

Principles of Spiritual Fellowship

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Man's highest function is fellowship. God made man in His own image and likeness so that he might be able to be a partaker of God, and also in such a manner that he may be indwelt by God Himself. The apostle John says in his gospel that God is spirit and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit. We cannot have fellowship with God in our bodies or in our souls; if we are going to know and worship God, and have fellowship in God, it must be by the Spirit of God.

Oneness is the highest expression of fellowship. If God has created man to have fellowship with Him, we can know that God will discipline man and bring him to the place where he will express the completeness of God's will. This oneness with God will come only through fellowship with God--by seeing who God is and what He is doing. Spiritual sight can only be given to individual believers by the Spirit of God that has been given to lead us into all truth.

Our relationship with God is through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are united with God and with what God is doing in one body--the body of Christ, the church. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 12:13 that we are all baptized into one body by one Spirit. We are brought to the place of oneness, and now it is our responsibility in this love affair with God to express that oneness. To express the oneness of God means that we must enter into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father. This oneness is the proof that what God has done in Jesus Christ is eternal salvation. God said that He has made us one in Christ; now through spiritual fellowship we are brought to a place of expressing this oneness, as a testimony of the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There can be hindrances both to fellowship with one another and to fellowship with God. Also, we can say that our fellowship or lack of fellowship with God has a definite bearing on our fellowship with one another. To rightly understand this fellowship one with another, we must see that it is not natural fellowship, on the level of self with its desires. True fellowship is fellowship together in God as we walk in the light.

To say it in another way, we are sharing in common. This means that we first have fellowship with God, and then our fellowship with one another is based on our ongoing fellowship with God, that which is common to each one of us. As we know Him together in the fellowship of His suffering and the power of His resurrection, the working of His grace in our hearts will speak to us of the ultimate in God, of God's highest for us as men. Colossians 2:2 speaks of the outworking of this fellowship. It tells us of believers' hearts being comforted, knit together in love *"unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ,"* and coming to a oneness, that they might realize together the fellowship that God has prepared for each one of us.

Jesus came, and at Calvary perfected fellowship between God and man. He came in the flesh and conquered death, hell and the grave. He bore our sins and brought into expression a brand new creation. Out of death He brought life, that we might enter into our highest expression--spiritual fellowship with the Father and with the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 2:21-22, Paul again speaks of this fellowship. *"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* We can see that our fellowship is through the Spirit and that we

are all being built together to come to the place of appreciating and communing with God together, understanding in the Spirit what God has prepared us for--that we might be a glory to Him for eternity.

The First Principle--Faith

When it comes to principles of spiritual fellowship, I believe the most important principle is faith. Faith orders our fellowship. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is the means by which souls partake of spiritual things. Faith is the essence of our walk in God because by faith we hear God and then obey that which God has said. If we are going to come to a place of spiritual fellowship, it is going to be on this ground: that we have entered into that fellowship by faith. There is no fellowship except through faith. We might say it in this way--that there is no fellowship unless we hear God, submit to His working, and obey what He has said. If we go on to be a part of a corporate fellowship with the Lord, it is going to be on this beginning ground--each member gathering together by faith, having entered into the fellowship which God has prepared for us in Christ Jesus, that we might come boldly to the throne of grace.

The Second--Sin Has Been Dealt With

For man to be brought back to this place of God's original design, sin had to be dealt with. The second principle must be that of God having dealt with our sin--that is, our life in self. There can be no fellowship as long as sin is present in our lives. Sin breaks fellowship. Usually we think of sin only as wrong actions, but sin is actually the very expression of self--that is, man moving separate from God. This began in Lucifer, the anointed cherub, when pride was found in his heart. Man is not only a wrongdoer, but man in his sinful state is a wrong being.

This must be dealt with, and only can be dealt with by God at Calvary. Jesus Christ came and paid the price that you and I might enter by faith into a crucified life. This means dying with Him to the expression of my own desires, to thinking that the world revolves around me and what I want. For me to know real fellowship with the Lord and Father above, I must be dead to self and made alive to God. This also affects my fellowship with other believers. If any one of us is not moving from a place of life in God, there can be no spiritual fellowship with that one. Fellowship is based upon the resurrection life that the Lord Jesus Christ gives us. We have something in common; it is our seeing in God together.

If this is the working of God in our hearts as we move by faith, then not only will we enjoy the sweetness of His fellowship, but we will also be able to comprehend together with the other saints of God that which God is doing, and it will be a joy--because the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

We Cannot Sit In the Judgment Seat

Now we go on to the third principle, which is that we cannot sit in the judgment seat. This means that we cannot look on our brothers and sisters in this great fellowship and judge them. We must take our eyes off one another and look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Admittedly, this is difficult; it cannot be done apart from tasting the real work of the Cross. This is one of the hardest areas for any gathering of God's people to attain to. It is a place of maturity, when we look at one another through spiritual eyes, that is, as the Lord looks at us. It means that we consider each one in the nature of God, which is love, and we serve one another with love as the source of our ability.

