

What Is Fellowship?

Introduction

1. Today's lesson is intended to find the scriptural answer to this scriptural question. What does the Bible mean when it uses this term?
2. It is an important question because it is a term which is frequently used and mis-used by Christians. For example:

The Reading Church of Christ advertises its weekly Sunday worship and then goes on to say:

"1st Sunday of the month - Fellowship meal
Bring and share a dish to enjoy lunch together"

www.readingchurchofchrist.co.uk/services

3. Whatever The Bible means by fellowship:

- We must continue in it if we are to be pleasing to the Lord (Ac 2:42; cf. 1 Jn 3:22).
- However, if we continue in something which we mistakenly believe is fellowship we cannot be sure that we are pleasing.

I. A Brief Survey Of The Greek Words And Their English Translations

A. The five Greek words.

1. The most commonly found of these are the noun, Koinonia (G2842; appearing 18 times) and its verb form koinoneo (G2844; appearing 8 times). Vine defines the noun form as:

"(a) Communion, fellowship, sharing in common '(from koinos, common)' ..."

"(b) 'that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution,' e.g., Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4 ..."

2. Other words are:

- a. Metoche (G3352; noun appearing only in 2 Cor 6:14), defined as "Partnership" (Vine).
- b. Koinonos (G2844; noun appearing 10 times) which "denotes a partner or partaker" (Vine).
- c. Sunkoinoneo (G4790; verb appearing 3 times). Vine commenting "to have fellowship with or in' (sun).

B. English renderings and a working definition.

1. Renderings: Fellowship, communion, communication, distribution, contribution, partaker and to communicate.
2. A working definition: It is a partnership; a sharing; a having in common. It has been described as, "two men under the same load".
3. Its meaning illustrated in Acts 2:42.
 - a. The Grk. is "koinonia".
 - b. The load is the gospel. How did they share it? The immediate verses do not reveal the full picture and so we must determine this from the broader context of the New Testament.
 - c. We cannot impose our understanding of how we are to have fellowship (how we are to share the load), if this has already been determined by God.

II. Fellowship As Afforded By The Father

A. The focus of fellowship - "His son" (1 Cor 1:9).

B. Things which are shared:

1. Christ's sufferings.
 - a. "The fellowship of His sufferings (koinonia)" as did Paul (Phil 3:8-10).

- b. Peter's readers were to rejoice to the extent that they "partake of (koinoneo verb) Christ's sufferings" (1 Pe 4:12-13).
- 2. Christ's victory (1 Cor 10:16).
- 3. The blessings of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).
- 4. Eternal life (1 Jn 1:1-4).

III. Fellowship As Exhibited In The New Testament

- A. That which was forbidden.
 - 1. Unrighteousness and darkness (2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:11).
 - 2. "Other men's sins" (1 Tim 5:22).
- B. Fellowship as extended by local churches.
 - 1. They gave to the necessities of poor saints. This was so in the case of:
 - a. The Macedonian churches (2 Cor 8:3-4).
 - b. The Corinthian church (2 Cor 9:13; read Rom 15:25-26).
 - 2. They engaged in evangelism.
 - a. By preaching the word themselves (Ac 13:1-3; 14:26-27).
 - b. By sharing in the expenses of those who preached the word (Phil 4:15-16).
- c. By sharing the joys and suffering arising from the work (Phil 2:28-30).
 - 3. They engaged in edification.
 - a. The Jerusalem church (Ac 2:42).
 - 1) The apostles' doctrine or teaching.
 - 2) Giving – possibly included in "fellowship".
 - 3) Breaking of bread.
 - 4) Prayer.
 - b. The Corinthian church.
 - 1) Breaking of bread (1 Cor 10:16).
 - 2) The speaking of the word (1 Cor 14:5).
 - 3) Singing and prayer (1 Cor 14:15-16).
 - 4) Giving (1 Cor 16:1-2).
- C. As individuals they had fellowship with one another when participating in the same activities as the collective.
 - 1. Giving to the necessities of the saints (Rom 12:13).
 - 2. Evangelism:
 - a. Preaching the word (Ac 8:4).
 - b. Supporting those who teach (Gal 6:6; 3 Jn 5-8).

IV. The Only Activities That Would Be Counted As Scriptural Fellowship That We Can Extend Today

- A. When our congregation does what the NT churches did, we are similarly having fellowship.
- B. So also will we have fellowship with one another, when we as individuals do the same things as individual Christians did in NT times to have fellowship.

Conclusion

1. The objective of fellowship in the gospel is to save souls for Christ and to keep saved those who are saved. Therefore we must first preach the word to the lost. Those who obey need edifying so that they can develop spiritually and those who fall into physical need should have their wants met.
2. Obviously there are other facets to Christian living but these are not classified in the Scriptures as fellowship. Hopefully this lesson has helped us better understand what is meant by the Scriptures when they refer to fellowship and thereby fortify our guard against the misuse of the word which is so prevalent