



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## **Fellowshipping with God**

### **Messianic Misunderstanding**

At the time of Christ, there was a lot of misunderstanding surrounding that which should not have been a misunderstanding, the person and work of the Messiah. Some thought He would be a military leader. Others thought He was going to be a great teacher or prophet. And still others thought He would be an earthly king, like David.

Regardless, almost all of the expectation surrounding the coming Messiah was off. After Christ fed the 5,000, we read this:

John 6:14-15, "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone."

See Christ wasn't the kind of Messiah whom the Jews at this point anticipated. Rather than allowing them to make Him their Messiah, He withdrew.

When John was in prison, we read that when he "heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matthew

11:2-3). See if John was part of the Messianic kingdom, then why was he in prison. Certainly if the Messiah was an earthly king, as Christ's miracles seemed to indicate, His followers shouldn't be locked up; they should co-reign with Him.

Again, much confusion and misinformation abounded in the first century when it came to the promised Messiah. And this confusion ought not to have been since this was such an important issue. And yet, there have been other important issues which on account of pride or bias have confused the people of God. For example, many are confused about these things:

- The nature of the kingdom of God.
- The resurrection.
- Revelation.
- Eschatology.
- The doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, one which strikes close to every one of us... is FELLOWSHIP! Today the concept evokes a full spectrum of expectation from simply reading the word, to some mystical communion, to a charismatic experience involving tongues and visions.

Now I find this rather amazing. In Scripture, we are told that part and parcel of salvation is fellowship with God. Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

As Paul summarized the essence of Christianity, he used the expression of "fellowship." When a person is saved, they enter into fellowship with Christ!

1 John 1:3, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

All that John did as an apostle, he did so that others might enjoy the fellowship which he had with God. Truly, salvation brings a person into a relationship with God through which fellowship is enjoyed. Arguing for the unity of the body at Philippi Paul wrote:

Philippians 2:1, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies."

Truly when a person enters into salvation, they enter into a relationship whereby they enjoy fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And so that we have and enjoy fellowship with God is a fact. Yet a survey of the thinking of most people today would reveal that we haven't a clue as to what this means.

## **Fellowship's Priority**

Today, we begin a brief series wherein we will discuss this all-important privilege: Fellowshiping with God. And to do that, I want to begin at the beginning... how important is fellowshiping with God?

Isaiah 43:6-7, 'I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name:

for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

This is an important passage to begin with as we endeavor to understand the importance of fellowship with God. For at the outset we must affirm that every created thing, including man, has been made for one important end: the glory of God.

Isaiah 43:7b, “I have created him for my glory”

The word *glory* carries the idea of weight or substance in the Hebrew. That simply means that everything has been created to demonstrate that God's love, eternity, sovereignty, goodness, holiness, etc. all have substance. This is in contrast to the false god which has no substance.<sup>1</sup>

We have been created to show forth the weightiness of God. And yet, the passage in Isaiah indicates that there is a primary way in which God has deigned to manifest the weightiness of His being.

What is that way?

God's glory is manifested primarily in and through a relationship with man.

Isaiah 43:1-6, “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;”

Do you see it?

### **Created for God's Glory**

Yes, as children of God we have been created for God's glory. Yet the manifesting of this glory in the lives of God's people involves a relationship wherein God

- Calls us.
- Declares that we are His.
- Promises to be with us.
- Saves us.
- Views us as precious.
- Loves us.
- Is with us.

Truly we have been created to glorify God by participating in a relationship with Him (this is the basis upon which any man can enjoy God! We see this in Genesis 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Psalm 115:1-7

Genesis 1:24-26, “And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

By its contrast, this text proclaims an incredibly loud message. Unlike the rest of creation, mankind has been endowed with a special gift. They have been created NOT after their own kind BUT after the image of God!

As such, unlike the rest of this world, man has the ability to communicate with God, love, create, oversee and care. All these attributes reflect the nature and character of God.

## **Created in God’s Image**

Why did God create man in His own image?

While we might answer this in a variety of ways, a large part of our answer revolves around fellowship.

Genesis 2:15-17, “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

This is an amazing passage. After creating this world, the Lord approached the image bearer- Adam- and entered into an agreement later called a covenant! In fact, speaking of Israel, God spoke through Hosea saying:

Hosea 6:7, “But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.”

## **A Covenant**

What is a covenant?

Many definitions have been proposed: O. Palmer Robertson defined it this way, it is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. John Murray defined it this way: A sovereign administration of blessing and promise. W. J. Dumrell said that it is a commitment by which a state of existing relationships is normalized. However the common denominator is that it is a RELATIONSHIP, a relationship into which God has entered with man!

With this we see that upon our creation, God entered into a relationship with us, a love relationship which involved

- Walking with man, Genesis 3:8.
- Dialoging with him, Genesis 3:9-10.
- Mutually sharing love, disappointment, delight, and joy!

