for His sheep and then leading and feeding and establishing a relationship with His sheep whereby He knows them and they know Him.

So those familiar Old Testament symbols of God's relationship to Israel become New Testament symbols of Christ's relationship to His church. But the New Testament even goes beyond that. The New Testament speaks of the church. In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 13, as a Kingdom, we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son so that the Lord Jesus Christ is our King, our sovereign. Ephesians 2:19 describes our relationship to Christ as that of the members of a family. We have been brought into His family. In the same chapter, Ephesians 2 verses 20 and following, it identifies the church as a building. Christ being the cornerstone and Christ being the builder.

That's a lot of imagery and those images each convey an aspect of our life as the church. We are Christ's church. We are one bride with one bridegroom, one wife with one husband. We are one set of branches all drawing life from one vine. We are one flock with one shepherd. We are one Kingdom with one King, one family with one Father, one building with one foundation. All of those convey aspects of life in the church.

But then there is that image that I just read you about in 1 Corinthians 12, the image of the body. We are one body with one head...one body with one head. Repeatedly in the New Testament, the emphasis is made on the fact that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, that He is the head of the church. That is, He is the one who thinks for the church. He is the one who commands the church. He is the one who sends directly to the church. This metaphor has no Old Testament parallel, it has no Old Testament equal, it is our unique identity.

In understanding the concept of this unity is the foundation for understanding fellowship. It all starts with common life. Turn with me for a moment to the seventeenth chapter of John. John chapter 17, there are just a couple of things here to point out to you, as Jesus refers to His relationship to His own.

In verse 11 He says, "I'm no longer in the world," anticipating His death, resurrection and ascension back to the Father. "And yet they themselves are in the world and I come to You, Holy Father. Keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me," then this, "that they may be one even as we are." With a real organic unity of common life, that's His prayer.

Verse 20, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone but for those also who believe in Me through their Word that they may all be one even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You that they also may be in us.”

In the sense that the Father and the Son are one in essence, one in shared life, one in will, one in purpose, one in mutual love, the prayer of our Lord is that we, the church, may enjoy that kind of oneness, that kind of unity, spiritual unity, unity of shared life, shared love, shared purpose, shared will, shared ministry, shared actions, shared truth, shared power. That’s fellowship...that’s fellowship. That’s what it is. It is the common sharing of the life of God in our souls. And it is why the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6 and said, “He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.” If you’re joined to the Lord, then you have His life. If I’m joined to the Lord, then I have His life and therefore we have the same life. We share the common life of Christ. He that is joined to the Lord is one with everybody else who is joined to the Lord. This is fellowship.

The verb “to fellowship” in its infinitive form, koinoneo, is used eight times in the New Testament, seven times it’s translated by the word “share” in the NAS, one other time “participates.” The verb then means to share in something common. In the sense of a body, it is common life, common function, common purpose.

The noun form which is much more familiar to us, koinonia, the noun form is used about 30 times in the New Testament and basically means the same thing, a sharing, a common contributing, partnership, participation. It is translated by all those words and accurately so in the New Testament. The concept them of fellowship is sharing common life, contributing to one another, partaking of things that we have in common, partners in a common life, partners in a common cause, partners in a common purpose, partners in a common truth, a common revelation from God. Like the partnership and the commonality and the sharing and the fellowship that goes on within the Trinity.

Summing it up, fellowship is sharing in the reality of spiritual life and all that that implies. You cannot share in the reality of spiritual life without sharing in the divine life, without sharing in divine truth and divine purpose and the divine will. We desperately need as a church to understand this. This is the core of our life together. It is the prayer of our Lord that believers would be one. And, by the way, that prayer was answered...that prayer was answered. He’s not talking about wishing that we’d all get along all the time. We don’t all get along all the time. But nonetheless, while we may not be one in attitude, and we may not be one in demonstrable affection, the fact is we are one in life. And so, we have to go back to that. If we’re going to talk about fellowship, we have to talk about what fellowship really is. Fellowship, this kind of partnership, this kind of carnality only belongs but does belong to all who are in Christ. Corinthians tells us that believers cannot be unequally yoked with unbelievers. “For what fellowship has light with...what?...darkness?” Fellowship is limited to light. Fellowship is limited to those who are in the light.