As long as we continue to judge and criticize one another, we can know nothing of real corporate and spiritual fellowship. We become judges of the law rather than doers of the law. The spiritual man is one who has the law written in his heart and his mind, and is a doer of that which God is speaking to him. The carnal or natural man is one who is moving in his senses or his emotions, or in the imaginations of his own mind. This causes him to judge others, comparing himself with them and then judging according to his own standards, rather than leaving them in the hands of God. We must not be in the judgment seat if we are going to know real spiritual fellowship.

We Must All Be Seeing the Same Thing

The fourth principle is that we all must be seeing the same thing. God has spoken to us in the book of Ephesians about a mystery, a revelation of Himself, a plan. If we are going to have fellowship one with another, we will have the same revelation. There must be the same aim before us. We must see Jesus, and Jesus alone. If we look to others, we will be divided in what we believe. If we try to know God in our minds, there is no way that our doctrines will be the same, but *"if we do His will, we will know His doctrine"* (John 7:17). So, to see the same thing is one of the principles of spiritual fellowship.

If each member of the body of Christ is looking to God and seeing spiritually, then we go on to experience what we see, and this brings forth a fuller expression of fellowship with God. The revelation is the Lord Jesus Christ, not in the letter of the word but in the life of the Spirit.

We Walk In the Light As He Is In the Light

The fifth principle is that we walk in the light as He is in the light. Scripture tells us in I John 1:7, *"But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."* In the fifth verse of the same chapter God tells us that He Himself is light and *"in Him there is no darkness at all."* So if we are going to walk in the light, God is the light that we must walk in. God is not in darkness; there is no darkness in Him. So if we are to know and have fellowship with Him, it is because we are walking in Him, walking in the light.

Too often we separate the light from God by saying that the light is that which God is revealing, but the light is God. God is light. I John 1:3, *"What we have seen and heard we proclaim unto you also, that you also may have fellowship with us: and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."* This gives us to understand that our fellowship is not based on a natural or human level, but it is in that which we are experiencing in God. If we are not knowing God, we have no fellowship with one another in the spiritual realm which I have been speaking about. Fellowship with one another is only in direct proportion to that which we are enjoying with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This may be the reason that many gatherings are not experiencing a high level of spiritual fellowship--their fellowship with God is at a low level. A low level of fellowship one with another finds us only in a place of looking at one another, rather than really enjoying the Lord.

The only place in which we can know a perfect cleansing is in walking in God--no other place. In this place the word washes us, removes every spot and blemish from our lives, and enables us to glorify Him and testify to the grace that has built us together *"a habitation for God by the Spirit."*

Capacity to Receive and Respond

The sixth principle is that of capacity. First the capacity to receive from God, and then the capacity to respond to Him. We know that God has placed members in the body of Christ as it has pleased Him, and to each member He has given a measure of grace, that they may be able to receive and to respond or function in the place that He has put them. This capacity comes from God, and we should not try in our own ability to be something that we are not. The capacity to receive comes from being born again, and partaking of the Holy Spirit that quickens us and leads us into all truth.

The capacity to receive is really not in us but in God, in the Spirit of God. A pure heart and a contrite spirit in us will open up the avenue for this capacity to be increased, that we might receive from the Lord. Humility is necessary if we are going to know the Lord and to experience the blessed fellowship which comes from walking in Him.

The ability to respond is in faith, and is also a work of grace. God gives us an ability to know and walk with Him, to fulfill our function according to the measure of grace that He has given us. If we are to function together, if we are to have fellowship, it must be in the ability that we each have. We are not trying to be something that we are not, but we are flowing together in the ability that He has given us, functioning in the place He has designed us for.

So this capacity is essential both to fellowship with God and to fellowship one with another. Our fellowship with God is going to bring forth an expression of communication one with another--a giving and a serving. We can never encounter the Lord and come away without a desire to serve our brothers and sisters.

Service

This brings us to the seventh principle of spiritual fellowship, which is service. This is another of those areas that cannot function unless we have tasted of the Cross. We must know who we are in God if we are going to be able to serve one another. Love serves, and out of this service comes a fellowship. We serve those who are unlovely, those who are not worthy in our own eyes, for God says that He is not a respecter of persons. Love, as it continues to serve, gives our brothers and sisters in the Lord the ability that they lack, for we are then channels through which the ability of God flows, enabling them to take a step in God. As another's lack is supplied, our fellowship in Christ will be increased.

