

Message Four

**Fellowship—the Reality of the Church Life**

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:1-3, 7; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16-17

**I. Just as there is the circulation of blood in the human body, so there is a circulation in the Body of Christ—a circulation that the New Testament calls fellowship; this fellowship is the reality of the church life—1 John 1:3, 7:**

- A. Fellowship is a common participation, a joint participation; thus, to have fellowship is to have a corporate participation in something—Phil. 4:14; 2:1.
- B. Fellowship is the issue of eternal life and is actually the flow of the eternal life within the believers—1 John 1:1-3, 7.
- C. In order to have the unique fellowship, we must live by and behave in the divine life, not in our natural life—Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11.
- D. To have fellowship with the Triune God in the apostles' fellowship is to put aside our private interests and join with the apostles and the Triune God for the carrying out of God's purpose—Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:9.

**II. “God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”—1 Cor. 1:9:**

- A. God has called us into the fellowship of His Son so that we may partake of Christ, participate in Him, and enjoy Him as our God-given portion.
- B. God has called us into the fellowship of, the participation in, the all-inclusive Christ; all believers should be focused on Him, not being distracted by any gifted person, any overstressed doctrine, or any particular practice.
- C. Christ Himself is the fellowship into which God has called us—v. 9:
  - 1. The fellowship of the all-inclusive Christ as our portion is nothing less than the living person of the all-inclusive Christ.
  - 2. To be called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ is to be called into Him, for He Himself is the fellowship—v. 30.
  - 3. We have been called into this person and into His fellowship—called into Christ for our participation and enjoyment.
  - 4. The fellowship in verse 9 is our participation in Christ; it is our enjoyment of Him and our preference for Him.
- D. The fellowship of Christ—a wonderful, excellent mutuality—is actually carried on by the Spirit; thus, in our experience the fellowship of the Son is the fellowship of the Spirit—2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1.
- E. Fellowship means that we and Christ have become one—1 Cor. 6:17:
  - 1. In our experience, being one spirit with the Lord follows being called by God into the fellowship of His Son—1:9; 6:17.
  - 2. We have been called into a oneness where we are one with Him and He is one with us.
  - 3. The word *joined* in 6:17 is a synonym for *fellowship* in 1:9; the joining is actually the fellowship.

4. Whenever we are one spirit with the Lord, we are in the fellowship of Christ, and we experience Him as the all-inclusive One.
- F. Fellowship means that we enjoy Christ and all He is and that He enjoys us and all we are—Phil. 1:18; 2:17-18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 10:
  1. We have been called into a mutuality in which we enjoy what the Son of God is and He enjoys what we are.
  2. This fellowship implies a wonderful, universal, mutual enjoyment—our enjoyment of the Triune God, the Triune God’s enjoyment of us, and the enjoyment that the believers have with one another.

**III. Fellowship is related to oneness—1 Cor. 1:9; 6:17; 10:16-17; 12:20:**

- A. The fellowship, the circulation, of the divine life in the Body brings all the members of the Body into oneness—Eph. 4:3-6.
- B. This oneness is called the oneness of the Spirit (v. 3); it is also the oneness of the Body—v. 4; 1 Cor. 12:12-13.
- C. As long as we have the divine life flowing within us, we are in this oneness—the oneness of the Body, the oneness among all the saints.
- D. The unique fellowship is the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ as the unique ground for the believers to be kept one in Christ—Eph. 4:3-6.