So fellowship is that which belongs to those who are in the light. We're going to see more about that. I want to give you some things to think about as we talk about fellowship based on that sort of introduction. I want to talk about the basis of fellowship, the nature of it, the symbol of it, the danger to it, the responsibility in it and the results.

Let's talk about the basis, and we've already kind of established that. But along the lines that we've been speaking, turn to 1 John chapter 1. Is there really a basis for fellowship? What is the common ground that ties us together?

Well we just said. Essentially it is shared life. It's not emotional. It's not denominational. It's not ecumenical. It's not societal. It's not economic. It's not cultural. It's not racial. It's not even theological, as if to say that we can only fellowship with people who have a common theological system with us. It's not experiential. We're not talking about feeling good about being with certain people. It is spiritual and it is divine.

First John 1 verse 3, John writes, "What we have seen and heard," that is concerning the person of Jesus Christ, "we proclaim to you also so that you too may have fellowship with us." John says, "I want you in the fellowship, and indeed, in truth, in reality, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Now there's the basis of fellowship. There's the basis of fellowship. The basis of fellowship in one word...salvation...salvation.

The proclamation of the gospel is not an end in itself. The proclamation of the gospel has an immediate objective and that is to create a fellowship, to create a commonality, to create a shared life, to create a participation, the sharing in common power, common truth, common purpose, common ministry. The goal of the gospel is not just salvation from hell for isolated individuals, the goal of the gospel is a fellowship obviously unified, sharing love. "By this will all men know that you're My disciples if you demonstrate this love."

When I was growing up, I used to hear preachers say, "You have to be careful that you're not out of fellowship with the Lord." That was a common thing I heard many preachers say that. Many invitations at the end of a message would be, "Now if you're out of fellowship with the Lord and you want to get back, come forward." If you've ever been in the fellowship, you can never get out of it. Just to clarify that. This is an everlasting fellowship. You don't lose your place in the common shared eternal life. Nothing will separate you from the love of Christ, right? Romans chapter 8 lays it all out, verses 28 to 39. Fellowship has as its basis eternal salvation. That puts us all into the common shared life and power and purpose and truth and ministry.

We then have a shared life with each other, a shared life with God, and with Jesus Christ His Son. And we have a shared life with the Holy Spirit, with the Trinity. You remember the doxology, "The

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," the end of 2 Corinthians, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Here John says we have fellowship with the Father and His Son. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:14 we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. That's true. We are in a common shared life with the Trinity. This is the nature of salvation.

The objective then in the proclamation of the gospel was to make every believer a partner in this eternal fellowship, sharing in common life. Wherever we see a church that is what it should be, this is manifest, this is evident. Certainly we see it in the Thessalonian church. If you were to take the time to read 1 Thessalonians 1 and the first...well the whole chapter, verses 1 through 10, you would see there how thankful Paul is for that church's work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope. And then he says, "In our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of our God and Father."

There's something wonderful about a church that is marked by faith, love and hope all connected to a relationship with Christ. Now what does this mean? What are the implications? Every saved person is entitled to full involvement in the fellowship. Did you hear that? Every saved person. Our responsibility extends to them all. People say to me, sometimes, "What standards do you set for people to join your church?" We have a very extensive doctrinal statement. We don't make that a wall you have to climb to become part of our church, we title it what we teach...what we teach. We don't think that when everybody arrives they already believe it, but this is what we teach.

And when I have been asked...what is it...what is required for someone to become a member of your church? My answer has been, if the Lord received you into the fellowship, we're happy to receive you into our church. We don't have higher standards. If you can get into the Kingdom, you can get in here. If you've been accepted by the Lord, we will gladly accept you as well. That's the standard. If you're in the divine fellowship, you can enjoy this expression of it in this local place.

