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

The Pattern for Biblical Fellowship, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-396

Well tonight, as you know, we are continuing to look at the subject of fellowship. And we talked about that a little bit last time. Let me just give you a brief introduction.

We hear the word a lot around the church, always have, but we need to get a good understanding and a good definition of what it actually means. The church is a fellowship. The Greek word koinonia means partnership. That's essentially what it means. Shared life, shared ministry, shared responsibility, shared resources, all of those fit together to make up what we understand as fellowship.

The component that makes it work is love, spiritual life and spiritual love. The love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts draws us not only to Him, but to one another. And so, in fellowship we serve one another in love. And the goal of this fellowship, according to Ephesians, is to build up the body of Christ into the fullness of the stature of Christ. We serve each other in love for the purpose of strengthening the body, giving honor to the Lord, enjoying His blessing, demonstrating His power, giving witness to the world and becoming increasingly more like Him.

I've read a lot of books through the years about the subject of fellowship. Probably the one that sticks in my mind more than any other is a book called Life Together. It's a very small book, a small book but it has a very big message. It is written by...was written by Dietrich Bonheoffer. Dietrich Bonheoffer was a pastor in Nazi Germany during the reign of Hitler. Bonheoffer was executed by the Nazis in April of 1945 at the end of a two-year prison sentence. He had been isolated from everyone in prison as penalty for his faithfulness to the church and to the Lord and to the gospel. And he wrote this little book under that duress because he was feeling the absence of fellowship. He was feeling profoundly the loss of Christian companionship.

He wrote this, "The presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. A physical sign of the gracious presence of the Triune God. They receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord in reverence, humility and joy. How inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians," end quote. He was feeling the profound loss of that when he wrote those words.

He continued, quote: "Therefore let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Thank God on his

knees and declare it is grace, it is nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in a community with Christian brethren," end quote.

We would understand that you wouldn't recognize how precious the gift of Christian fellowship is until you lost it...until you forfeited it. Some of us have mild experiences like Bonheoffer, being forced perhaps by illness to be absent from the fellowship for a prolonged period of time, or by virtue of being placed somewhere else in the military or in work or for some other reason educationally, to be in a place where we are cut off from the familiar joys of a long-term fellowship. We all understand that.

The heart of that is what we're talking about. What constitutes that fellowship. And the New Testament analogy that is most explicit and most defining is the one we found in First Corinthians 12, the whole chapter basically, likens the fellowship to a human body, with everything completely interdependent, specific tasks granted to each part and yet a common life that pours through everything. This is the body of Christ.

Christ is the head. The New Testament says that several times. Colossians 1:18, the book of Ephesians also reiterates it a couple of times, Christ is the head, we are the body. He gives us our orders. His life pulses through us all. We are one body. We are united therefore as a spiritual organism. And yet each of us is fitted together with properties and abilities that give us unique responsibility within that fellowship.

It is necessary, says Paul, that we all hold fast to the head. We all hold fast to the head. Each of us holding fast to Christ. He goes on to say, "Being supplied then and held together by the joints and ligaments, we grow with a growth that is from God. Every individual believer clinging to Christ for his or her very life is then intimately connected with every other believer and it is the very life of Christ moving within us that causes growth to come from God and be to the glory of God. The fellowship we enjoy then is definitive, it is what it means to be a Christian in the true church. We're part of a living organism, a spiritual organism. The life all coming from our head, responsible for and to one another, mutually dependent and interdependent.

Paul's testimony to the priceless value of the church, I think, is best indicated in his willingness to suffer for it. For example, in Colossians 1:24 he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body which is the church."

How precious was the fellowship of the church to Paul? It was precious enough that he was willing to suffer for the advancement of the church. And suffer he did. He even says in that same verse, Colossians 1:24, that I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

We all understand how much he suffered. We understand how brutally he suffered. We understand how unfairly and unjustly and unrighteously he suffered. But in all of it, filling up the afflictions of Christ meaning he was taking the blows that were meant for Christ because of the hatred for Christ, and he was rejoicing in it all because of the priceless reality of the fellowship. That's what drove him, that's what motivated him.

No one can truly grasp the significance of the church without understanding this. I think a lot of people assume that a church is a building that you attend. Well the word "church" can apply to a building, but the term "church" in its purest and deepest level describes a fellowship, intimate, interwoven, interdependent, like an organism.

