

Fellowship – How May We Celebrate Our Unity with All True Believers on Earth?

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[Presented at the Colonial North Pastor's Conference, October 8, 2008]

This article appeared in a newspaper:

Bosses of a publishing firm are trying to work out why no one noticed that one of their employees had been sitting dead at his desk for five days before anyone asked if he was feeling OK. George Turklebaum, 51, who had been employed as a proofreader at a New York firm for 30 years, had a heart attack in the open-plan office he shared with 23 other workers. He quietly passed away on Monday but nobody noticed until Saturday morning when an office cleaner asked why he was still working during the weekend.ⁱ

Chicago Tribune writer Marla Paul took a risk when she wrote a self-revealing column confessing her sadness and frustration over her own inability to build and sustain friendships. She wrote this column expecting little, if any, response. However, she was inundated with letters from others experiencing the same kind of isolation and frustration.

One person wrote, "I've often felt that I'm standing outside looking through the window of a party to which I was not invited." What a vivid picture! Do you ever feel that way? Do you ever have a sense of being on the outside looking in?

Another woman wrote, "I have this fear of becoming a very lonely, old widow sitting around and listening to the clock tick." This fear, she says, just about paralyzes her life. It is probably a well-founded fear, because she confessed in her letter that she has no sense of community. She has no family. She has no friendship or small group or church community of which she is a part. She feels that she's going to die alone, and she may be right.

In the summer of 1995, many people died in Chicago's heat wave. Forty-one of them were buried in a mass grave called "The Potter's Field." Not a single person surfaced to claim their bodies or grieve their passing. Forty-one people died *alone*.

Marla Paul ended her column about loneliness with these words: "Sometimes it seems easier to just give up and accept disconnectedness as a dark and unshakable companion; but, that's not the companion I want." She writes, "So I will persevere." She is going to keep longing, searching, trying, and hoping that someday she will be able to discover and develop community.ⁱⁱ

More than once, especially after our congregation grew to thirty or forty people, we have seen people drift off and leave our congregation. Why? Because they didn't feel connected. They didn't feel part of our community. Besides worship on Sunday, they felt alone. They were on their own. They were lonely, disconnected, and yearning for more.

An 87-year-old man was moping through life. He lived in a small village outside of Rome with his books and his seven cats. His wife had been dead for twelve years. His only daughter lived in Afghanistan. He lived a lonely life, seldom venturing out, seldom speaking to others.

So one day he decided to do something about it. Giorgio Angelozzi put himself up for adoption. Yes, this 87-year-old man placed a classified ad in Italy's largest daily newspaper: "*Seeks family in need of a grandfather. Would bring 500 euros a month to a family willing to adopt him.*"

The response to the ad was enormous. The newspaper ran a front-page article about him. Inquiries came from around the globe. He went from having all the time in the world to having barely enough time to look at all of the requests. A pop star responded. A millionaire offered servants and a seaside villa. But one letter stood out, Angelozzi explained, because every member of the family – father, mother, sister, brother – had signed it.

He settled into their ground-floor apartment, taking walks in the garden, helping with dishes and homework. “I couldn’t have chosen better,” he says. “Maybe it was luck, or maybe it was God looking after me, I don’t know... I knew right away I had found my new home.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It just wasn’t good for him to be alone.

One of the first things God ever said was: “*It is not good for the man to be alone.*” (Gen. 2:18)

Of course, God was explaining why He was giving the man a woman to be his lifelong companion. But God did not create people to be *alone*. God’s plan for this world did not include the loneliness we see all over the world and within our communities and even our congregations today. God never had in mind the brokenness we see in marriages, in families, and in relationships that have been destroyed and have come apart, leaving individual people separated all over the place.

Going through life...alone.

We live in a world that strives more than ever for “connection” with other people. We invent new ways and technology at a rapid pace to help it happen. Internet, cell phones, e-mailing, instant messaging, GPS, video conferencing, and going live to the planet are designed to help connect people more and more. Because more and more, people are feeling disconnected. Separated. Alone. We live right next to each other and right on top of each other, but have never been as lonely and disconnected as we are now. Someone has called the situation we are living in “crowded loneliness.” Ten people sitting next to each other at an airport, all talking on their cell phones... to someone else. Five kids on five computers right next to each other, none of whom are talking to each other.