Walking In Truth

Eighth and last is the principle of walking in truth. Truth is Christ, and we can never compromise any principle of spiritual fellowship and degenerate to natural fellowship, if we are going to glorify the Lord. The pathway that God has called us to walk in is truth. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth..." and we must have our lives ordered in truth. If we are not willing to submit to the word of God and obey it, we know nothing of truth. It is only as we are quick to respond to the Lord, quick to obey His every command, that we will enjoy more of the fellowship with the Father.

Obedience pleases God. In Hebrews 5:8-9 we are told, *"Though He were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."* To walk in truth and have our lives ordered by truth is what God has prepared for those that accept His Way, His Son. God has not just called us to enjoy Him individually, but has called us to the highest, which is to enjoy Him together. He has created us as one new man in His Son that we might know Him together and experience His divine working. His love in every heart binds us together, and we know and comprehend God together. One day we shall see Him

as He is and we shall know as we are known, but now we are moving together because this is God's design.

If we will take note of these eight areas, consider them and allow God to strengthen us each one through our communion with Him, we will see that the overall fellowship of the mystery of God will give forth a true and single testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Fellowship--God's Way

I Corinthians 13 speaks of charity. Charity, or love, we know to be embodied in God, because God is love. *"Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."* This verse embraces the principles of spiritual fellowship. If our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, our lives together must be structured in God. They must find an expression in the living reality of the Holy Spirit as He would build us together for the glory of God and for the highest purpose God has created us for. *"Charity rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Charity beareth all things"--a serving. This is causing the one who is weaker to be lifted up. "Charity believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things."*

I believe all true Christians desire fellowship, but many are hindered because they lack understanding. They are destroyed because of this lack. But with understanding and direction, as our lives are built and strengthened in the Lord and in the principles of life, we will start to enjoy our fellowship with God. In enjoying this fellowship we will also be in communion with those who are enjoying the same fellowship.

In John 8:12 Jesus said, *"I am the Light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life."* Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, has now come to give the world light that the world might walk in truth. There is no darkness in God, no variableness or turning in His ways, but the Lord is straightforward. His ways are ways of righteousness.

He is upright, and the work of grace in the hearts and lives of those who have come to know the Lord as their Savior will also be upright. We will not look to one another, but will have eyes only for Him. Jesus Christ is the Lover of our souls, and we should seek to know Him and Him alone. Our fellowship is not with one another in the beginning. Our fellowship is with Christ, and only then can we know fellowship one with another in that which we are experiencing.

God has created us in Christ Jesus to enjoy Himself and to contain His life. He has said that we are being built as a habitation for God, and we shall be with Him for eternity. He will be in our midst for eternity, not only these individual bodies, but the Church--the body of Christ brought together in Him by faith. So allow your lives to be structured in God; allow these principles of Christian fellowship to be strengthened as the Spirit of God is wooing and leading you. That anointing will not leave you, but will teach you all things. Let us not draw back, but let us press on into this fellowship.

If there is one thing the devil would like to rob us of, it is our time and fellowship with God. He would have us involved in religious activities, without a real flow of the life of God in our hearts and through our lives. He would get us working for God, but not having fellowship with God. Fellowship takes time. Fellowship takes a work of the Cross. Only as we continue in this life we have in Christ, and enjoy Him, will we come to the highest that God has ordained for us. He will not stop short. It is up to us to submit our spirits to Him, humble ourselves and then by faith take hold of His promises.

We are partakers of His divine nature through these promises, knowing Him and experiencing the depth, the height, the breadth and the length of all that God has done in Christ Jesus, and the going on

together to comprehend the love of God which passes all understanding. This is not a natural working--not man understanding God in his natural mind. This is man in the Spirit enjoying the Lord, comprehending and knowing God and His power and strength, moving in the authority that He has given to us in His Son that He may be glorified in all things.

Jesus said, "I can do nothing of Myself," and this should be the testimony of every born-again Christian: that as we stand in faith we can do nothing of ourselves. We can know nothing of fellowship unless the Spirit of God would give us this sweet communion and bring us to a place that we can enjoy together what God has given to us in His Son.

God has made us with an ability to choose, and the freedom to choose Him and His way. The Spirit has come to lead us into all truth. He will discipline, chasten, guide and train us in the way of righteousness. So let us by faith take hold, and let the Lord wash us with His word. Let the word become living to us and then we shall rejoice in God and not in the pleasures of this world. We will not look at the sufferings but count it as all joy that we may attain to that higher plane. that God has purposed for us in His Son. We will rejoice to know that we have been counted worthy to suffer for His sake.

This rejoicing can only come out of true fellowship with God, and then fellowship together in what God has done in us and is doing through us. Let us walk in the light as He is in the light, and then there will be no darkness. We will speak the truth in love because we will have come up to that place in which we do not look to man. We will not be centered in self, but we will have found life in its fullest expression in Christ Jesus our Lord.