Now last time we gave you some elements of this, the basis of it is salvation. First John 1:3, "Because we've come to Christ, our fellowship is with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." If you are a Christian, you are in the fellowship, you are everlastingly in the fellowship. You are permanently in the fellowship. You can never be out of the fellowship. It is a forever fellowship. It is the fellowship of all who are saved. That's its basis, salvation.

Its nature is sharing. Shared life, shared resources, shared responsibilities, this is the experiential aspect of life in the church. It is a selfless expression of mutual love going in every direction.

We talked about the symbol of it. The symbol of it is the supper that we partake of, the Lord's Supper. First Corinthians 10:16 and 17 says, "The bread that we eat, the cup that we drink, is it not the fellowship?" Communion then is the visual picture of the fellowship. We all stand at the foot of the cross. We all partake of the significance of the cross. We all partake of Christ, our common Savior, our common Lord and our common head.

Then we talked about the danger to fellowship and that was sin. Sin is the great culprit in the fellowship. It fractures, divides, devastates, mars, corrupts the fellowship. That is why Matthew 18 says if your brother's in sin, go to him. If he repents, you've gained your brother. If he doesn't, take two or three, keep going after that sinning brother. If he doesn't repent after two or three, send the whole church after him. And if he still doesn't repent, put him out because he will be an evil influence. And as the Apostle Paul wrote, a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Sin will fracture the fellowship. Sin will interrupt the fellowship. Sin will seal the joy of the fellowship. It will bring division into the fellowship and corruption into the fellowship, and conflict into the fellowship.

Certainly the Apostle Paul was very much aware of this. He confronted it in the twelfth chapter of 2 Corinthians. He says, "I'm afraid...verse 20...that when I come I may be found by you to be not what I wish, and maybe found by you to be not what you wish. Perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. I'm afraid that when I come again, my

God may humiliate me before you and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality, sensuality which they have practiced."

His fear in going to the Corinthian church was that he was going to find a nest of iniquity. So he says, "But I'm going to come...chapter 13 verse 1...and every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses." When I come, I'm going to go after this sin and we're going to do it the way our Lord said to do it, we're going to confront the sin and the sinner and then we're going to confront with two or three witnesses. We're going by the book on this. That's what we're going to do, cause he knew how important it was that the church be pure for the church to be effective. The church needed to be pure for the church to be joyful. It needed to be joyful. It needed to be unified in love in order to have a powerful testimony. Sin is the danger.

Then fifthly we talked for just a little bit about the responsibility in the church and the word is serving. In 2 Corinthians 8:4 it's called the fellowship of serving and that is the way you have to look at the church. Ask yourself the question, "How do I serve the church? How do I serve the church?" But that is the one question that you ask in relationship to the body of Christ. How am I serving the body of Christ? That is my duty. How do I discharge it? We are to love one another, John 13:34 and 35, this is how men know that we're His disciples. How do I demonstrate that love? And the answer to that is given, of course, by our own Lord when He gave the disciples the lesson of all lessons in the gospel of John when He washed their feet in the thirteenth chapter. And He said, "I want you to do to one another what I've done to you, humble yourself and wash each other's feet." That, of course, was not intended to establish some kind of foot washing ordinance, as some have thought, but rather was a symbol of the kind of sacrificial lowly service that we are to render on behalf of each other.

Now how do we serve each other? That's our responsibility. How do we do that?

The first way, and I told you this last time, is through our spiritual gifts...through our spiritual gifts. Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4; those are passages we looked at that let us know that there are divine enablements given to every believer, to you, to me, to every believer. First Corinthians 12 lays it out, He is...the Holy Spirit has given them severally to every man as he wills, okay? That you don't seek a gift, you don't earn a gift, you don't pursue a gift, you receive a gift, right? Okay.

When you became a believer, the Spirit of God dispensed to you a divinely empowered enablement by which you serve the body of Christ. This is how you function in the body of Christ, by this spiritual gift. Each of us has a gift and the gift we have as each man has received the gift, Peter says, the gift, the gift that you've received, minister the same.