This is what God had in his heart when He said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone.*” This is not the way God created us to be. He didn’t create people to be disconnected and alone. He created us to be connected and together, in a close relationship. Doing life together. Associating with each other. In *communion* together.

In *fellowship* with one another.

It might help us understand how much God wants his people to be in fellowship with each other when we consider for a moment who God is and what He is like. God lovingly reveals Himself to us in three different persons. Yet He is one God. “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*” (Deut. 6:4)

God is one. *Echad*.

Echad is oneness made up of several parts or members. The word *echad* actually is quite complex, implying a unity with multiple parts. We speak of a team playing “as one,” a group of people discussing something as being “of one mind.” “One nation” can be made up of thousands or even millions of people. Interestingly, *echad* is also the word used when God says “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become **one** flesh.*” (Gen. 2:24) With a human marriage, God is giving people a picture, even if it is an imperfect one, of what He is like.

There is one God. He is one. But in his oneness there are three persons. Our one God reveals Himself to us in three persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. But they aren’t three gods. One God. Those three persons are so inseparably connected that we can’t even describe it with human language except to say that God is one. *Echad*. And God is perfect. And so, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in perfect communion with one another.

They are in *fellowship* with each other.

They do not argue with each other. They are not jealous of one another. They do not hurt each other with their words, actions, or thoughts. They do not try to outdo one another. They don’t gossip about each other. They don’t covet the roles the other one has. They don’t lie to each other. They don’t tempt one another. They don’t irritate each other. They don’t talk behind each other’s backs. They don’t steal from one another. They aren’t selfish or lazy, either. They serve one another: The Holy Spirit leads people to the Son. The Son leads people to the Father. The Father gives up the Son and sends out the Spirit. They work together. They dwell together. They are together. They are one.

Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one.*” (John 10:30) Another time He said, “*I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all He does.*” (John 5:19-20)

They are in perfect fellowship. And they show us what fellowship really is. An association. A communion. A close relationship. A unity that makes life wonderful and perfect the way God intended it. This is the image of God. A perfect three-in-one fellowship of unity, harmony, and selfless love.

And so, it shouldn't surprise us that when He created us, He wanted the same for us.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27) People were created in the image of God. Perfect. Their will was perfectly united with God's. They loved Him. They wanted to serve Him. They were thankful to Him. They were in a perfect communion and unity and relationship with God. They didn't argue with Him. They didn't lie to Him. They didn't get angry with Him. They didn't want to avoid Him. They wanted to be with Him.

They were in fellowship with God.

And so, they were in fellowship with each other. Since they both were in perfect unity of will with God, they were both in perfect unity of will with each other. They loved one another. Perfectly. They were selfless, not selfish. They helped each other out. They didn't argue with one another. They didn't hurt each other. They were faithful to one another. They put the needs of the other before their own. Life was good, wasn't it? Life was exactly the way it was supposed to be. No pain. No tears. No sadness.

There was a *unity with all true believers on earth.*

There was fellowship. *Koivwvia.*

Koivwvia is defined by *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BAGD)* as an “*association, communion, fellowship, or close relationship.*” “Hence, it was a favorite expression for the marital relationship as the most intimate between human beings.” *Koivwvia* is “a community of will. A closely knit majority, naturally belonging together.” It can also mean “a participation, a sharing in something.”^{iv}

Can you imagine that? There was a time where we were in perfect fellowship and communion and unity with one another. No discord. No jealousy. No scrapping with one another. Just harmony and selflessness. We were in that kind of fellowship together because we were in fellowship with God. It was the perfect community. Everybody belonged. Everyone was in fellowship.

But then Adam and Eve made a bad decision.

They thought, “Maybe there is something better than this fellowship we have with God. Is He holding out on us? That's what this serpent is trying to tell us. It seems to make sense. Maybe the serpent is right.” Whatever it is that they thought, they decided to break that wonderful fellowship with God and establish fellowship with the devil.

Sin ruined our fellowship with God. Our first parents could no longer be where God was. They could no longer live in his garden or eat the fruit from his special tree. They had to leave his presence. They now feared Him in a way they didn't before. They felt guilt. Shame. Pain.

