

Word Study Fellowship

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There is a great fellowship in Christ Jesus. The Master once said in response to a statement by Peter: **"Verily I say unto you, There is no man who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."** (Mark 10:29,30). We clearly see from this passage that Christianity is not just a "pie-in-the-sky" religion. There are many blessings to be enjoyed now and many of these blessings result from our relationships with our fellow saints. I think it is true to say that quite a number of Christians reading this article will confess that they feel closer to their brothers and sisters in the Lord than to brothers and sisters in the flesh, who are not in the Lord. I could tell you about the houses that are open to me because I am a Christian, and about the people whom I have grown to know and love in the Lord, who are truly fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters to me. Not all of them live in Britain.

" FELLOWSHIP " ANALYSED

The Greek word for "fellowship" is *koinonia*. The root word is *koinos*, which means common. Those in Christ share something in common. The fellowship of the Spirit is actually the sharing of eternal life, which is the life of God Himself. And let it be emphasised, that we are not in Christ Jesus because we are in the fellowship, but we are in the fellowship because we are in Christ Jesus. If this is the case, then is fellowship something we can extend or withdraw? Surely it is, as one writer put it, "a state or condition created by the Holy Spirit in which we share through the amazing grace of God." Fellowship, therefore, should not be equated with endorsement. I personally enjoy the fellowship of hundreds of brothers and sisters in the Lord, but that does not mean I endorse everything they say and do. I have definite views about a lot of things, especially about the Lord's Supper and the ministry of the Church. But I do not make a lot of the divisive issues "tests of fellowship". Some brethren have asked me: "Do you fellowship individual cups or instrumental music?" To me, such a question manifests their ignorance of what fellowship in Christ is really all about. Can I hold to my views and my brethren at the same time? I think I can - and I do!

For example, I know brothers and sisters who smoke cigarettes; drink wine; abstain from meat; work some Sundays; think that Christ is coming before the millennium; think that the millennium is coming before Christ; have difficulty in spelling millennium; equate breaking the loaf with eating the loaf; sanction deeds of covenant; endorse Bible colleges and schools; oppose eating in the meeting house; reject the use of leavened bread at the Lord's table; renounce Church business meetings; refuse to allow sisters to speak in a Bible study class; think little of Alexander Campbell; etc. I could go on and on. I agree with the controversial Carl Ketcherside when he wrote: "The only way God can be in the fellowship with us is by being merciful, tolerant and longsuffering. Thus, the fellowship revealed in the scriptures is one which demands such characteristics."

THE KOINONIA AT SEA

I see a ship on the ocean when I think of fellowship. It is called the *Koinonia*. The captain is Christ Himself. All His followers are in this ship together. They are bound for a port or haven called "Heaven". Above all, they want to bring others on board so they too can feel safe, sure and secure. They all know that there will be stormy times ahead, but remain eternally confident that He and His crew will see them through the dark and tempestuous seas to the glory world. There are dangerous rocks everywhere, but Jesus knows the safe channel and that is good enough for His passengers. No one questions His ability or authority. After all, there is no one better or greater than He. They have left the port of "Sin" behind and there is no turning back. To jump ship would be absolutely unthinkable. It could only mean disaster and death.

The passengers help one another on the voyage. They work together; sing together; pray together and eat together. There are words of encouragement each day for all. There are no first, second or third class passengers on this ship. All are equal. Every Sunday, all get to sit at the Captain's table and partake of a very special meal. His presence is guaranteed and this provides particular comfort and cheer. Many of His crew are working behind the scenes and are never seen. They are called angels. They are doing an outstanding job and are striving to keep the ship on course and the passengers happy.

Other boats are seen on the voyage to Heaven. Tragically, they are all sailing in the opposite direction. The word is that their destination is "Hell". Every one of them appears to be full to the funnel. Their cries of worldly fun and amusement are heard as they pass by. They seem oblivious to the dangers ahead, although our Captain says that they are without excuse because they have been well warned. The warnings have come not only from the Captain Himself, but also from His brave and courageous messengers. Those in *Koinonia* wonder why others prefer darkness to light, falsehood to truth, death to life, Satan to God. They wonder why these others do not see the power, wisdom and goodness of God in the heavens above and in the oceans below; the justice, truth and holiness of God in His wonderful providence; and the mercy, favour and love in the glorious gospel of Christ. The expression "all at sea" seems to be an apt one for the countless numbers not part of the fellowship or *Koinonia*.

FINAL COMMENTS

I conclude with some comments on fellowship.

- "Fellowship is sharing in a life, in the Divine nature. It is joint participation in the Holy Spirit, the gift of God to all His children".
- "God has no step-children and we can have no half-brothers in the Lord". "Those who are in the fellowship will never see everything alike while in the flesh and caught up in the human predicament, there will always be areas of disagreement and matters in which not all can jointly participate".
- "Only the mind of God could have conceived of a community composed of ransomed slaves in which the dignity of each individual is preserved while each esteems others better than himself. Such a society whose members are together not because they are bound to like one another, but are bound together because they all mutually love another person, never entered the most fanciful dreams of the philosophers of Ancient Greece or Rome".
- "We share with each other in Christ because He has shared His bounty and grace with us. We are not in the fellowship because of our attainments in wealth, power, prestige, wisdom or knowledge...We are partners, not through anything we did, or because of any accomplishments of our own, but because of the riches of His grace".