Now, your gift is the combination of the categories of giftedness that are generally laid out on the pages of the New Testament in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians and even in 1 Peter

4, gifts of speaking, gifts of serving. It isn't that you have this one gift connected say to the gift of faith, or the gift of preaching, but it's rather that you are a blend, you are a combination. It's as if the pallet had all the categories of giftedness and the Lord dipped the brush in many colors and painted you. And I say that to you because some people try to find their gift and they want to isolate it down, make a list of all the gifts that are listed in Romans12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and say, "Which of those is mine?" Well those are only categories and the fact that the list in Romans 12 and the list in 1 Corinthians 12 differ should be an indication to you that we're not talking about hard and fast absolutes here, but general categories of giftedness by which we minister to the body.

Each gift then is unique. And I always liken it to being a spiritual snowflake, no two of us is alike. You are critical to the body, nobody can really fully take your place, your ministry is crucial.

What is your gift? It is that ability by which you minister effectively to the body of Christ. Ask yourself, "What do I do that God blesses? What do I do that other people respond to?" And I don't mean casually because it's a responsibility of every believer to use that gift to its max, to get beyond a casual use of that, a kind of a drop in exercise of your gift, or "come see, come saw," when you feel like it. If you have a gift, Romans 12 says, then use it. If it's this gift, then do it. If it's this gift, then do it. If it's this one, do it. And we're mandated to exercise those gifts. Romans 12:4 through 8 lays it out, "Be diligent in the exercise of your spiritual gift in the church." We're not talking about talent, we're not talking about the fact that you're good at mathematics, or that you can play a violin, or that you've had a lot of business experience, or whatever. We're not talking about human talent, we're talking about a spiritually empowered gift, a way to minister to people, not way to entertain people, not a way to help them figure out their taxes, those are services that we can all render depending upon our abilities. But we're talking about a spiritual ministry by which we aid...here it comes...in the spiritual development of other believers.

And if you want more information on this, you'll find an entire series on the Grace To You website on spiritual gifts and you can...you can wallow in that till your heart's content, until you get a clear understanding of it. And I recommend it to you.

The second thing, and that's what I want to talk about tonight but it always takes me a long time to get to where I want to get, is the responsibility that we have that's not connected to our gifts but that is general and it belongs to all of us, and I like to call that the "one anothers...the one anothers" of the New Testament...the one anothers.

We have a whole list of those things given to us in the New Testament...commands that we are to exercise toward one another. Now I know we have a responsibility to the lost. We have responsibility to the unconverted, of course. But our collective testimony and the growth of the church and the development of the church, and the Christlikeness of the church as we minister to one another and grow into the likeness of Christ, that makes such a huge impact that it gives credibility to our

individual witness, right?, when the church is Christlike.

Now in thinking about ministering on a “one-another” basis, how we deal with one another just in life in general, I want to give you a negative responsibility and I want to give you a positive responsibility.

For the negative one, go to Matthew 18...Matthew 18. And here you have essentially the first instruction in the New Testament for the church, okay? This is the first instruction in the New Testament for the church. We know that because we are told down in the middle of the chapter, verse 17, that if somebody doesn’t repent, tell it to the church...tell it to the church. The only other mention of the church is in Matthew 16 where Jesus said, “I will build My church.” Now even before the church begins on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord gives this initial instruction for life in the church. And what I want you to look at is verse 5, “Whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me.”

What are you talking about? A baby? A little kid?

No. What child? Verse 4, “Whoever humbles himself as this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.” Now what this chapter is telling us is that we’re all like children. We come in like children, that is we have no achievements that we can claim, give us a right to enter the Kingdom. We have no accomplishments by which we earned entrance into the Kingdom. We have no merit. We are not worthy. We come like children, with no achievement, no accomplishment, nothing to commend ourselves. We enter helpless as children. We enter humbly as children. We enter weak as children. We enter defenseless as children. We enter unaccomplished as children. And we’re in the Kingdom because we came like children.

Now that we’re in the Kingdom, we’re still children and we are to be treated like we would treat children. You need to think of other believers the way you would think of a child. “And whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me.” How you treat another believer is how you treat Christ, okay? If every believer is the temple of the Spirit of God, if the Spirit of Christ dwells in every believer, how you treat every believer is how you treat Jesus Christ. That’s a very, very searching reality, very penetrating. How we treat each other is absolutely critical because Christ comes to us in every believer.

