

A Study of Scriptural Fellowship

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- Series introduction
- Definition of fellowship
- Fellowship as used in the scriptures

Much Discussed Over the Years

- Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address
- In Alexander Campbell's Lunenburg Letters
- In Daniel Sommer's Sand Creek Declaration
- Limits tested in controversies over use of instrumental music and missionary societies
- Tested with Premillennial and institutional controversies
- Recently over divorce and remarriage and brotherhood societies issues
- There has never been an extended period of time absent the discussion of fellowship

Much Discussed Over the Years

- The same polar arguments are still being made that were made nearly 2000 years ago
- Some defended the “right” of brethren to receive one teaching some doctrinal errors or engaged in some sinful practices
- Others teach that fellowship must be broken over any variance in teaching or practice regardless of the nature of the teaching or practice
- Fortunately, the truth does not exist at the extremes of human opinion; the truth is found in God’s word

Definition Of Fellowship

- Fellowship (Greek word koinonia)
 - Used of an association or close relationship
 - Refers to generosity, a gift or the act of sharing in something
 - “To share” or “give a share” (koinoneo)
 - “Partner, companion, sharer” (koinonos)
 - “Joint” participation - both noun and verb form plus prefix “with”
 - “Fellowshipping” is a contemporary American construction without basis in scripture

Definition Of Fellowship

- Uses in Septuagint (Greek translation of Old Testament scriptures)
 - Lev. 6:2 - “If a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor”
 - “fellowship” refers to something held in common; a pledge
 - Job 34:8 - “Who goes in company with the workers of iniquity, And walks with wicked men?”
 - “goeth in company with...” an association implying approval

Definition Of Fellowship

- Uses in Septuagint (Greek translation of Old Testament scriptures)
 - Prov. 28:24 - “Whoever robs his father or his mother, And says, It is no transgression, The same is companion to a destroyer.”
 - “companion of destroyer” - “partaker with an ungodly man”
 - 2Chron. 20:35 - “After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted very wickedly.”
 - “joined” - “entered an alliance”

Definition Of Fellowship

- Uses in New Testament
 - Heb. 2:14 - “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”
 - Luke 5:10 - “...James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”
 - Matt. 23:30 - “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.”
- In each case, denotes association based on common goals and in common action

Definition Of Fellowship

- Spiritual association of believers
 - 2Cor. 6:14-16 - “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.”

What Is Fellowship?

- Yoked - implies a common work
- Fellowship - denotes “share” in action
- Communion - common word for “fellowship”
- Concord - implies harmony of thought
- Portion - having a part together with others
- Agreement - a union of purpose
- Agreement in revealed principle leading to common action in spiritual work

What Is Fellowship?

- 2Cor. 6:17 – 7:1 - “Therefore Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. 18 I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty. 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
- We can agree on what God says about holiness and practice it

What Is Fellowship?

- Eph. 5:3-12 - “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.”
- We can agree on what God says about sin and avoid it

What Is Fellowship?

- Rom. 1:32 - “Knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”
- We can agree on what God says about those who choose sin and error and avoid becoming partakers in their sin

What Is Fellowship?

- Rev. 18:1-5 - “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. 4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”
- We can agree on what God says about the fate of those who preach and practice sin and error and avert that fate by avoiding partaking in their sin and error

Lesson

- Knowing that the fate of those who practice sin and preach error is also reserved for those who share with them in it, why would one elect to partake with them in it? What benefits are derived from fellowship with sin or error?
- Is the temporary familial or social relationship with them worth the loss of your soul?

A Study of Scriptural Fellowship

Previously

- Series introduction
- Definition of fellowship
- Fellowship as used in the scriptures

Today

- New Testament instructions and examples of fellowship
- Conclusions drawn from NT teachings on fellowship
- Final Lesson
 - Blessings of Fellowship

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Fellowship in Suffering
 - Phil. 3:10 - “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”
 - 1Peter 4:12-13 - “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Heb. 10:32-33 - “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated”
- 2Cor. 1:5-7 - “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Fellowship in preaching the Gospel
 - Phil. 1:3-7 - “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Phil. 4:14-16 - “Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”
- Gal. 6:6 - “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Fellowship in Benevolence

- Rom. 15:25-27 - “But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- 2Cor. 8:1-5 - “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- 2Cor. 9:12-14 - “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, 14 and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.”
- Rom. 12:13 - “distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Condemned fellowship
 - 1Tim. 5:22 - “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.”
 - 2John 9-11 - “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Three groups condemned 2John 9-11
 - One going beyond doctrine of Christ
 - One not bringing doctrine of Christ
 - One aiding the erring teacher

1Cor. 10:14-21 - “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. 18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? 19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- Fellowship in the same faith
 - Philemon 4-7
 - Rom. 11:11-24
 - Acts 18:24-28

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- The foundation is provided by God
 - 1Cor 1:9 - “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
 - 2Cor 13:14 - “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ”
 - 1Peter 5:10 - “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”

New Testament Examples Of Fellowship

- The foundation is provided by God
 - 2Peter 1:4 - “by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature”
 - Gal. 2:7-9 - “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter 8 (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”

The Basis of Fellowship

- Common principle is set by the will of God
- Common application is engaged in by those who follow the will of God

Necessary Conclusions

- Fellowship exists only in common principle and application
- Fellowship does not exist between righteousness and truth and sin and error
- Defined principles and specified actions are found in God's Word and may not be modified or reduced to increase fellowship
- General principles and unspecified actions permit individual applications and may not be modified or restricted to decrease fellowship
- Variations in applications among individuals in general principles with unspecified actions do not mandate an end to fellowship

Necessary Conclusions

- There is a difference between fellowship with God and fellowship among Christians
 - Fellowship with God is decided by God
 - Fellowship with one another is determined between one another.
- There is a difference between fellowship with individuals and fellowship with congregations
 - Fellowship between congregations and persons outside of the congregation is decided at the congregational level
 - Fellowship between individuals is decided at the individual level.

Necessary Conclusions

- Fellowship at the collective level may never be determined for others by any organization outside of the local church; fellowship at the individual level may never be determined for the individual by anyone other than the individual.
 - Partisanship is not a scripturally acceptable basis for fellowship.
- The duration of fellowship among Christians is affected by individual rates of growth, levels of knowledge, effectiveness of the teacher, and personal assessment of the individual.

Necessary Conclusions

- Fellowship continues to exist when conscientious brethren mutually labor harmoniously to understand difficult matters
- Citing personal judgment in choosing fellowship with an impenitent errorist or sinner does not exclude one from criticism by others who have already ended fellowship with him.
- There is a difference between legitimately warning disciples about brethren persisting in sin or error and demanding that others end their fellowship with them. The first is scripturally commanded, and the second exceeds the authority of the one making the demands.