

## Fellowship

We start today with a quote from Ray Stedman. He was a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). He was the pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California. He pastored there for 40 years dying in 1992.

“To me, the true glory of the Christian message is not the fact that it is a way to get to heaven, (though there was a time in my early Christian life when that was all important to me, and it certainly is the way to get to heaven), but the richness of the Christian proclamation to me is that, in Christ, I discover a way to become a man. That is the really tremendous thing. God is not interested in making saints, period. He is interested in making saints, but only as one step in the process of producing men. After all, that is what God is after – men and women. The goal is not sainthood, but manhood and womanhood, as God intended them to be.”

“All the writers of Scripture aim toward that goal. You can see this in the first letter of the Apostle John. He makes clear right from the beginning that it is impossible to become a man, as God intended men to be, without first becoming a Christian. In other words, God is absolutely necessary to the process of fulfilling our humanity. God is not, therefore, an option to life, as we are being told on many sides today. He is the most basic necessity of life. It is impossible to live and fulfill ourselves without coming to know God through Jesus Christ. Our Lord himself put it flatly, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” {cf, Matt 4:4}. That is essential to the full development of manhood and womanhood.<sup>1</sup>”

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1 <https://server.firefighters.org/stedman/stedmandvd/1john/index.html>

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**1 John 1:1-3**

Certainly God wants everyone to become saved by faith in Jesus Christ. But now that we are saved, now what? God saved us so we can live a life empowered by Him and thereby blessed by Him which glorifies Him.

Adam started out, created in the image of God as body, soul, and human spirit. Jesus Christ was also true humanity with a body, soul and human spirit. When Adam sinned his human spirit died. He was no longer trichotomous but dichotomous. It is only when a person believes in Jesus Christ that he or she receives regeneration, the imputation of a human spirit. Once again that person is now fully human.

But once again, what does God have for each of us in our lives on earth? And as Jesus said, we live by means of the Word of God, not by bread alone.

This week the topic is fellowship. The word in Greek shows up in our passage in 1 John.

**1 John 1:1 What was from the beginning,  
what we have heard,  
what we have seen with our eyes,  
what we have looked at and touched with our  
hands, concerning the Word of Life—**

**1 John 1:2 and the life was manifested, and we  
have seen and testify and proclaim to you the  
eternal life, which was with the Father and was  
manifested to us—**

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**1 John 1:3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

The word fellowship has several meanings. Unfortunately, in our current society, fellowship may mean “getting along,” or “ignore doctrine so that we can have church unity,” or even a big group hug.

The right way to approach this word is from the Greek and its usage in the New Testament.

First let us look at the word itself. Κοινωνία.

Biblehub.com has much to say about it.

“Koinōnia (Strong’s 2842) expresses active participation in a common life. At its heart are the ideas of sharing, partnership, communion, and mutual contribution. The term gathers spiritual, relational, and material dimensions into a single reality: the life believers hold in common with God through Christ and with one another in the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>”

Key words throughout the literature are sharing, participation, partnership.

Let us take an excursion into some words used by Paul and John. Robby Dean says that John uses the word “abide” as a synonym for fellowship. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says that Paul likes to use words prefixed with the Greek suffix for “with,” συν.

Let us start our lexical (vocabulary) journey with looking at some passages in the New Testament that use the word for fellowship. There are 19 passages in which the Greek noun for fellowship is used. In some

<sup>2</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2842.htm>

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of them, there are explanations of what fellowship is. We will only look at a few of them. I am following Robby Dean on the passages he highlighted.

**Acts 2:42**

After the Pentecost event and Peter's first sermon, Acts narrates what the apostles did.

**Acts 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.**

**Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (κοινωνία), to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

The first use of the word for fellowship is in Acts. It is found in a list of activities that the apostles persevered in, immediately after the dispensation of the Church started.

The first item is the apostles' teaching. The first item. How were the believers who had just stepped into a new dispensation to know what just happened? God the Holy Spirit had brought back the apostles' memories of Jesus' teaching such that they now understood the doctrine and could now themselves teach it.

Second in the list is fellowship. Some say there are four items in this list. Others say there are two items in the list with fellowship being the second item. The two items following it are in "apposition" to fellowship. In other words, the two last words are explanations of what fellowship is. In this list, each item is separated by "and." Except that there is no "and" between fellowship and communion in the Greek. That

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implies that communion and prayer explain what the apostles included in their fellowship in the daily efforts.

The third item is breaking of bread (the communion service). Per Robby Dean, this is in apposition to fellowship. It explains what is part of fellowship. We call it the communion service. Communion is derived from “common” which is the root of the Greek word<sup>3</sup>.

The fourth item is prayer. Again, per Robby Dean, this is part of fellowship.

So in Acts 2:42 there are two items the apostles devoted themselves to: teaching and fellowship. The last item, in this context included the communion, breaking of the bread, and prayer. As we will see as we progress, fellowship includes more than just these items. Indeed, we need to include God. If we do not first have fellowship with God, we cannot truly have fellowship with one another.

### **Romans 15:26**

Another aspect of Christian fellowship is giving.

**Romans 15:26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution (κοινωνία) for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.**

**Romans 15:27 Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared (κοινωνέω) in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/communion>

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**Contribution.** This is our word for fellowship. This indicates that giving from one's means to another is a form of fellowship. A person is sharing. This is something we often try to teach children. To share of what we have with someone who doesn't have. But this must be from our free will. It has to be our choice, not something forced upon us.