The first thing in the instruction, verse 6, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me,” we’re not talking about babies or children, we’re talking about believers who believe in Me, that’s the defining phrase. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble...”

What does that mean? Trip up, stumble into sin, that’s exactly what it means. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble into sin, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Wow! Hello, church. This is your first message from God. You would be better off to die a horrible death by drowning with a rock and a chain around your neck in the middle of the sea than ever to cause another believer to stumble into sin. Wow!

Why is that? Because I told you, sin is so deadly to the church, isn't it? It cripples the church, steals its joy, wounds its testimony, disrupts its fellowship. You don't ever want to be the cause of that ever. You don't want to be the reason that someone falls into sin. You don't want to lead them into sin, you don't want to influence them into sin. You don't want to set a bad example that gives them license to participate in sin. And so He says in verse 8, "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, throw it from you. Better to enter into life crippled or lame than to have two hands, two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, throw it from you. Better to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell."

What is this? This is a familiar statement that Jesus used to emphasize how much importance should be given to avoiding sin. Deal with sin drastically. Deal with it drastically in your life and make sure you never are the cause of sin in the life of someone else. Very straightforward.

So this is a negative approach to the one anothers. We never lead another believer into sin and in order to avoid doing that, we deal drastically with sin in our own lives because if sin is allowed in your life, believe me, you will pass it on....you will pass it on. By your evil influence, and by being a means and a source of temptation to others.

Then in verses 10 to 14 He adds another element to this. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones."

What do you mean "despise"? Look down on, belittle, think less of, see that you do not depreciate one of these little ones. In other words, never do you look down on another believer, no matter who they are. Never treat another believer with contempt. Never treat another believer with disdain. Never treat another believer with indifference. Never belittle another believer. Never think of them as beneath you. Philippians 2 tells us that we ought to think more of others than we think of ourselves, right? Not less. These little ones, no matter who they are, these believers are Christ's and when they come into our lives, Christ comes in them to us and how we treat them is how we treat Christ, even the least of them. They are the ones...believers are the ones represented in Hebrews 11:32 to 38, as the ones of whom the world was not worthy. The world belittled them. The world despised them. The world looked down on them. The world persecuted them. The world executed them. And you have all of that in Hebrews chapter 11, and we expect that from the world. Go back to verse 7, "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks. It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes. We expect it from the world, we don't expect it from the church. We don't want to be the reason somebody stumbles into sin. We don't want to be belittling,

thinking lowly of other believers, but rather to consider others better than ourselves, as Philippians 2 puts it.

Despising other believers, how can you do that? By being indifferent to their needs cause you don't think they're important enough. By flaunting your liberty in their face. By failing to demonstrate love to them. By withholding from them when they have a need. By ridiculing someone's physical features. They said about Paul that his presence was unimpressive and his speech contemptible. By rejoicing in the sin of another person that you don't particularly care for. You can belittle another believer by taking advantage of him or her. This is all very serious because Christ comes to us in every life that belongs to Him.

Now how important is this? Notice in verse 10, "Do not despise one of these little ones, don't kataphroneo, think down about them." Here's why? "Their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven." The angels are concerned about them. Hebrews 1:14 says that the angels are a ministering spirit sent to minister to the saints. And the angels minister in behalf of all the saints...even the least of the saints, and maybe even more in the case of the least of the saints.

So you're going across the grain of the very ministry of angels on behalf of the saints. If you look at Scripture, you will find that angels watch over the saints, guide the saints, provide for the saints, protect the saints, deliver the saints, dispatch answers to prayer to the saints. Better be careful how you treat the saints cause the angels serve them. Their relationship to angels is a motive.

Secondly, their relationship to the Father...the angels are always looking at the face of My Father. They take their orders from the Father. Why are the looking at the face of the Father? Because they see in the face of the Father a reaction to the way His saints are being treated, the way His children are being treated. And they take from the face of the Father that concern and are dispatched to help the ones about whom the Father is concerned.

God is concerned with His own. He is committed to His own. When we go after His own to rescue them from sin, Jesus says in verse 20 in this chapter, "There am I in the midst. I'm right in the middle of that process. I'm right in the middle of the process of trying to bring repentance, trying to bring confrontation of sin in my church."