Sometimes, you know, we struggle with whom should we fellowship? Now wait a minute. What about a believer, a professing believer in sin? Oh well, that's another story, isn't it? You have to deal with sin and maybe that you put that person out so they don't corrupt that fellowship. But foundationally as the basis of the fellowship, all who are in Christ are in the fellowship. Some of us are more mature than others. Some of us are stronger than others. Some of us are very weak and infantile, we're like children who say nothing more than, "Abba, Father," we don't know much more than that. Some of us are like young men who are strong in the world and have overcome the evil one. Some of us are like spiritual fathers who know Him who is from the beginning, we've begun to plumb the depths of the eternal God. We're all across the range of possibilities. But the basis of fellowship is salvation. You're either then in the fellowship or out of the fellowship. You don't go in an out of it. You're either in it, or you're out of it.

And that's why John goes from this point in chapter 1, to basically contrast believes and unbelievers. He does it in chapter 2. He does it in chapter 3 and he keeps doing it all the way to the end, showing

the difference between a person in a fellowship, saved, and out of the fellowship, unsaved.

For example, in chapter 1 verse 5, “This is the message we have heard from Him and announced to you that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son is cleansing us from all sin.”

What’s the point there? Well you’re either in the light or the darkness. You’re either saved or lost. You’re either in the fellowship or out of the fellowship. And it’s not what you say that evidences, it’s what you do. If you walk in the light, that is you walk in a way that is holy and obedient to the Lord, that reveals that you’re a person of the light and therefore you’re in the fellowship. Believers are always in the fellowship. Believers are always in the light. Believers are the ones confessing and having their sins continually cleansed. That’s what it means to be in the fellowship.

Does that mean we’re perfect? No. I could update an old Donald Barnhouse illustration. If you’re on a jumbo jet and you’re flying across the ocean of some foreign country, you may be wandering through the jet and somehow be bumped maybe by a little air turbulence or something that happens and you may fall down. That’s a far cry from being thrown out the window. You’re still on the jet. You fall down. You pick yourself up. That’s a far cry from exiting it at 35,000 feet. Christ says no force, no power, death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, height, depth shall ever throw us out of the plane. We’re in the fellowship. This is a forever fellowship. All true Christians are in it.

Now the bottom line is, we have an obligation to true believers. We have an obligation to true believers. Dietrich Bonheoffer, a German pastor who was killed under Hitler had some good thoughts on that, talking about the fact that we have an obligation to every brother in Christ. He wrote this, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we participate.”

You hear a lot about this idea that we need unity in the church and we want...we want to create a oneness in the church. And people are talking about that as if it didn’t exist. And I’ve even heard many preachers say, “You know, Jesus prayed that we would be one and He prayed that we’d be one, and we need to get together and really fulfill that prayer.”

Look, that prayer was answered. It’s answered every time a believer is redeemed. We are one. The ground and the strength and the foundation of our fellowship is that we’re in Jesus Christ. And all believers are there. So you’re in the fellowship.

Now the implications are pretty strong, right? Because if you’re in the fellowship, you’re in the body. If you’re in the body, you have a responsibility, true? And we’re going to see more about that.

Let me move from the basis of the fellowship to the nature of it. What is the nature of it? How does it function? Well you can take that right out of the Word, koinoneo, or koinonia. The function is to just use a simple word, sharing...sharing...sharing. The nature of fellowship is sharing in spiritual ministries among yourselves, sharing in the realities of spiritual life. An illustration, of course, is a very practical illustration in the second chapter of Acts where verse 42 says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and to fellowship.” What was that? What...what do you mean fellowship?

Well this is more than the spiritual basis, they were devoting themselves to the implications of that. And how did that work out? Here’s how it worked out, verse 44. “All those who had believed were together.” That’s the fellowship. “And they had all things in common.” In other words, they realized that whatever they possessed was held lightly in their hands if somebody else needed it.

They didn’t hold anything with a vice grip. They actually began, in verse 45, selling their property and possessions and were sharing...there’s our word...them with all as anyone might have need. This isn’t Communism. They didn’t all become believers and everybody sold everything and it was redistributed. No. When somebody had a need, somebody made a sacrifice to meet the need. It was personal. It was individual. But it was sharing because that’s the nature of how fellowship works. We share a common life. We share common truth. We share common convictions. We share common spiritual duties, responsibilities, demands, purposes. And we share in all things necessary to express love and to enable the body of Christ to be healthy. That’s sharing.

