

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-5-14 AM NOTES
"FELLOWSHIP BASICS"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#1 in Series "Growing Small"

Acts 20:20 (NKJV) "how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you **publicly** and from **house to house**."

Acts 2:46a (HCSB) "And every day they devoted themselves [to meeting] together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house."

Hebrews 10:25 (NASB) "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

I. The Comprehension of Fellowship

Koinonia—Fellowship

Acts 2:42 (NKJV) "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Luke 5:10a (NKJV) "and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were **partners** with Simon."

Philippians 1:5 (ESV) "because of your **partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now."

Philemon 1:17 (NKJV) "If then you count me as a **partner**, receive him as *you would me*."

Communion refers to communicating intimately or sharing with one another on a close, personal, and spiritual level.

Acts 2:44-45 (NKJV) "44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in **common**, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need."

Koinonia involves partnership in a common life (Christ's life), a common purpose (the glory of God), a common love (to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves), and a common mission (make disciples of all people groups). This partnership includes a sharing of friendship, truth, encouragement, and even material possessions when there is a need.

Biblical fellowship at its essence is not an activity; it is a relationship.

II. The Categories of Fellowship

A. Fellowship With God

1. Our Standing With God

2. Our Walk With God

While our standing before God is objective, our walk is experiential.

1 Corinthians 3:9a (NKJV) “For we are God's fellow workers...”

2 Corinthians 5:20 (NKJV) “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.”

B. Fellowship With Believers

1. Love One Another

John 13:34-35 (ESV) “³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

“Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the final apologetic.” —Francis Schaeffer

Love—“To serve a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what the person brings you.” —Tim Keller

2. Serve One Another

Galatians 5:13 (ESV) “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

3. Edify One Another

Ephesians 4:11-12 (NKJV) “¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Romans 14:19 (NIV) “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”

4. Restore One Another

Galatians 6:1 (NKJV) “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

*Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.*

—Kelso Carter, 1886

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Series Introduction:

For the month of January we are going to look at the biblical basis and importance of small groups. That may not sound very exciting or be much of a motivator to get you to come back the next three Sundays, but if you will listen carefully and allow the Scriptures to speak to you I believe that you will be impacted. There seems to be a pattern in the early church in the book of Acts that I believe should be the pattern for today. **Acts 20:20 (NKJV)** “how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly [large group] and from house to house” [small group]. The “publically” meant in public places that would hold larger crowds. In Jerusalem that place would be the courts of the temple. In Ephesus it was the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) which was likely a larger meeting hall that would seat most of the disciples. In addition to the larger meeting places, there were smaller groups that met in the homes of the disciples. We read in **Acts 2:46a (HCSB)** “And every day they devoted themselves [to meeting] together in the temple complex [large group], and broke bread from house to house” [small group]. There are some who take these references to mean that all small groups should meet in homes. I **disagree strongly** with that. I think that homes are a good place to have the smaller gatherings and you will hear about some opportunities to do that coming up in a few weeks, but the principle is smaller groups and the location in the early church was homes because that was the only place they had. There were no church buildings we know of until about the third century. The principle is this: There needs to be the larger gathering and the smaller gatherings. Some call these the **congregation** and the **cell**. There are things that can happen in a gathering of the larger group that can’t happen in a smaller group and vice versa. I know of nothing more exciting than being in a gathering of a large number of generally like minded people to worship God and encourage one another. There are things that can happen in a large group that cannot happen in a small group. I offer as evidence our World Missions Celebration that we have every year. However, there are some things that can happen in a smaller group like a Sunday School class or a home cell group that cannot happen in a larger gathering. Neither is more important than the other; it is “both and”; not “either or”. If you only go to a small group and never gather as a congregation, you really miss an element of worship and encouragement that you need. On the other hand, if you’re not in a small group, you are missing so much that you need. The main thing that you are missing is what we are focusing in on in this series – genuine biblical fellowship.

Let me illustrate this. Several years ago, I (along with 3 others in our church) had the privilege of meeting with a couple who oversaw a group of about 14 house churches in a country that is officially closed to the Gospel and churches are illegal unless registered with the government. The government registered churches have some limitations on what could be taught. This husband and wife in their 60’s were retired university professors. Periodically (I think about once a month) they would rent a hotel ballroom and all 14 of the house churches would meet together for worship and instruction. The missionary we were working with shared with us that if they were caught by the government officials they would likely get 20 years imprisonment in a labor camp. He cautioned them and their response was that the larger gatherings were so vital to the church’s health that they were willing to take the risk.

In this series, we are focusing on the cell and not on the congregation. I am not going to conceal my goal in bringing this series. I want you to get in a small group – whether it is a traditional Sunday School class, a week night class here at the church or a home group. I’m going to be persistent in my insistence that you get in a group! I do that because I care about you and I believe that there will be an element of your discipleship that will be anemic if not absent altogether if you are not in a small group of some kind. That anemic or missing element will be genuine biblical fellowship. In this message we are going to focus in on what real fellowship is and what you are missing when you are not experiencing it. We will see this church will grow in a way that pleases God when we grow in small groups.