We better be careful how we treat believers. The angels are their concern and the Father is deeply concerned about them, and so is Jesus Christ. We need to be concerned about them because they're precious to God.

Verses 12 to 14 lay that even wider open. "What do you think, if a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? He turns out that he finds it. Truly I say to you, he rejoices more over that than

the ninety-nine which have not gone astray so it is not the will of your Father who's in heaven that one of these little ones be devastated." Even the least of believers are the special care of the Father, of the Son and of the angels.

Well that's the negative. That's the warning side of the one anothers. Don't despise. Don't lead them into sin. Don't cause other believers to stumble. What about the positive side?

Let's turn the corner then and talk about some of the positives. There are many, you may not want to try to chase all these scriptures but you can write them down. Let's begin with James 5:16, "Confess your sins," hamartia, "Confess your sins to one another...confess your sins to one another."

Again returning to Dietrich Bonheoffer and the book Life Together, he says, "The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur because though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner so everybody must conceal his sin from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is, we are sinners. You don't have to go on lying to the fellowship. You don't have to go on lying to the brothers and sisters to keep up the charade as if you were without sin...he writes...in the fellowship. You can dare to be a sinner because we all understand. We all understand. God has come to save sinners...says Bonheoffer...be glad. You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are. He wants to be gracious to you. Give the fellowship the opportunity to be the same. Let it be a fellowship of grace."

Then Bonheoffer says this, and it's insightful. "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power over him. And the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness in seclusion of the heart. The sin is brought into the light. The unexpressed is openly spoken and acknowledged. All that is secret and hidden is made manifest. Sin openly admitted and God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron. The sinner surrenders...says Bonheoffer...gives up all his sin, gives his heart to God, finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and His brother."

It's really true. Sin wants to isolate us. "Sin wants to make hypocrites of us all. But when sin is revealed and judged as sin, it can no longer tear the fellowship apart...says Bonheoffer...now the whole fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil. He's cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It's been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. Now he can be a

sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham. The sin confessed has helped him find true fellowship with the brethren in Jesus Christ."

Fast on the heels of that one another is another one in Colossians 3:13, forgive one another. Coming along with this confessing must be forgiving. "Be ye tender hearted," Ephesians 4:32, "forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." We did a little series, didn't we recently, on the great doctrine of forgiveness in the Bible and I said you're never more Godlike then when you forgive.

A third principle that must be understood in the fellowship is Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Spiritual sympathy, this is the law of Christ. What's the law of Christ? That you love one another, John 13:34 and 35, that you love one another. This is the law of Christ. And you demonstrate the law of Christ when you bear one another's burdens.

What does it mean to bear one another's burdens? Well primarily it's talking about the burdens that come because of sin. Galatians 6:1, "If anyone is caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself so that you too will not be tempted, bear one another's burdens and therefore, or thereby fulfill the law of Christ." And if you think you're too good for that and you think you're something when you're nothing, you're self-deceived.

This is talking about helping people carry the burden of their weakness, the burden of their sin, the burden of their failures, helping to restore them, to lift them up, set them on their feet again.

In James 5, if a person is literally crushed under the burden of sin, they are told to go to the elders, repent of their sin and the elders will pray for them. Sin will be forgiven. The joy will be restored along with fellowship.

Central to all of this is another principle, love one another. First Peter 1:22, "Love one another with a pure heart, fervently...I love the word fervently, in the Greek it's ektenes, it has to do with reaching as far as you can possibly reach. It's a word that means to stretch to the absolute limit. Love as far as you can love with a pure heart. Stretch that love as far as it will go.

Peter further describes that love by saying it is to be compassionate love, 1 Peter 3:8. It is to be hospitable love, "Be hospitable to strangers." It is to be submissive love, chapter 5. It is to be physically demonstrable love, chapter 5 verse 14. We are to love one another. So here we are confronting sin in one another, forgiving one another, lifting one another up, carrying one another burdens, loving one another, stretching with compassionate, hospitable, submissive, demonstrable love. That's what life in the church is like.