Day by day...verse 46...continuing with one mind in the temple. Ah, one mind. One mind about what? They all thought the same way. They thought the same way about their spiritual life. They thought the same way about the gospel. They thought the same way about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They thought the same way about the cross. The same way about the resurrection. The same way about what the Lord had done through Christ. They all thought the same way.

And because they all thought the same way, they were naturally drawn together. And so day by day continuing with one mind, they went to the temple and they were breaking bread from house to house and taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. They were praising God and, of course, having favor with all the people. This was an unbelievable thing to see because on that very day three thousand people were saved. And here they are together every single day and they’re eating meals together and they’re coming to the Lord’s table on a daily basis and they’re studying the Apostles’ doctrine and that’s what gives them the one mind and they’re enjoying fellowship, sharing with each other all the common things that they need that they possess. And the result? The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

They were all true believers. They're all...I love this...continually, verse 42, devoting themselves. The mark of a true believer is continually. They're really in the fellowship. Jesus said in John 8, "You're My real disciple if you continue in My Word." All the professors were possessors. They were sharing in all that they had. This is the partnership of mutual ministry. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 8:4 it's called "The Fellowship of Serving," "The Fellowship of Serving." Galatians 6:6 says, "The one who is taught shares in all good things with his teacher." That's what marked them. Some of them lost their jobs because of their faith and had no resources and were cared for by those who did have resources. It was a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate what this fellowship on the inside looks like on the outside. It's sharing, sharing that goes beyond a common spiritual life to a common physical life.

Bonheoffer again speaks. "God has bound us together in one body with all other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we entered in to common life with them. We enter in to that common life as thankful recipients. We thank God for what He has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, by His promise. We do not complain by what God does not give us, we rather thank God for what He does give us daily and is not what has been given us enough? Brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of this grace? Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the life of the church, is not the sinning brother still a brother with whom I too stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds but only by that one word and deed which really binds us together, the forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ."

That's a great point to make that even in the fellowship, and even though we sin and we all do, that doesn't breach the fellowship, that incites gratitude for the fellowship. That's Christianity, that's how we live. This is to be the character of the church, sharing love with one another, sharing to meet the needs of one another.

There is a symbol of the fellowship. We talked about the basis and the nature of fellowship and sharing. Let me talk about the symbol of fellowship and it's a magnificent one. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10...1 Corinthians chapter 10, the symbol of fellowship, the symbol of our shared life.

Not a lot of symbols, as we know, in the New Testament, just baptism and communion, and this is communion or the Lord's Table to which we direct your attention. Chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians, verse 16, very direct... "Is not the cup of blessing," meaning the cup of communion, the cup at the Lord's Table, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The communion table, the Apostle Paul says, is a symbol of our common participation in the salvation provided in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The

church gathers at the Lord's table on common ground. We all come as sinners. We all come needing forgiveness. We all come finding that forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ. We all come with the same need, the need is met in the same way through the provision of Jesus Christ. Communion then visualizes the essence of the fellowship. It demonstrates it.

Christ is the head. We're all members of His body, all equally redeemed by Him, forgiven by Him, saved by Him, sustained by Him. And the Lord's table vividly celebrates that. It celebrates the cross at which point God and man are reconciled. Here the life of the church is made visible. It's a magnificent symbol, a wondrous symbol. I think most of us think of the Lord's Table simply as a point of remembrance. And it is that. But why remember? In order that we might celebrate our common life. There are no better or lesser people at the foot of the cross, right? We're all wretched. We're all sinners. We're all inadequate. We're all hopeless. And at the same time we have all received the same eternal life. We are His body and the communion keeps us face to face with the unity of believers at the foot of His cross, who have been made one through His body and His blood.

