

What Is Fellowship?

Introduction

1. In the Family News section of the June 2024 edition of the Christian Worker, the CUMBERNAULD COC reports:

“We are blessed to have brothers and sisters from thirteen different countries in our congregation. On the 27th April we came together and celebrated one another’s cultures. We learned songs, dances, poems and traditions from each country and also had some traditional food. It was a great night of fellowship. What an amazing thing it is to have so many different backgrounds but be able to come together as one big family in Christ. God knew what he was doing when He designed the church.”

2. This highlights the question “what does the NT mean when it uses the term “fellowship”? It is an important question because it is a term which is often mis-used by Christians. Another 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; 1 Jn 3:22).
- ▶ But if we continue in something which we mistakenly believe is fellowship we cannot be sure that we are pleasing Him!

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 (G2841; 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) ‘with’...”

B. English renderings and a working definition.

1. Renderings: Fellowship, communion, communication, sharing, contribution, partaker/s, partner/s, companions and to communicate (Taken from NKJV).

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. Grk. koinonia.

b. The load is the gospel. How did they share it? The immediate verses do not reveal the full picture and so this must be determined 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 this fellowship - "His son" (1 Cor 1:9).

B. Things which are shared:

1. Christ's sufferings.

a. "The fellowship of His sufferings (koinonia)" (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 10:16-17).

3. The blessings of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

4. Eternal life (1 Jn 1:1-4).

a. V. 1 announces the subject and certainty of what was to be said - it concerned "the Word of life", the Son of God.

b. V. 2 states the content of what was to be said. The Word was made manifest, they had seen it and proclaimed to the reader the eternal life which was with the Father.

c. V. 3 explains the reason for the proclamation: That the reader might have fellowship with those (and by extension with the Father and Son) who had certain knowledge of these things.

III. Fellowship As Exhibited In The New Testament

A. That which was forbidden.

1. In unrighteousness and darkness (2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:11).

2. In "other men's sins" (1 Tim 5:22).

B. Fellowship as extended by local churches.

1. They gave to meet the needs of poor saints (2 Cor 9:13; read Rom 15:25-26).

2. They engaged in evangelism.

a. By facilitating the preaching of the word (Ac 13:1-3; 14:26-27).

b. By sharing in the expenses of those who preached (Phil 4:15-16).

c. By sharing the joys and suffering arising from the work (Phil 2:24-30).

3. They were involved in edification.

a. The Jerusalem church (Ac 2:42).

1) The apostles' doctrine or teaching.

2) Giving - possibly included in "fellowship" but certainly described specifically (Ac 4:34-37).

3) The breaking of bread.

4) Prayer.

b. The Corinthian church.

1) The communion (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 pursued by the collective.

1. When giving to meet the necessities of the saints (Ac 4:34-37).

2. When sharing in the evangelistic activities of the congregation as it gives financial support to preachers or organising outreach programs (Ac 13:1-3; 14:26-27).

IV. The Only Activities Which Fall Within The NT Description Of Fellowship Are Evangelism, Edification And Benevolence To Needy Saints

A. When our congregation does what the NT churches did, we are similarly having fellowship.

B. Likewise, we will have Biblical fellowship with one another when, as individuals, we engage in the same actions.

C. However, simply eating meals together, singing secular songs, dancing and reading poems does not fall under the umbrella of New Testament fellowship.

Conclusion

1. A lot could be said about the question of authority in these areas but that would be outside the scope of this lesson.

2. 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.

3. 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 widespread misuse of the word.