

Wednesday Night **BIBLE STUDY**

Wednesday, February 12, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

BUILDING, BUILDING, BUILDING
“Building Stronger Church Through Stronger Relationships”
Building Genuine Fellowship
Acts 2:42-47

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 and relationships through things like texting, facebook, twitter, email and whole host of other technologically advanced means. We just kind of live in our own little world and rarely let others in. 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. The influence of our disconnected culture has even been felt in the church today. 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,” 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, and care and mutual compassion, of support for one another and forgiveness – all those things that characterize the Lord Jesus Christ when He walked on earth and that actually build the body of Christ into all that He intended it to be. That is genuine fellowship. True, genuine fellowship is risky... it will risk you something of yourself that you may even be afraid to give, it is sometimes costly... it will really cost you something of yourself (time, commitment, convenience)... it may hurt at time, genuine fellowship can be painful and exacting... it isn't always neat and tidy... sometimes it gets messy.

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. Fellowship was a part of the very fiber of the fabric early church and what held it together. If we are going to build a strong growing church it (genuine fellowship) will be part of our fabric as well.

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. Oh, we think we have this one down pat. 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:

TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF FELLOWSHIP

Read each of the following statements and respond to each one with the given instructions below:

- (1) Place a check mark [✓] to the left of each numbered statement that you believe reflects how we use the word fellowship in the church today.
- (2) At the end of each completed statement place an “x” after each one(s) that you believe is not actually an accurate understanding of what fellowship really is.
- (3) Place a question mark [?] following each statement that you believe could have something to do with fellowship.

- (4) Circle the number of each statement that you believe may have benefit in promoting fellowship in the church.

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?
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 (pizza and bowling parties)
6. A gathering of church friends at the home of one who has just lost a loved one
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. FELLOWSHIP IN ITS ORIGINAL SENSE (Acts 2:42-47)

1. **The Phenomenon Observed (Acts 2:44-45)** – Again, verse 42 reminds us of the early church, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship...”* The words translated as “fellowship” in verse 42 is the familiar Greek word “koinonia.” What genuine fellowship or “koinonia” looks like is further described and explained in the verse that follow... for example in verse 44, *“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”? **Given Scriptures explanation of what genuine fellowship or “koinonia” looks like, how would you define genuine fellowship?** _____

3 Characteristic of Genuine Fellowship:

- (1) **Inclusive not exclusive** - It included everyone (vv.44-45)
- (2) **Bonding not divisive** - It held them together (v.44)
- (3) **Hands on not hands off** - It met needs (v.45)

2. What Does “Koinonia” Mean?

(1) Background

- The term “common” appearing in Acts 2:44 is the Greek word “koinos.”
- This word literally means shared, mutual, communal, joint, public, collective, conjoint, corporate.
- A sister term is “koinonia,” from which our word “fellowship” comes and appears in Acts 2:42

- Behind this word is the root meaning a partner, an associate, or those conjoined together and it speaks of a close inalterable bond
- The act of sharing in common is at the heart of this word.

(2) Practical Definition

“Koinonia” (genuine fellowship) then is “the unbreakable bond and expression of genuine Christianity among the member of God’s family.”

IV. WHAT DOES GENUINE FELLOWSHIP LOOK LIKE?

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

Essentials Elements in Genuine Fellowship: “Koinonia”

1. **Mutual love and acceptance (Ephesians 3:16–18, 4:32-5:2)** - *“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 3:16-18*

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.

Question: What does our “grasp” of the depths of Christ’s love have to do with our mutual love and acceptance of one another within the fellowship of Christ? Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4:32-5:2, *“⁴ And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. ⁵ Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”*

2. **Deep honesty and humility (Philippians 2:1-11)** – *“¹ Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that*

*every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
–Philippians 2:1-11*

Question: What would the church look like we truly imitated the deep honesty and humility of Christ in our fellowship as believers?

Love, honesty and genuine humility are inseparably linked really, and honesty and humility 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. **Genuine concern and restoration (Galatians 6:1-2)** – *“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*

Question: What role does honesty and humility play in genuine concern and restoration given Galatians 6:1-2? How should we work at concern and restoring another? (gently) How does this build fellowship?

To fulfill the law of Christ, one Christian must bear the burdens of another, particularly that 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. **Heart-felt 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*

Question: What could the implications of the word “healing” through confession have to do with strengthening the fellowship of believers?

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

5. **Sincere encouragement and availability (Hebrews 10:23-25)** – *“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.

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.