

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, January 4, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

DANGEROUS FELLOWSHIP “Defining Fellowship” Acts 2:42-47

Back in the 80’ (while I was still a young person) I remember a story that made the headlines. It caught my attention and has stayed in my mind not only because of the terrible tragedy of the story, but also because for me it represented a terrible numbing mindset for our culture.

You may remember this story from years back... it a true story. Kitty Genovese lived in a residential area of New York City. One evening, in front of her apartment she was confronted by a man who assaulted and brutally murdered her while 38 of her neighbors watched from their windows. It was reported that many of them drew their blinds and closed their curtains, but during the assault, that lasted for some 30 minutes, not one person attempted to help or even bothered to call the police. They just stood by refusing to help or get involved and do something.

QUESTION: *What does this scenario say about our culture today and our personal lives and our ability to connect with other people?*

We live in a world today that is more and more disconnected from one another. We live isolated lives. We do our thing and are just content to let others do theirs, and we are rarely involved or associated with those around us. We are more and more today becoming disconnected... we have faceless and even voiceless conversations through texting, and facebook and email. We don’t really know how to communicate with each other very well. We live isolated lives where we may not even know our neighbors.

Even in the church, if we are not careful it is far too easy to be disconnected from those that we go to church with, worship with and do our faith with. We may see those we go to church with for one hour at church and have no other contact with them the rest of the week... we live a totally separate lives away from the church. Perhaps that is why many today enjoy going to the rapidly growing, more progressive and contemporary churches where you can gather in a large faceless crowd, raise your hand in worship to loud, voice drowning music, hear a “make me feel good” talk and go home and no one even knows or cares. They are all just doing their own thing.

Listen, regardless of what you have been told or what you see today, we really do need each other! God made us that way. Not as independent, disconnected islands, removed from and unrelated to one another. No. In God's family we are interrelated... fellow members of the Body of Christ. Our lives are to touch each other deeply... we need each other... but I fear the church has lost something of that ability today.

The Bible calls this "fellowship." The Greek term is "koinonia"... and it is as old as the first century church and Christians who endured so much together. It wasn't a shallow, meaningless pat on the back. It was an authentic display of love and acceptance, care and compassion, support and forgiveness – all those things that characterize the Lord Jesus Christ when He walked on earth.

This study does more than announce what ought to be. It deals with how to do it and why it's so important. If you are interested in the horizontal dimension of Christianity... if you hunger for more than an isolated relationship with Christ... if you really want your faith to be something shared instead of just declared, KOINONIA awaits you. But be careful, it's dangerous, risky, costly. True, genuine fellowship is risky... it will risk you something of yourself that you may be afraid to give. It is an investment... it will really cost you something, some time, some commitment, some inconvenience. It is dangerous, it can be perilous sometimes the investment that true genuine fellowship calls us to make in the lives of others... it may hurt, it can be painful, it isn't always neat and tidy... sometimes it gets messy. Genuine fellowship... the kind Scripture calls us to is a dangerous fellowship. That is why some fellowships split up... why some fellowships just can't get along an longer. It is not for the faint of heart, but it is absolutely what God has called us to and of highest benefit for the life of a believer. It is, for your Christian life and walk, a matter of life and death... spiritual life and spiritual death.

Too-familiar words often lose their intended meaning. Such a victim is the word "fellowship." Though regularly employed by Christians (both ministerial and lay person), perhaps only a minority of its users know fellowship in its genuine sense. Fellowship has been loosely used to identify a variety of gatherings, ranging from coffee and doughnut breaks between services to the service themselves. Beach and backyard parties, skate nights and other sporting activities have also benefited from such noble description. Such usage, however, doesn't fit comfortably with New Testament thinking. In the first century, fellowship was viewed as something beyond the occasional, even regular, gathering of Christians, even though they met in the same space... at the same time... for a unified purpose. Fellowship was a heart issue, to be felt and expressed... to be participated in. It was something which occurred apart from the program and schedule. It was a fundamental way of life.

I. THE ORIGINAL CHRISTIANS – CENTURY ONE (Acts 2:42-47)

The infant church which breathed its first breath into 3,000 believers was impacted by the pressure felt from a hostile surrounding society. The closeness which marked the church

made it possible for its members to sustain life. Four ingredients comprised the diet upon which the young church thrived:

Four Ingredients in the Early Church:

1. **Teaching (v. 43) –**
2. **Fellowship (v.44-45) –**
3. **Ordinances/Breaking of Bread (v.46) –**
4. **Prayer (v.47) -**

**II. THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS – CENTURY TWENTY-ONE
(Comparative Comment)**

Three of the four ingredients are still actively pursued at this time – teaching, ordinances and prayer. One, however, is noticeably weak, if not absent... fellowship. The church, now 2,000 years old, must critically evaluate what is missing in its diet. Contrary to popular thought, fellowship is neither based upon the number of times a church body is together, nor upon the sociability of its people.