One writer says, regarding a certain man, "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 around the outer circumference of the opened fire pit. In a few moments, the flames died down. And in another few minutes, the coals lost their brightness and grew ashen and dull. The pastor then turned and looked at the member and said, 'Do you understand?' The man had grace and wisdom enough to say, 'Yes, pastor, I understand.' And then he took the tongs again and taking the coals from the outer edge of the grate, he drew them all together, 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, do you? Let nothing divide you in your fellowship with your fellow believer because you will both be the loser, not only will you both be the loser but so will the integrity of the church. The flame will go down and the fires of spiritual devotion will die. While together in Him, together at the Lord's Supper,' the pastor said, 'we are drawn together and the nearer we are to the Lord at His table, the nearer we must be to each other.'"

Well, a simple illustration, but a graphic one. It's a holy table and there we remember the symbol of our unity. We are all sinners. We are all lowly. We are all hopeless and helpless. No one of us able to earn reconciliation with God, we are humbled there, it is a delight for us, it is a privilege for us and is a duty for us to be at the Lord's table and to celebrate the symbol of our fellowship.

Number four in my little list, the danger...the danger...the danger to fellowship. It's not hard to discern, in a word sin...in a word sin. The basis of fellowship is salvation. The nature of fellowship is sharing. The symbol of fellowship is the Lord's Supper. And the danger to fellowship is sin. Sin devastates the fellowship between the believer and the Lord, first of all. It's not a matter of forgiveness. The Lord has

forgiven all our sins past, present and future. But it certainly is a matter of joy. That's why David said in the Psalm 51, "Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation." We have complete forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 4:32; He's forgiven us all our sins, all our transgressions. We know that. The Old Testament says He remembers them no more, He's buried them in the depths of the sea, removed them as far as the east is from the west. It's not a matter of redemption...sin. It's not a matter of love. Even though we sin as believers, and even though some believers sin repeatedly and rebelliously, it doesn't change His love because nothing can separate us from His love....nothing.

And it's not really a question of fellowship because the fellowship is forever. You say, "Well then what is it?" It's a question of joy. It's a question of peace. It's a question of blessing. It's a question of power. It's a question of usefulness. Sin devastates our joy, robs us of blessing, robs us of peace, robs us of power, robs us of an effective usefulness in the body of Christ as well as an effective witness to the world. It cripples us severely and cheats us of the best that God has. That's what sin does between us and Him. Takes us out of the place of blessing, out of the place of usefulness, out of the place of effectiveness in evangelism.

And then what does sin do between believer and believer? It shatters harmony. It restricts ministry. It confuses purpose. It brings evil influence. Sin disrupts every category. It effects you in your relationship to other believers on a personal level, even the level of sin and significant ministry in the life of another believer. That's why our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount, "You may want to help another believer who has a sin issue, you may see something in their life that is not right, like something in their eye. But before you get anything out of somebody else's eye, make sure you get the two-by-four out of your own eye."

Sin in your life renders you trouble in the fellowship. You're in the fellowship but you're trouble to the fellowship...whether it's pride or lust or materialism, any sin in any category, cripples your ability to love, your ability to serve, your ability to minister your spiritual gifts, your ability to confront in a gracious and loving way, to be a purifying influence in the fellowship, to use your opportunities for the glory of God and to be a witness to the unbelievers. All of that is hampered severely by sin. This is so, so serious. That is another reason why the Lord's Table is so important, 1 Corinthians 11, as long as we're already there, you might want to look at verse 27. "When you come to the Lord's Table, whoever eats and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself and in so doing, eat of the bread and drink, of the cup, or he who eats and drinks judgment on himself if he doesn't judge the body rightly."