And sin ruined our fellowship with each other. Our first parents now began blaming each other. They had to clothe themselves. They were self-conscious, selfish, angry. Their relationship would change – it would no longer be perfectly loving and selfless. And look at how sin has messed up you and me living in community and fellowship with each other. We fight. We argue. We get jealous. We get mad. We get even. We lie. We hurt. We hate. We steal. We kill. We covet. We keep up with the Jones'. We tempt each other. We step on each other. We make bad decisions. We fail at our relationships. We blame each other and we blame God. And we end up living lonely, broken lives.

Because we are no longer in fellowship with God. And if we aren't held to Him, we can't hold to each other. It's like when you have a magnet, a number of paper clips will stick to it and then other paper clips will stick to them. But when you take the magnet away, all the paper clips fall to the ground. Separated. Messed up. That's the condition we were in after the devil's devious work among us.

But then Jesus showed up.

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” (1 John 3:8) Jesus came as the ultimate fellowship-restorer. He was the “*sacrifice of atonement*”^v that made us at-one with God again. He was willing to be separated from his Father so that we wouldn't have to be. He restored the fellowship with God that

we lost. He reversed what the devil did – put enmity between us and the devil – the way it should be – and put us in fellowship with God once again!

Now that we've heard the good news that we have been restored in fellowship with God, let's walk through all the passages in the New Testament where we find the word "fellowship" so we can understand clearly what this means for us.

Jesus Christ is in fellowship with the Father and the Spirit.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46) *"I and the Father are one."* (John 10:30)

We have fellowship with Christ, and through Him, with the Father and the Spirit.

"And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3) *"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."* (1 Corinthians 1:9) *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."* (Philippians 3:10) *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* (2 Corinthians 13:14) And Jesus said, *"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."* (John 17:20-21)

So if we have fellowship with Christ, if we are in fellowship with God, then we have all the reason and motivation we need to *live* like Christ. To honor God for the hand of fellowship He has given us, we live like we are part of his fellowship. We want to live like Him. Like Jesus.

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:1-5)

And when we do live like Jesus, nothing will attract others to want to be a part of our fellowship more!

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

If we have fellowship with Christ, all other true followers of Jesus have fellowship with us.

Like us, they will live like Jesus in order to thank and honor Him. And because we are united to Jesus, and they are united to Jesus, we are united to each other. We are in fellowship. All true believers on earth have this fellowship with one another. *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7) *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."* (1 John 1:3)

And when we recognize through thorough discovery that people are indeed in fellowship with us, we can even display and celebrate that publicly. Paul writes *"James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me."* (Galatians 2:9)

And there is no more beautiful way to express the fellowship we have with each other than by doing life together. Eating together. Helping each other out. Encouraging one another. Growing in the Word together. Taking the Lord's supper together. Praying together. Spending time together. Being there for one another. *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* (Acts 2:42)

If you cut yourself off from your fellowship with God, you cut yourself off from his people.

When someone shows that they aren't in fellowship with God, we have to let them know that by their words and actions they have cut themselves off from that fellowship with God. If they are not trusting in Christ for fellowship with God, and if their lives show that, they cannot be in fellowship with Him. And since we are in fellowship with God, that means they can't be in fellowship with us either. *"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."* (1 John 1:6) *"And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"* (1 Corinthians 5:2) *"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"* (2 Corinthians 6:14)

When the Holy Spirit leads me to trust in Christ, I am linked to Him and enjoy fellowship with Him. But if I decide to reject Him, to disbelieve his promises for me, then I remain in the darkness. I remain outside the beautiful light of fellowship with God. And the warm fellowship with his people on earth.

I lose my connection with the magnet and my paper clip falls to the floor.

It is all about connection. People connected to God through Christ. People connected to people because they are connected to God. Connection. Fellowship. Association. Communion.

But it still sounds pretty theoretical to me. So how do we *live* it?

Our fellowship will be perfect in heaven, one day, of course. All believers in Jesus will be celebrating our unity and fellowship with God together. Our Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Non-denominational brothers and sisters will be just as close to us in our unity and fellowship and faith as we are to each other! (picture that for a moment!) There will be no more differences among the followers of Jesus Christ.