**Shared.** This is the verb form of our word for fellowship. Double whammy.

Here is Robby Dean's explanation.

“Why did they do this, just out of the goodness of their hearts? No, because they understood that all believers are members of the body of Christ and we participate in the same benefits and blessings of salvation, and as result of our relationship with God it is to impact how we relate to one another. But the starting point is the emphasis on God, not the emphasis on man.<sup>4</sup>”

## **2 Corinthians 6:14**

**2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship (κοινωνία) has light with darkness?**

**2 Corinthians 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever**

What fellowship has light with darkness? None! Similar thought to what John writes in 1 John chapter 1. There is nothing in “common.” That is the key concept behind the Greek κοινωνία. Common or sharing.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://deanbibleministries.org/new-testament-menuitem/1-john-menuitem/message/2000-1john-007/read>

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But let us look further at the items that are in parallel to this fellowship. This helps shed some additional light on fellowship.

Bound together, Partnership, Harmony, Common. These are all concepts similar to our word for fellowship.

We are bound together with believers “in Christ.” We are not bound to unbelievers spiritually.

Righteousness and Lawlessness can be considered opposites. There is no partnership there.

Christ is God and Belial is demonic. There is no harmony there.

We should understand that these are absolutes. Light and dark. All or nothing. The Bible understands a digital world. 0 and 1.

**2 Corinthians 9:13**

Another example of giving as a component of fellowship. Also understand that each person has a spiritual gift. That gift is to benefit the church. It is not something to be hidden away. It is part of the spiritual fellowship.

**2 Corinthians 9:12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.**

**2 Corinthians 9:13 Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for *your* obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution (κοινωνία) to them and to all,**

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**2 Corinthians 9:14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.**

**2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**

The Corinthian church was rich monetarily but also had many people with a variety of spiritual gifts. Perhaps as a result of Paul's teaching, the Corinthians became grace oriented and understood the meaning of love. Love observes and sees a need and attempts to fill it. The church in Jerusalem was going through some rough times. The Corinthian church gave of their "excess." They were fellowshiping with them.

**2 Corinthians 13:14**

As Thomas Constable states, "This so-called "Trinitarian benediction" is one of the most widely quoted verses in Paul's epistles."<sup>5</sup>

**2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship (κοινωνία) of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.**

Here Paul specifically relates fellowship to the Holy Spirit.

We keep returning to 2 Corinthians for quotes. It is a book I am inexperienced in. But obviously it is full of spiritual gems. Maybe some day, if I live long enough...

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<sup>5</sup> <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/2corinthians.pdf>

## Philippians 2:1

**Philippians 2:1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship (κοινωνία) of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,**

**Philippians 2:2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.**

Once again, Paul relates fellowship to the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you have seen the Dirty Harry movie in which Clint Eastwood says, “Make my day.” Here Paul is saying “make my joy complete.”

## Philemon 1:6

Philemon was a slave owner who had helped many believers. Onesimus was one of his slaves. But he had run away and subsequently become a believer. “Paul wrote this brief 25-verse appeal in order to pacify Philemon and to promote reconciliation between the slave and his master.”<sup>6</sup>

**Philemon 1:4. I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,**

**Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/philemon.pdf> page 2

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**Philemon 1:6 and I pray that the fellowship (κοινωνία) of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.**

**Philemon 1:7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.**

Philemon was praised for his application of his Bible knowledge via faith. Faith is related to fellowship. Indeed the love that is mentioned is fruit of the Holy Spirit. We should glean that fellowship starts with faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. Application of Bible doctrine (i.e. answers to life's problems) via the empowerment of the Holy Spirit promotes fellowship.

Robby Dean sums it up.

“There we see that fellowship is not social life with Christians. Christian fellowship is based first on a relationship with God, based on right doctrine, and it results in right behaviour. Christian fellowship, therefore, is not sitting around and having a good social time with other believers, but Christian fellowship is that which is specifically centred around the person of Christ. The meaning of koinonia has to do with a joint ownership, a joint partnership, and it relates to the joint benefits which we all share as part of our spiritual life. We participate in that when we are abiding in Christ.<sup>7</sup>”

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<sup>7</sup> <https://deanbibleministries.org/new-testament-menuitem/1-john-menuitem/message/2000-1john-007/read>

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There are other passages that do not use the “fellowship” word but do point to other aspects of the believers sharing and participating with Christ and each other. These came out of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. The point they make is that the word for fellowship is often used by Paul. But he also uses words with a “συν” or “with” prefix to indicate participation. This is a helpful insight.

Romans chapter 6 is full of pointers to the believer sharing in Jesus death and now life.

**Romans 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live (συν + live = to live with) with Him,**

**Romans 6:9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.**

**Romans 6:10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.**

**Romans 6:11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

We do not ask in a particular situation “what would Jesus do?” No. We ask how did Jesus live? He lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. He lived his life as a man empowered by the Holy Spirit as an example to us as how to live. So we share (fellowship) in His life when we are empowered by God the Holy Spirit.

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**1 John 1:1-3**

2 Corinthians 7:3

Romans 8:17

Galatians 2:19

Colossians 2:12

Colossians 3:1

Ephesians 2:5, 6

Colossians 2:13

**Romans 8:17**

2 Timothy 2:12