From all of this I hope you see it: We were formed to fellowship with God! It is NOT just any ol' activity. It is THE activity of the Christian life! In fact in the final state, we will spend eternity fellowshiping with Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this there are two very important questions that need to be answered under this heading “Its Priority” since we have been formed to fellowship.

## **What is Fellowship**

First: What is fellowship? Specifically, what is denoted by the expression “Fellowshipping with God?”

The concept behind fellowshiping with God must NOT be confused with

- Ascendancy.
- Spiritual ecstasy.
- Tongues.
- Or being slain in the spirit.

As we'll see, all of these today arise from a pagan notion with regard to God, and they are not Scriptural. No! Biblical fellowship implies a relationship of devotion on the part of God and man whereby they communicate with one another unto the demonstration of God's glory and the benefit/pleasure of man.

This relationship involves personal commitment, promises, and, on the part of man, a growing understanding/comprehension of the nature and character of God. The emphasis is NOT on the ecstatic or the emotional BUT on genuine and heartfelt communication arising out of the love relationship.

That is what fellowshiping with God is all about! That is what we have been created for to dialogue with God and to grow in our understanding of who He is. We were created to enjoy the love and commitment that He has for us.

## **Benefits of Fellowship**

Secondly, what is the benefit of fellowship in the life of the child of God?

To answer this, I want to draw your attention to a couple of passages.

Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

Psalm 73:28, “But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.”

You didn't have to ask Asaph here; he plainly tells us. He was no more at his best than when he was near to God, in God's presence, and fellowshiping with the Lord! David said, “in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Revelation 19:9

David here rightly calls it. When we are in the presence of God- fellowshiping there is fullness of joy and pleasures forever! So crucial is fellowshiping with the Lord. Speaking of the king, David said, “For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance” (Psalm 21:6).

Hey David! When is the child of God most joyful and filled with gladness in life?

When he is in the presence of the Lord!<sup>3</sup>

Listen to the testimony of the two disciples as they fellowshiped with Christ.

Luke 24:32, “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

I hope you see it! We fulfill the end for which we have been created, when

- We genuinely communicate with God.
- In His presence we grow in our apprehension of His greatness or kindness.
- We actively participate in communion with God such that there is an exchange of love, devotion, commitment.

We realize our chief end and so are filled with utmost joy and gladness. And yet we have to be careful at this point. History positively demonstrates that the temptation will be to confuse Biblical Fellowship with its results. Movements, sects, and cults even today have as their goal the experiencing of the ecstasies of Fellowship: The feeling of love, an all-pervasive-joy, a burning within the bosom. And if we are not careful, we too will fall into this trap- confusing feeling with fellowship!

What happens in a love-relationship when the participants live for the “feeling”?

They're not married long because a healthy marriage does not revolve around how one feels, but on fulfilling your God-given calling to each other. Great feelings do not provide for a great marriage. But a great marriage provides for great feelings. And so it will be in our relationship with God! And so today our best is had as we fellowship with God. And yet that brings us to the problem of fellowship.

## **Fellowship's Problem**

Exodus 20:18-21, “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.”

This is a most important passage when it comes to understanding our relationship with God. God delivered His people from slavery and brought them to Himself at Mount Sinai for the purpose of fellowship. And yet this saved, newly delivered, and redeemed people had a problem, they were terrified by God's holiness.

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<sup>3</sup> Compare also Isaiah 9:6.

Exodus 20:19, “And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

And so we read this:

Exodus 20:21, “And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.”

And this raises THE PROBLEM that fellowshiping with God presents to God's people: while we have been created to fellowship with God the nearness of God is our good. Nevertheless on account of God's greatness (not our sinfulness), we run. We shrink back to safety because we are not willing to get too close to God. We stand at a distance.

We see this pattern in Romans 1.

Romans 1:21-23, “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”

Do you see it?

Because we are traumatized by God's greatness, the temptation is ever and always present to hide from God. We run from His fellowship. Accordingly, though the nearness of God is our good, nevertheless just like Adam and Eve<sup>4</sup> we opt for the cheap imitation. We exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for the perks which accompany corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.

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<sup>4</sup> Notice Adam and Eve's defection from God in Genesis 3:6-7. Not focusing on what they did after they sinned, which was to hide themselves from the presence of God, notice the fall! It revolved around the passion to be independent from God and so to be free from a relationship with God!

When Eve took the fruit to her mouth, she was casting off God, His authority, and His fellowship. Richard Pratt put it this way:

“Eve did not immediately reject the Word of God nor did she immediately accept the word of the serpent. Instead, she looked at the tree herself and determined its character by committing herself to independence from God... Eve rejected the Creator-creature distinction. She took the revelation of the independent God and put on the same level as the serpent's words and set herself up as the ultimate judge between them.”

Now there is much to learn from this passage about the fall. However for our purposes notice the fall does NOT teach that pre-fallen man was foolish, naive, or dumb. Truly, mankind was created without sin and therefore lived for a time with perfect knowledge.

No! The fall doesn't teach us that man is innately foolish or dumb. Rather the fall teaches us that even a perfect man falls short of the glory of God, which is why God, and God alone, is the only one who could fulfill the covenant of works into which He entered with man in the garden!