The fellowship we have with God and with fellow believers right now on this earth, however, is something we live out imperfectly. It is imperfect because it is limited. It is limited because we can't read hearts and minds. We are in unity with all true believers on earth but we can't look with God's eyes into those hearts and know what He knows. We listen to words and confessions of faith. There are differences in what we hear God saying in his Word and what others hear God saying in his Word. And because his Word is truth, and because we rely on it for our eternal life, it is important for us to get it right. And we can't pretend to agree with people when we don't agree with them on these words that are so important. And if we care about their souls, and the Holy Spirit has convicted us of God's truth, we need to communicate in a loving way that those truths are important for them too. And that we can't agree to God's Word being changed or twisted around.

So, how in the world do we celebrate our unity with all true believers on earth? After all, they are going to be our roommates in heaven...

I am not going to talk about all the things that we *can't* do in practicing Christian fellowship. Rather, I am going to talk about what we *should be* doing. Instead of making lists of stuff we can't do and people we can't do it with, I want to focus on what celebrating that wonderful fellowship with God and with his children means that we can be doing.

God has brought us into fellowship with Him. We are part of God's community. And the way to live in this community is to live the way God lives. Our relationship with each other should mimic the relationship that Father, Son, and Spirit share, should it not? Living a life of thanks and glory to God means living a life of loving fellowship with others. As Christians, and as Christian congregations, we stress the importance of worship. We stress the importance of studying the Word of God in its truth and purity. We (hopefully) stress evangelism - going into the world to share that Word with others. But do we stress the importance of Christian *fellowship*?

Celebrating fellowship, our unity as Christ-followers, means doing life together. It means helping each other out. Giving to people who need financial help, food, or shelter. It means meeting together. It means eating together. It means encouraging one another. Rebuking one another. Praying together. Laughing together. Crying together. Praising God together. Being a close-knit community. Having refrigerator-rights in each other's homes. Repairing each other's broken whatever's. Putting the needs of others before your own. Spending the day with the person who is grieving. Letting others call you at 3am. Dropping whatever it is you are doing to be there for someone. Doing life together. When other people saw this kind of stuff going on among the early Christian community, they wanted to be a part of it. This kind of living attracted outsiders to Jesus. Then when they heard the Gospel, it all made sense because it matched what they observed. And God changed their lives.

Carrying out the mission God has given us happens best as we celebrate our fellowship with Him by celebrating it with each other. This is what happened in the book of Acts. The early Christian community didn't have all the blessings of WELS-trained pastors, church buildings, outreach programs, Christ-light® curriculum, gospel tracts, or web sites. They had Jesus. And people knew it. And their love for Him and their love for each other changed the world.

We need to keep returning to what we learn from that first church. The importance of celebrating fellowship. An emphasis on fellowship has to be part of all of our ministry planning in our congregations. I eventually learned in ministry that I could ask people to join our Bible Information Class (BIC) until I am blue in the face without getting many results. But when we invited people right away to join other people in our congregation on "fellowship events," or had people over to dinner, or did something out there in the world that had nothing to do with our "church," in other words, when we got to know them a bit and show them some love and concern and encouragement, we began filling up more BICs than we could even teach!

Our congregations need to keep thinking how we can demonstrate our Christian love in this broken, lonely world. How can we create real community for people, to show them how great it is to be a part of Christ's community? How can we, in this world where privacy is so important to everyone, break down some of those walls and show love? How can we get together with people? How can we get others to get together? Can we invite outsiders to every event and function our congregation puts on? Can we move our barbeque grills out of the backyard and into the front? Can we let kids play together without scheduling a get-together? Can we keep some time open for those unexpected drop-ins? Can we make sure that fellowship ministry planning gets a thorough plan that includes more than a pancake supper and a Christmas party once a year? I am convinced a strong emphasis on fellowship in our ministry will bring larger BICs, greater worship attendances, more members, more people in Bible study, and ultimately, more lives changed by Christ. As it did in Acts chapter 2.

Our congregation began emphasizing this with regular monthly fellowship gatherings for all. And that worked wonderful until we grew to about forty. But once we got larger than that, it became difficult to get everyone involved in those. Now our main strategy for encouraging Christian fellowship (as well as spiritual growth, evangelism, worship, and service) is having small group gatherings. This has been a wonderful catalyst for encouraging Christians to get to know each other and do life together. We have also created many fellowship opportunities with women's ministry, men's ministry, family ministry, and a healthy dose of after-Sunday fellowship with loud music, good food, and a "no-after-church-meeting" rule. With that being said, we are a long way off from the church in Acts 2. But the Acts 2 church is a model worth mimicking.

