

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

We learn much about "fellowship" from the beloved John. No little persecution seems to have been against the little scattering of saints in John's day. Human philosophers, though their philosophies were not named by John, seem to have been forms of Gnosticisms. They taught mainly, in their power structured philosophies, that they were superior to believers because they were born with a higher degree of wisdom. They felt to be far higher than those of the new birth in Christ. They greatly persecuted those true children of God by faith. They deemed themselves to be nigh to God.

John stated, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrepes, who loveth to have preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Therefore, if I come, I will remember the deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church" (3 John 9, 10).

Growing out of such preemptive arrogance, John expounded on true "fellowship." Let us remember that all true "fellowship" has its basis and underlying cause in God the Father. It is in His hands. He is the final judge.

Fellowship is in Jesus Christ. True to the principle which Jesus taught of His Father, "And Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine," this fellowship," which is with the Father, is of the Son also, "by whom ye were called unto the **fellowship** of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Cor. 1:9). Paul was minded to know, "the **fellowship** of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10), that he might be truly identified with Christ.

Fellowship is of The Spirit. We likewise, if we are led of the Holy Spirit, as were those at Phillipi, have "fellowship" of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1).

Fellowship is with the apostles. The apostles of Christ were personally trained by Jesus on earth. They later received power after the Holy Spirit came upon them, enabling them to be witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8). It is not surprising, therefore, that the Apostle John taught, "that ye also may have **fellowship** with us" (1 John 1:3). Among other things, the early saints in Jerusalem continued steadfastly in the "apostles' doctrine and **fellowship**" (Acts 2:42).

Fellowship is with saints. Contingent upon our walking in the light, "we have **fellowship** one with another" (1 John 1:7). Such "fellowship" is not voted on by men. It is not granted by churches of men. John said, we "have it." It is with The Father, The Son, The Holy Ghost, and those others walking in the light, through the inspired Word of God.

Fellowship is between Jew and Gentile. The gospel was preached for about ten years before the Gentiles were brought into the kingdom. In the meantime, Saul of Tarsus was converted and later became known as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. When the twelve apostles later perceived the grace of God was given to the Gentiles, the Jewish brethren extended unto Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of **fellowship**," seemingly in recognition of these truths (Gal. 2:9).

Fellowship is with righteousness. In opposition to this, there should be no "fellowship" with unrighteousness, works of darkness, and devils (2 Cor. 6:14; i Cor. 10:20; Eph. 5:11).

The foregoing are brief summations of what the New Testament says relative to all kindred words translated "fellowship." Much misunderstanding and misapplication of these principles have resulted in divisions of the religious world generally, and Churches of Christ are not free from divisions. In fact we have in our past divided over this very subject.

What fellowship in the New Testament, does not involve:

(1) "Fellowship" is not something to be practiced as a test among denominational churches, to grant, or to withhold, participation in the Lord's Table.

(3) No so-called "Congregation of The Church of Christ" is said to have "withdrawn fellowship" from another "sister congregation."

(3) No apostle ever directed an organizational church to "withdraw fellowship" from a "member" thereof, even tho' saints are to withdraw themselves from ungodliness (2 Thess. 3:6; I Tim. 6:5).

(4) So-called "elders over a church" never sent "letters of disfellowship" to an erring Christian.

(5) No so-called "eldership" ever "disfellowshipped" a saint by letter for not attending so-called "church services."

(6) No church ever made "fellowship grants" to so-called "affiliated human institutions."

(7) No church ever built special facilities, such as gymnasiums, encampments, kitchens, or halls, in order to have "fellowship with their membership."

(8) When the apostle Paul desired to have "fellowship" with Christ's resurrection, such was not equated as mere social eating, secular education, or fun and games.

(9) "Fellowship with The Father" does not require kitchens, halls, gymnasiums, schools, encampments, man-made institutions, etc...

(10) Withdrawing "yourselves," or "thysel" from ungodliness is not the same as "church withdrawal of fellowship" from an erring saint.

(11) The expressions, "withdrawal of fellowship" and "disfellowship" are nowhere in the Bible, and therefore the teaching is not biblical.

(12) God Almighty never authorized "fellowship" with Himself to be decided upon, nor is it administered, by men for men. Fellowship with God is equated to the new birth process where the alien sinner now becomes anew into a "relationship" with the Father. Hence the better/best meaning of Koinonia, (many say *fellowship*) but would better be described with = "*sharing*". Koinonia in the greek - "joint participation in things common", more properly = *relationship*.