In light of this notice the implication when it comes to fellowshiping with God. Even as perfect creatures in the garden-before sin entered the world, man was unable to uphold that which was necessary in order to maintain the divine/human fellowship. Rather than bask in light of the glory of God's presence, Adam and Eve fled!

Romans 1:24-32 tells of the result of this forsaken fellowship.

- Fornication.
- Homosexuality.
- Unrighteousness.
- Wickedness.
- Greed.
- Evil.
- Envy.
- Murder.
- Strife.
- Deceit.
- Malice.
- Gossip.
- Slander.
- Arrogance.
- Boastings.
- Rebellion against parental authority.

Look around! When you see these things you are beholding the cry of a soul bereft from that which it was created for: Fellowship with God!

You say, “Isn't that just the non-Christian?!” NO! Again it is the inclination of all. When Peter came to the knowledge of Christ's deity for the first time, notice what he said as a Christian, “But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” (Luke 5:8).

From this I hope you see that God's fellowship is beyond us. Though we have been created to fellowship with God, and therein we are at our best! Nevertheless His holiness traumatizes us such that we long to remain at a distance. We flee at the first sign of being uncomfortable. We cast God off for the cheap imitation.

This is the dreadful situation we find ourselves in today.

Now next time we are going to move forward in this study considering the “Therefore” of this, for now I want to close with this brief exhortation.

If we are in the business of fellowshiping with God and yet His character traumatizes us, what naturally will be the result?

While we might suggest a couple of things<sup>5</sup> we conclude that genuine fellowship, or at least the pursuit of

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<sup>5</sup> First, believing in the ability of man, we will reject this message altogether. We will say this:

- *What do you mean I don't want to fellowship with God?*
- *I “hear” God.*
- *He's my Savior and best friend!*

Truly, many who hear a message like this today will flat out reject it- which brings me to another suggestion.



it will be arduous and hard. Because we have been made for fellowship, and so long for it, and God is so great that His being frightens us such that we long to stand at a distance any genuine attempt at fellowshiping with God will be difficult and taxing.

We see this in the honesty of our children, don't we?

Many a Christian parent is shocked the first time their child says, "I don't want to go to church; it's boring." Or "I don't like family devotion; they're not fun." Or "I don't want to spend time with God's people; it's boring." Or "I just can't have a quiet time; the Bible is too difficult to read."

In fact, so dreaded is this response that as parents we design our ministries such that they put the "fun" back into fundamental. We seek out churches where both we and are children can be amused. We create new and improved ways to read the Bible.

When it comes to approaching an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God, you better believe that it is going to be the most difficult thing a mortal could ever do. Accordingly, it will be hard and, at times, undesirable. We will feel most safe standing at a distance. This is not unnatural nor is it shocking.

What is shocking is when otherwise intelligent people who themselves preach

- Hard work.
- Discipline.
- Dedication.
- Preparation.

When it comes to our children's education, music, relationships, and future careers we completely ignore this when it comes to our children's walk with Christ insisting on fun, fantasy, and frills. Brothers and sisters, if its genuine fellowship, it's going to be hard. Our job is to disciple our children and ourselves in light of this.

And yet, and this is amazing, that is not to say that God hasn't provided for us when it comes to this need as well! Listen, though we have been created to have a relationship with God which has been seriously retarded on account of our makeup, would you notice that God continues to pursue us in fellowship. Through Theophany, revelation, and the incarnation, God has deigned to draw near to us that we might draw near to Him.

This is what you Bible is all about. In fact, listen to David's boast in it.

Psalm 40:1-3, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD."

Truly, fellowship today with God would be impossible had it not been for the descent of Christ into this

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Second, we will be tempted to substitute genuine fellowship with a counterfeit. We will confuse feelings with fellowship, and so endeavor to *feel* a certain way about God and then think we are fellowshiping. We are going to come back to this, however know that the primary passion of false religion ever and always is moving the worshipper to feel a certain way in his worship, personal times of communion, and in their self-help groups. This is such a devastating counterfeit!

world. By it, He personally lifted us out of the pit of destruction. He placed our feet on the Rock, which is the Son of God. And He put a song of praise in our mouth such that others watching have seen and heard our testimony, and so have trusted the Lord.

And so, we have been made to fellowship with God and herein is the fullness of joy! Yet our nature is such that this will be altogether impossible in and of ourselves. And accordingly we are not surprised that fellowshiping with God is difficult and hard.

Ah but herein we behold the glory of the Lord. God condescended to us and continues to condescend such that, while we might be running from Him, He is pursuing us. As He twists our path, illuminates our minds, convicts us of sin, and assures us of His pardon we find our ourselves growing deeper and deeper in love with this incredible Being!

Next time we are going to pick this up with “The Prerequisites to Fellowship.” For now, let us go to the table of the Lord that we might fellowship with Him.

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and the these notes can be found at [Fellowship with Christ](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 12, 2006. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.