But what about those sticky fellowship issues? You're waiting for me to go there, aren't you? What about the hard-cases of fellowship expression? OK. I will share a little about the way I have approached some of this. And admittedly, most of my experience comes from working with newer Christians...

When a new person comes into Christ's fellowship, comes to faith in Jesus, it is an exciting thing for that person! They realize all they have because of Christ. They are overwhelmed that they are now part of God's family. And also, that they are part of the unity of all believers in Jesus. So in my experience, new believers want to celebrate.

Big time. With everyone. They want to pray with any and every Christian. They are happy to go and visit any church with any friend. They want to gain insight from any Christian who will sit and answer their questions. They want to soak in every radio station. Christian TV show. Or Christian book.

What takes a little longer to understand is that some of it will be helpful for them. And some of it won't. That some of those people they want to pray with confess the same faith they do. And some don't. It takes a while to comprehend, and then accept, the differences between principles and applications. Why should you do something and why shouldn't you? And the important question that practicing fellowship with others comes down to: "What message am I giving by fellowshiping /not fellowshiping with this person?" "What message am I giving by praying/not praying with this person?"

Even though the principles are clear, the applications of them are not. So I have tried not to be legalistic about making rules about what the people in our congregation can do or can't do regarding these applications. I have tried teaching the principles as clearly as possible. And reinforcing them regularly.

But instead of telling people they can't do something they want to do *outside* of our congregation, we try to make a way that they can do the thing they want to do *inside* our congregation.

For instance, we have a man who joined our church after going through BIC with us. He loves Jesus. He loves the doctrine and teaching of our congregation. And He has a big heart for sharing his faith with others. He was a follower of Christ for a few years before he met us, and that big heart for witnessing his faith led him to get involved with the Gideons. He attended their meetings, and was very active in doing the Bible-handouts in malls and busy places that they do. I did tell him about the differences in teaching between the Gideons and us. But I didn't just tell him, "You can no longer do anything with the Gideons." That would have sounded to him at the time like, "You can no longer tell people about Jesus." Instead, I challenged him to get a "Gideon-like" Bible-passing-out ministry going right among our own congregation. The church showed its support by purchasing a number of full-size Bibles we can regularly hand out to contacts. But six months ago, the Lord moved him to buy and donate 1000 Bibles with his own money, even paying for the printing and posting of stickers in each Bible to share our church's message. And now he regularly encourages or organizes ways we can hand those out. I can tell you that he has stopped going to the Gideon's meetings. But he does still go help them hand out Bibles in malls every once in a while. It's going to be a growing process.

In another example, a family of six joined our church about two years ago. They are excited about their faith and our congregation and they are active. But they are frustrated with the community that their children live in, the schools they go to, and the challenge of surrounding them with positive, Christian friends. And to that end, they had a couple of their kids in scouts. We have let them see the religious emphasis behind scouting. And they saw that it wasn't Biblical. But they longed for something positive for their children. Again, we didn't make a rule about what they could or couldn't do. But as we speak, we are helping fuel and equip their desire to start a scouting-like youth group ministry *inside* our own congregation. It is happening as we speak.

I think we need to spend more time helping the people in our congregation use their gifts and passion for Christ to get involved in ministry *inside* the fellowship of our own church, than telling them what they can't do outside of it. You have an old lady going to prayer-meetings run by other churches? I am guessing she isn't getting enough group prayer time in your Sunday morning Bible studies or worship services. Help her start a prayer group in your congregation. Your kids going to other youth groups? They're missing something. Work on yours. And challenge *them* to be the ones to make yours better!

We aren't going to help people who want to be growing in their faith or getting involved in ministry by just forbidding them from doing certain things. We have to give them opportunities to do those things in our own fellowship. Then they can experience the joy of serving Christ and doing life together with people who they *know* they share that blessed unity with!

My biggest failure in celebrating Christian fellowship is not the time I prayed with someone I shouldn't have. It is not the time I looked the other way when one of my members did, either. My biggest failure is when I didn't put my work down to go and be there for the person who needed some encouragement. Yes, even like writing this paper while my neighbor, a member of my church, is in the hospital.

And I think Jesus would agree.