I. The Comprehension of Fellowship

God created us as relational beings. Our greatest need is for a relationship with Him, but there is also a need for relationships with others. The culture we live in is not “relationship friendly”. What we call “social media” is really developing a culture that is anti-social. People are so consumed with Facebook that they don’t have time for face to face relationships. Vance Packard calls America “a nation of strangers”. What we really need (whether it is a felt need or not) is biblical fellowship. “Fellowship” is not a word used only in church. We use it in all kinds of settings. The dictionary defines fellowship as companionship; friendly association. In the world, it means getting together with people we like for the purpose of having an enjoyable time. You may say, “Is that really wrong?” The answer is “No, that is not wrong”, but that is not biblical fellowship. As with so many other words like “hope”, “love”, and “faith” we get in trouble when we take the world’s definition of a word used in Scripture and apply that definition to the biblical word.

The Greek word that is translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*. The basic definition is “that which is common or shared”. The New English Bible translates *koinonia* as “sharing a common life”. The first use of the word in the New Testament is in **Acts 2:42 (NKJV)** “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and **fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Biblical fellowship also involves partnership. Both in the biblical and in the secular arenas, *koinonia* is the word used to refer to a business partnership. **Luke 5:10a (NKJV)** “and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were **partners** with Simon.” The word translated “partners” is from the same root as *Koinonia*. This emphasis of partnership is also found in **Philippians 1:5 (ESV)** “because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” It is used in this way in **Philemon 1:17 (NKJV)** “If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me.”

Another emphasis of *Koinonia* is sharing together. It is sometimes communicated with the word communion. Communion refers to communicating intimately or sharing with one another on a close, personal, and spiritual level. It may be the sharing of truths from Scripture or sharing the word for the purpose of encouraging another believer. Sometimes the sharing is physical things to meet the needs of a brother or sister in Christ. We see that aspect of fellowship in **Acts 2:44-45 (NKJV)** “⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in **common** [same root as “fellowship”], ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

Let me summarize biblical fellowship this way. *Koinonia* involves partnership in a common life (Christ’s life), a common purpose (the glory of God), a common love (to love the Lord the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves), and a common mission (make disciples of all people groups). This partnership includes a sharing of friendship, truth, encouragement, and even material possessions when there is a need. **Biblical fellowship at its essence is not an activity; it is a relationship.** The world longs for relationships like this, but they are not possible apart from union with Christ. Sadly, many Christians long for relationships like what was just described, but they have not put themselves in a place where those relationships can be found. You will never find this kind of fellowship sitting in a worship service with several hundred other people. You won’t even find it in a Sunday School class or a home group if you are not open and focused on others. You won’t find it when your focus is self centered – what can this church, these people do for me? Let me illustrate that. Do you know where people generally experience the sweetest fellowship? It is when they are on mission. It may be a mission trip to another continent, a mission to a children’s camp to add or fix up facilities, it may be ministering in a mobile home park or in the inner city projects, while on a TELL team making disciples, or simply a Love Loud project at a widow’s house. The reason we experience that sweet fellowship in those circumstances is because we are in a mindset of ministering to others and our focus is seldom on ourselves and our desires. When you join a church to pour out your life for others, you will most always find sweet fellowship. When your focus is on yourself, you will likely be disappointed with the fellowship that you experience. A self-centered heart will never be satisfied.

II. The Categories of Fellowship

There are two categories or levels of fellowship.

A. Fellowship with God

Without a right relationship with God, we can never have the kind of relationship and fellowship with other human beings that God intended us to have. In other words, there is something more fundamental to true fellowship than our relationship with one another; it is our relationship with God. Let's focus on what fellowship with God involves. Fellowship with God involves our **standing** with God and our **walk** with God. Let's look at these two aspects of fellowship with God.

1. Our Standing with God

Our standing with God is determined by what we have done with Christ. If we have **not savingly believed on Jesus Christ** (trusting that His substitutionary death on the cross was sufficient for the atonement of our sins, and then surrendered to His lordship and relied totally upon Him to save us) we have no standing with God. We are separated from God, at warfare with God, and without God and without hope in this world (Ephesians 2:12). When we have our spiritual eyes opened and our deaf ears unstopped to hear His call and we respond by repenting of our sin and savingly believing on Christ, we are united to Christ and become a partaker of His eternal life and stand before God in Christ's righteousness. We are "in Christ". We have right standing with God. The old us in Adam that could never be accepted by God is now crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20). We are reconciled and made righteous and have right standing before Him and acceptance by Him.

2. Our Walk with God

While our standing before God is objective, our walk is experiential. Our walk with God is a walk of **fellowship**. We now share a common life because we are partakers of Christ's eternal life. We share a common goal with God (to glorify Him) and we share a common mission with God (to make disciples of every people group). We are now walking in fellowship with God as His fellow workers. **1 Corinthians 3:9a (NKJV)** "For we are God's fellow workers..." We are His ambassadors. **2 Corinthians 5:20 (NKJV)** "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." Because we are in right standing with God, we now can walk in fellowship with God. We begin the day with a quiet time with Him in His Word and prayer. We walk through the day practicing His presence – always in an atmosphere of prayer. We cast our cares on Him and look to Him for grace that is sufficient for our every need. In Christ, we have fellowship with God. That fellowship with Him opens the door to the second category of fellowship.