**IV. The experience of the cross deepens both the vertical and the horizontal fellowship and enables us to know the life of the Body and live in the fellowship of the Body—Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Matt. 16:24; 1 Cor. 12:27:**

- A. We need the experience of the cross to deepen our experience of the divine fellowship—1:9, 23-24; 2:2:
  1. Without the cross, our fellowship is superficial; only the cross can remove the many obstacles to the divine fellowship and deepen our fellowship with the Lord and with one another—Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Matt. 16:24.
  2. Fellowship frees us from our sinful self through the cross; without the cross, there is no release, freedom, or liberty from the self and no genuine fellowship—1 Cor. 1:9, 23-24; 2:2; Gal. 2:20.
  3. In Matthew 16:24 the Lord used the term *his cross*, indicating that there is a particular portion of the cross for each one of us in order to cross each one of us out:
    - a. To bear the cross is to deny the self, to put the self to death, to apply the cross of Christ to the self all the time—Luke 9:23-25.
    - b. We are easily offended by others because we are so sensitive about ourselves; if we did not have such a strong self, we would not be offended by others.
    - c. If we have a strong self and are offended by everything and everyone, we cannot have real fellowship; in order for us to have horizontal fellowship, we need to deny ourselves—Matt. 16:24.
- B. The experience of the cross brings us into the fellowship of the Body of Christ—Rom. 6:6; 8:13; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24; 2:2; 12:12-14, 27:
  1. The cross deals with our flesh, self, and natural life so that we may know the life of the Body in reality—Matt. 16:24-26.

2. If our flesh, self, and natural life are dealt with by the cross and if we submit to the headship of Christ and live the Body life, we will enjoy the fellowship of the Body—Gal. 2:20; 5:24; Phil. 3:3; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 10:16.
3. Our relationship with the Head is that of obedience, whereas our relationship with the Body is that of fellowship—Col. 2:19; 1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 10:16-17:
  - a. Fellowship implies the fact that we are limited and inadequate and that we are willing to accept what comes from others and take it as our own.
  - b. Fellowship is to acknowledge that we need the Body—Rom. 12:4-5.
  - c. We can live in the Body and have fellowship in the Body only when our flesh, self, and natural life have been dealt with; otherwise, we will not see the importance of fellowship—Gal. 2:20; 5:24; Phil. 3:3.
  - d. God must bring us to the point where we cannot go on without fellowship—1 Cor. 12:14-27; John 15:4-6; 1 Thes. 3:8.
4. Once the flesh, the self, and the natural life have been dealt with by the cross, we will know the life of the Body, we will see the importance of fellowship, and we will not be able to live apart from this fellowship—Rom. 6:6; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2:2; 10:16-17; 12:14-27; 1 John 1:3, 7.

**V. The fellowship among the churches is the fellowship of the Body of Christ—cf. 1 Cor. 10:16:**

- A. The Lord's recovery is based upon the truth that Christ has only one Body, which is expressed as the local churches—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; Rev. 1:11.
- B. Because there is one Spirit, there is only one Body, and there is only one circulation of life in the Body; this circulation is the fellowship of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:4; 1 John 1:3, 7.
- C. The fellowship of the Body of Christ is the circulation, the current, of *the* Spirit; when *the* Spirit is circulating within the Body of Christ, divinity, humanity, Christ's person, Christ's death, and Christ's resurrection are all circulating.
- D. A local church is a part of the unique Body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Body is universally one; in fellowship there is no separation—Rev. 1:11; 2:7a:
  1. No church or region should isolate itself from the fellowship of the Body.
  2. The result of a church or a region isolating itself from the fellowship of the Body of Christ is darkness, confusion, division, and death.
- E. Whenever we come to the Lord's table, we come to practice the fellowship of the Body—cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17:
  1. The Lord's table is a testimony that we who belong to Christ are one:
    - a. We are one bread, one Body, because we all partake of the one bread—v. 17.
    - b. Our partaking of Christ constitutes us into His one Body.
  2. If we isolate ourselves from the fellowship of the Body, we are not qualified to partake of the Lord's body, because the loaf on the table in the Lord's supper signifies the entire Body of Christ.
- F. Among all the churches that compose the one universal Body of Christ, there is no organization, but there is the fellowship of the Body of Christ—Phil. 1:5.
- G. The divine fellowship is the reality of living in the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:9; 12:12-13, 27.