Our biggest failure in the church at large in celebrating Christian fellowship is not whether we prayed with someone we shouldn't have, or let someone to the communion rail who got by the ushers. It's when we fail to show love to our neighbors. It's when people leave our church and won't ever come back because no one

talked to them. It's when one of your members had a baby and no one offered to help her out. It's when the visitor sits alone at worship. It's when there is nothing in our mission statement or list of ministry programs that shows that we care about helping people. It's when the people in our congregations feel it is normal just to come to worship and then leave without getting to know anyone. It's when no one in your church's neighbourhood even knows your church is there.

Our biggest failure as a Christian community would be if we had people in our neighbourhoods, or even in our memberships, who feel they have to put themselves up for adoption. Who have no one to talk to. Who have nightmares about becoming old widows listening to clocks ticking. Who live in crowded loneliness. Or who die alone.

If we concentrate more on what we can do together as followers of Christ, we won't have to concentrate so much on what we can't do.

Fellowship is not and should not be one of those subjects we want to avoid. Fellowship is actually the most beautiful expression of the Gospel. Christian fellowship shows people who have never read a Bible how wonderful that fellowship with God is! When we live loving lives of Christian fellowship with one another, and we let the community around us see it loud and clearly, they will be so attracted to our congregations and our ministries, and want to be a part of our fellowship, that they will even respect our convictions about what God's Word says about the subject of fellowship. As difficult as it may be at times to grasp.

Fellowship is the gospel in action.

When you hear "fellowship," let this be the first thing that comes to your mind: "Come and join us! Come and join our fellowship!" Let's invite people into our fellowship instead of only telling people what they can't do out of it.

Christianity was never intended to be a private affair. Community is something we find in the nature of God himself (the Trinity). Belonging to others is part of a healthy expression of life. God's designs for humanity include family, and He is building a family to enjoy for eternity. Since Abraham, God has been in search of a people who will partner with Him in sharing his story with others. Part of our spiritual growth is learning to be part of this family. That includes committing energy to other family members and sharing possessions, giving money to the cause, and doing chores.^{vi}

Someone has to do dishes at the family feast.

Fellowship. Communion with God. One of the pictures God gives to help us understand it is *marriage*. Another one is *eating*.

Fellowship. Communion. A close relationship. Eating together. Fellowship is all about *eating*.

God began the history of this world by telling Adam and Eve: Here is a garden. Take care of it. Eat all you want. Go nuts. Just set this one tree aside for me. And I even picture Adam and Eve eating with God, or at least talking with Him as they ate.

But then one day they decided to eat somewhere else. They were dinner guests of a serpent. They broke their fellowship with God. They hid from Him. They were separated from Him. Fellowship was over. All because they stopped eating with God.

So God began plans to bring a Savior into the world. And as He gave structure to his Old Testament people, He had them make very regular *fellowship offerings* to Him. There are 85 references to *fellowship offerings* in the Old Testament. Fellowship offerings expressed *communion with God*. Offering your grain, or whatever you offered in your fellowship offering, was like "eating with God."

It also foreshadowed a meal we might be a little more familiar with. Or should I say "supper."

The Lord's Supper.

A meal where God is reminding us of his covenant with us and our fellowship with Him.

And that foreshadows another meal that is yet to come. Or should I say "feast."

The marriage feast of heaven. A feast where we will finally sit down and eat with God at his table. In reality. Forever. The feast that will celebrate the fact that we have been restored to real and perfect fellowship with God! The way it started out. The way it should be.

The marriage feast in heaven. *That is how we may finally celebrate our perfect unity with all true believers on earth.* We will enjoy perfect fellowship with God. And perfect fellowship with each other. There won't be anyone left out. No more loneliness. No more brokenness.

Just the perfect fellowship God has in mind for all of us.

Fellowship. It's pretty great stuff, isn't it?

Let's sit at a table together with Jesus and listen to Him...

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (John 17:20-26)

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

Bibliography / Endnotes

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ⁱⁱⁱ "Italian Pensioner Seeks Adoption," BBC News, UK Edition, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3612688.stm>

^{iv} *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Walter Bauer, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick Danker, The University of Chicago Press, 1957.

^v Romans 3:25.

^{vi} *The Present Future- Six Tough Questions for the Church*, Reggie McNeal, Jossey-Bass, 2003.