In Hebrews 3:13 and Hebrews 10:25 it says to exhort one another...to exhort one another, parakaleo, to come alongside and help, to come alongside and comfort, to come alongside and encourage. This is the ministry of counseling, comforting, encouraging. In Romans 14:19 and First Thessalonians 5:11, we are told to edify one another, to edify means to build up, to strengthen with the Word. Acts 20:32 Paul talks about being built up with the Word. The Word is able to build you up and give you an inheritance. Colossians 3:16 tells us we are to be teaching one another...teaching one another, dispersing truth, disseminating doctrine. James 5:16 says we are to be praying for one another...praying for one another.

And by the way, there are many, many more. Some time take your Concordance, if you can, if you've got one that's extensive, if you don't, go to the bookstore and get one and just go through all the "one anothers". That will be a rich experience for you.

So the basis of our fellowship is in our salvation. The nature of our fellowship is in our shared life. The symbol of our fellowship is the supper of the Lord. The danger to our fellowship is sin. The responsibility of our fellowship is serving. That serving breaks down to using our spiritual gifts and fulfilling the one anothers.

And as I told you last time, and I'll repeat it tonight again, the result of this fellowship is joy...the result of this fellowship is joy. I don't know about you, but I prefer joy to just about anything I can think of. I mean, real joy. And I tend to be a very, very joyful person. Oh I may not be a comedian, that's different. In fact, I used to be a speaker to young people, and, you know, you've got to be funny to a certain degree to get away with a 45 minute, or an hour long sermon. And I remember somebody said to me some years ago, "You're not as funny as you used to be." And I said, "Well, life isn't as funny as it used to be either, by the way." You know, when you're 21, everything is funny. But as life goes on, it gets less funny. But I want you to know that I have more joy now than I've ever had in my entire life. I'm a totally joyful person. Joy dominates my life. And it is that deep down settled unruffled joy, that wondrously rich settled joy.

John 17:13, "I've come to You," Jesus says anticipating His return to the Father, "these things I speak in the world." All the instruction that He gave to His own, "So that they may have My joy made full in themselves. My joy made full in themselves." Your life should be characterized by joy. Our church should be characterized by joy.

Do you remember the benediction at the end of 2 Corinthians 13 verse 11, "Finally, brethren," yes? Finally what? "Rejoice." I like that. Rejoice. How you going to do that? "Be made whole, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you and then greet one another with a holy kiss." That's joy. That's the way we ought to live as a church. Summed up so beautifully there. Finally, brethren, rejoice. You have so much to rejoice about.

And the result of living in this kind of genuine spiritual fellowship in the church will always be joy. And I know by the grace and goodness of God that this is a joyful church. I live in the joy of this church. It's a joyful church. You're a joyful congregation. We're not all slap-happy all the time, life has enough problems to prevent us from being silly about serious things. But there's a deep, settled joy here and it's because the Spirit of God has taught us all these things through all these years. We invite you to our joy.

I think one of the surprising things that happens when people come to our church from other places is that they maybe hear the preaching on the radio, and it's pretty strong and we are convinced of what we preach and it's doctrinal and people might get the idea that we're a little bit hard-edged here because of our strong commitment to the truth of the Word of God and our no-nonsense approach to being obedient to the Word of God. And I think the biggest surprise that people find when they come here, at least this is what they tell us, is that this is a place that's full of joy. But that's the end of our fellowship, isn't it? I mean, that's the product of our fellowship. Be joyful. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Paul wished the fullness and the richness and the joy of that fellowship on the Corinthians on that benediction and he wishes it on us as well.

Father, thank You for our time tonight in Your Word. Just sort of summing up the things that are important as we understand the fellowship. Thank You for this wonderful church, this blessed congregation. What a joy it is for all of us to live in the truth, to know the truth, to obey the truth, to proclaim the truth. What a joy it is for us to celebrate the fellowship. Make us faithful to use our gifts and to fulfill the one anothers as You would have us. Help us to really live life together. Help us never to take for granted this immense privilege of being in the fellowship. Help us not to have to wait until we have it taken from us through an illness or through a parting, or through some forced isolation. Help us to cherish the value of a fellowship and to enjoy its lighter moments, but always to be focused on the issues that really matter to You. May we be stimulating one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the fellowship, not forsaking the assembling together and ever-increasingly so as the day of Your return nears. We thank You for the fellowship. May Your Holy Spirit make it all that He would want it to be that our fellowship might be Christlike and demonstrate His glory to the world. We pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).