What an interesting statement. If he doesn't judge the body rightly? Yes. If you come to the Lord's Table and you're not dealing with sin, which you're supposed to do when you come there, that's for the purification of the church as well as the celebration of its unity, if you come to the Lord's Table with an impenitent heart, with sin in your life, you will bring judgment on yourself because you don't discern the impact of that sin on the body of Christ. You are to be shut out from the symbol because

the symbol is a symbol of unity and you are a disruption to that unity. You don't discern the unity of the church, the body. And to violate that and to sin against that is to bring on yourself judgment for the sin of hampering, defiling the fellowship. So you're in the fellowship. You can't get out of the fellowship, but you can be a serious trouble to the fellowship. Deal with sin. Deal with sin. That is crucial to the fellowship. Deal with it in your own life. Get the beam out of your own eye, then you can help somebody else. Matthew 18, "If your brother's in sin, you go to your brother," and then you go through that whole process, take two or three, tell the church. If they don't repent, put them out of the church. Sin has to be dealt with...it has to be dealt with.

Eventually if your sin is discovered and you are confronted, hopefully you repent and you become useful again and rightly discern the place that you play in the body of Christ. But if you don't, then the process will put you out because the purity of the fellowship is so important to the Lord.

So we've talked about the basis of fellowship, being salvation; the nature of fellowship being sharing; the symbol of fellowship being the Lord's Supper; and the danger to fellowship being sin...the responsibility. What is the responsibility?

We've talked around it already. This is the fifth point and the word is serving... serving. It is, as I said in 2 Corinthians 8:4 called the fellowship of serving..the fellowship of serving. This common life is shared by all of us and yet we're designed to be individuals. In the body analogy, some of us are internal organs, some of us are external body parts, some of us are eyes and some are ears, some are toes, and some are fingers, and all of those things and that speaks of the diversity within the unity, okay? So within this fellowship of common life, there is immense diversity.

If you think in a more modern term about the body and you understand, I don't know, the latest number I heard is that your body has actually three hundred trillion living cells. That's amazing. That's a massive amount of diversity, a massive amount. Each of those cells, every one of those cells being a living organism and being the product of information...information. Designed by God, the body is a wonder of diversity...a wonder of diversity.

I was reading an article last week about balance, written by a Christian science professor...not Christian Science, but a Christian science professor and a medical doctor who was addressing what goes on in your inner ear to give you the kind of balance that you see and take for granted in great athletes and in great gymnasts and people like that. And the design by God is absolutely astonishing, every tiny little part plays a critical role and reacts in microseconds to every whim and will and almost unconscious thought of the brain. It's a stunning thing.

And so, the diversity in the body is indicated in the New Testament and it falls into two categories. The body is diverse in two ways. Number one, spiritual gifts...spiritual gifts. Sometime we could talk about that a little bit. Spiritual gifts are a very, very important part of spiritual life in the church. And

just a couple of things to look at.

Romans 12 gives you an insight into this, along the same analogy. Verse 4, “Just as we have many members in one body, physically, and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.” That’s the unity aspect. All right, we’re all in one body, we have this shared common life. But we have gifts, verse 6, that differ. We all have different functions according to the grace given us.

In other words, all of our gifts that operate on a spiritual level in the body of Christ are given by grace. We haven’t earned them. They’re all grace gifts and we exercise them according to the proportion of faith. God gives us a gift and a proportion of faith to use the gift.

If the Lord gave you the gift of prophesying or preaching and didn’t give you along with it a proportion amount of faith to stand up and do that, what good would the gift be? So you have a proportion of faith that’s consistent with the gift that you’re given so that you can function in that gift. There are serving gifts and then he says in service in teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, showing mercy. These are just suggested areas in which there are gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 12 which we read earlier, you have very similar teaching. Verse 6, there are a variety of effects as verse 5 says, there are a variety of ministries, as verse 4 says, there are a variety of gifts. Variety of gifts, variety of ministries, variety of effects, so you’ve got all this kind of mingled together. But each one, verse 7, is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Now here’s the key. You all have different gifts but they’re all for the common good. What’s the common good? The building of the body. The Lord in Ephesians 4 gave to the church Apostles, prophets, teaching pastors, evangelist s for the edification of the body so that the whole body could come to the fullness of the stature of Christ. So these gifts are for the building up of the body, for the common good.