B. Fellowship with Believers

I cannot overemphasize the importance of true fellowship between believers. While we are to show friendship, compassion, and love toward unbelievers and seek to love them to Christ, we cannot have biblical fellowship with unbelievers; it is impossible. Fellowship is between people who share a common life, a common goal, and a common mission. Non-believers do not qualify on any of those criteria. What I want to do in the remainder of this message is to show you what fellowship between believers in a church should look like. I believe that the best way to do that is to look at a few of the dozens of "one another's" in the New Testament. I believe that biblical fellowship between believers can be summarized by the phrase "one another." We could do a whole message on each of these one another's, but I will just mention a few of them.

1. Love One Another

John 13:34-35 (ESV) "34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer said, "Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful – Christian community [fellowship] is the final apologetic [defense of the faith]." [Quoted in Bill Willits and Andy Stanley, *Creating Community*, page 44]. Loving one another both marks us as Jesus' disciples and answers the arguments of the opponents of Christianity. Loving one another requires an "others centered" approach rather than a "me centered" approach. I love Tim Keller's description of this fruit of the Holy Spirit called

love. He defines love this way, “To serve a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what the person brings you.” Basically, loving one another executes, puts to death a self centered life. A person with a self centered life will not experience biblical fellowship. Loving one another is at the heart of fellowship. Love is to fellowship what peanuts are to peanut butter. If you remove the peanuts, you don’t have peanut butter. Loving one another elevates others needs above our convenience and goals and comfort. I have watched that love over the last few days with 2 families in our church as the Father and husband in each home died and people responded with love. It was a beautiful thing to behold and believe me; it will speak to unbelievers in the extended families.

2. Serve One Another

Galatians 5:13 (ESV) “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Actually it is hard to distinguish between loving one another and serving one another. Serving one another is in reality love rolling up its sleeves and getting dirty (both literally and figuratively). If you are not regularly involved in acts of service, you may be (to use one of my mother’s terms) “a little struck on yourself”. You may consider certain tasks a little below you and your exalted state in life. Remember that Jesus took a towel and a basin and washed the disciple’s feet!

3. Edify One Another

The Greek word translated “edify” literally means “to build the house”. It was used as a metaphor for building up others in the body of Christ. The world tears us down but in the church there is to be a constant building up. This happens as we exercise the spiritual gifts that God has given to us. **Ephesians 4:11-12 (NKJV)** “¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”. **Romans 14:19 (NIV)** “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”

4. Restore One Another

Galatians 6:1 (NKJV) “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” I love the Special Olympics which features mentally and physically disabled athletes from around the world. One of the most emotionally touching events in the Special Olympics was several years ago in a race where all of the participants had Down’s syndrome. The runners were all close together as they came around the track headed for the finish line. One of the runners stumbled and fell. Guess what happened. The other runners stopped and went back as a group, and helped the fallen runner up and then started running the race again. What a beautiful picture that is of the Christian life and of true biblical fellowship!

There is a song written by Kelso Carter in 1886 that says:

*Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.*

I like that song, but the fact is that the howling storms sometimes knock us off the promises of God. The lure of the pleasures of sin that are for a season entice us to step down from the promises of God. The Devil’s constant temptation sometimes pulls a believer off the promises. Sometimes the anxieties and pressures of life wear us down and even forget the promises of God and fall into discouragement and depression. Sometimes sickness weakens us and we begin to give in to the howling storms of doubt and fear. That is where God uses biblical fellowship and leads us to restore the one who has fallen off the promises of God and have fallen into sin. We need to be restored. Love restores with gentleness and with a humility that is aware that we too could fall off the promises of God and one day need this brother to restore us.

CONCLUSION

If we had time we could look at the directives we have to encourage one another, accept one another admonish one another, confess our sins to one another, and a host of other one another’s. Here is what I

want to close this message with. All of these manifestations of fellowship best take place in the context of small groups. I did not say that small groups are the only place they happen, I said that small groups are the best place for them to happen. Over the years we have had people get very angry and many of them leave the church because they suffered a major crisis in their life and no one from the church even contacted them. In the overwhelming majority of those cases, they were not in a small group and the Pastors did not even know there was a problem. When you come and just sit in a worship service and leave and go home, you are going to experience very little love from other members of the body, very few acts of service, little encouragement when you are beat down, and no one will be there to restore you when you fall. Its not that people don't care; it's that they don't know. Here is something worse. How are you going to establish relationships where you can love others, serve them, edify them, and restore them when they fall? In the weeks to come you will hear of possibilities for small groups and opportunities to plug in. Don't go through life without fellowship with God, but don't think that you don't also need fellowship with other believers. You need to be in a small group.