What is fellowship? Try your hand at the following exercise. In column 1 place a check beside each one that you believe is how we use the word fellowship in the church today. In column 2 place a X [x] beside each ones that you believe is not actually an accurate understanding of what fellowship really is. In column 3 place a question mark [?] beside the ones that you believe could have something to do with fellowship, and in column 4 place an asterisk [*] beside the ones that you believe have benefit in promoting fellowship in the church.

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?	1	2	3	4
1. Dinners at the church.				
2. Social events at the church				
3. Sunday School Class Get Togethers				
4. Shaking hands with visitors during church and greeting one another				
5. Youth events and activities				
6. Pizza and bowling parties				
7. Home Bible Studies with a snack time				
8. A club or organization within the church (i.e. Men's Fellowship)				
9. Children's Party				
10. Cell groups or small group within a church				

III. KOINONIA IN ITS ORIGINAL SENSE (Acts 44:45)

1. **The Phenomenon Observed (Acts 2:44-45) –** “All believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” (See Acts 4:32-35) What are the characteristic of “koinonia”?

3 Characteristic of Koinonia:

- (1) **It included everyone (vv.44-45) –**

- (2) **It held them together (v.44) –**
- (3) **It met needs (v.45) –**

2. **What Does “Koinonia Mean? –**

- (1) **Background** – The term “koinos appearing in Acts 2:44 simply means “common.” Something common was considered widespread, familiar, and ordinary. A sister term is “koinonos,” from which our word “fellowship” comes. Behind this word is the root meaning “a partner” or “an associate.” The act of sharing is at the heart of this word.
- (2) **Practical Definition** – “Koinonia (fellowship) is “the expression of genuine Christianity among the member of God’s family.”

IV. **WHAT DOES EXPRESSED KOINONIA INCLUDE?**

Though many items could be listed, the following provides us with the basics:

Essentials Elements in Koinonia:

1. **Love and acceptance**– *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” – Ephesians 3:16-16*
Genuine fellowship involved first sharing in something with someone, and second, sharing of something with someone. Abrasiveness, insensitivity, and a judgmental spirit must be replaced by “agape” – “love which seek the highest good of the other person, getting behind them so as to help or direct them to reach God’s goal for their life.” Acceptance is demonstrated by making it safe for another to be themselves.
2. **Honesty and humility** – *“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up in him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” – Ephesians 4:14-16*
Love and truth are inseparable, and truth must be the garment in which love is housed. Humility asks a tough question, “How can I be of assistance to another, instead of feeling discouraged because no one else has helped me?”
3. **Concern and restoration** – *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him (or her), gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” – Galatians 6:1-2*
To fulfill the law of Christ, one Christian must bear the burdens of another, particularly the one of the brother or sister who has fallen spiritually or morally. Beyond prayer,

this requires time spent with the one who has failed. While pointed fingers are unacceptable, actions motivated by gentleness and love will restore.

4. Confession and forgiveness (James 5:16) – “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”-James 5:16

These two cannot operate apart from a prepared atmosphere of freedom and sensitivity, and require frank, courageous willingness to admit personal need.

5. Encouragements and availability – “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” –Hebrews 10:23-25

Any sense of competition must be broken down, and destructive and cutting comments must be set aside. The tendency to demand and manipulate must be curbed, so that cooperation and encouragement are developed.

6. Informality and flexibility – “Keep on loving each other as brother (and sisters). Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:1-2

While a feeling of security may result when things are set and structured, so also many a sense of distance and formalism – a loss of freshness. Some of the routine molds we preserve limit or destroy the very qualities they were intended to protect.

Now it’s your turn...

Write about it: In your own words, define fellowship. Write a definition that specifically deals with your situation (family, friends, job, church, community). Write down things that come to your mind as you read over what is included in fellowship.

Talk about it: Gather a group of friends or family together and talk about the first century church described in Acts 2:42-47. How is your personal experience similar to this church? How is it different? End the discussion by listing some practical ways your church could improve its level of koinonia.