Verse 8, some have gifts related to the Word of wisdom, through the Spirit. These are gifts that are empowered by the Spirit and given by grace, as we saw in Romans. To another, a word of knowledge, to another faith which would be a gift exhibited in prayer, to another...and these are temporary gifts, as we know, gifts of healing, affecting of miracles, those would be gifts that were manifest by the prophets and those associated with them. And then to another, prophecy or speaking, another distinguishing of spirits, and other kinds of languages. We know that also to be a sign gift that passed away with the apostolic era, as well as interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

So each of us has a gift, a gift. Now I’ve heard people say, “Well you have many gifts.” No, you really have just one gift which is the combination of many categories of giftedness.

First Peter...1 Peter chapter 4 says this, Peter recognizing that we all have gifts, verse 10 says, “As each one received a gift...as each one received a gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” You’ve received a gift, use it...use it for the edification of the body. This is the responsibility of the fellowship, to use your gift.

And then he just gives us two broad categories, they’re speaking gifts. And if you have one of those, speak the Word of God. And there are serving gifts. And if you have one of those, do it in the strength which God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever amen.

So whether you have a speaking gift or a serving gift, you do it to the glory of God. There are then speaking gifts and there are serving gifts. We just heard about the gifts of prophecy, gifts of speaking wisdom, teaching knowledge and gifts that are not public gifts, but serving gifts, like prayer and gifts of service or help or ministry or giving.

Now those are just broad categories and the categories given in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 differ from each other. And here these simple categories given in 1 Peter 4 differ even from those. The point being, this is not an exhaustive list. They’re just categories of Spirit-given grace given abilities. And you are a blend of those. It’s like the Lord had a pallet with a lot of colors and He wanted to paint your portrait so He dipped into this, a little of this, a little of this, a little of this and it came out you. You’re like a spiritual snowflake. You’re the combination of these things. I have a gift, a gift that involves various elements of categories of gifts blended together to be me. That’s the first way you serve the body of Christ, with your spiritual gifts. Whatever that gift is, whatever combination it is.

And you...you say, “How do I know that?

What do you desire to do? What do you do and receive joy doing it? What do you do and when you do it other people are grateful and respond positively to it? That’s a good indication. You don’t need to label it. You don’t need to be able to give a clear-cut definition of what it is. You just need to follow the promptings of the Spirit of God and do what your heart tells you to do.

There’s a second category of serving and that is the one anothers of the New Testament...the one anothers of the New Testament. And I’m not going to take the time to go through all of them tonight. In fact, we’ll save that for next time. But the New Testament is filled with the one anothers, what it is that we are actually responsible to do for each other. And this really is all our responsibility. So, the responsibility in serving is both spiritual gifts and what we’ll call the one anothers.

Now let me jump to the end. What’s the result? We’ll come back to this next time. What’s the result? I think the result is pretty clear. I think the result of fellowship is intended to be joy, okay? Let’s just take

that word “joy.” That’s...that’s what the Lord desires us to receive out of the fellowship, joy. In John 17:23, “I in them and You in Me that they may be perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You have loved Me.”

What...what does He want for us? That we may be perfected in a unity that is like a reflection of the unity of the Trinity, that draws attention to the glory of Christ, to the work of Christ, to the salvation of Christ, to the love of Christ. There is nothing...nothing that can produce greater joy than that in the life of a believer. John writes in 1 John 1:4, “I write these things unto you that your joy may be full.” He wants us joyful. And our joy, I think, is directly dependent on how we live in the fellowship and how we serve in the fellowship. He wants His joy in us. Verse 13, “Now I come to you and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy...My joy.”

He’s praying for our unity. He’s praying that we might experience this kind of unity that is like the unity of the Trinity, that we might enjoy the richness of that kind of love in order that we may have the same joy that He has. That’s where fellowship can take us, to supreme joy.

Well, I gave you a lot to think about, right? We’ll think about it a little more this next Sunday night.

Father, thank You for a wonderful time tonight. Thank You for the direction You have given to us from Your Word along the lines of understanding fellowship. Give us a glorious opportunity this week as we endeavor to live out the reality of our fellowship with one another. Thank You for what You’re going to do in us because we understand this and because the Spirit will cause it to bear fruit in all our lives. For the glory of Christ, we pray. Amen.

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