

## Building Up One Another

### Message 1: Fellowship, the Basis for One-Another Ministry<sup>1</sup>

Every summer we pause from our exegetical messages and consider a biblical topic. For our Summer Sermon Series this year, we'll be looking at some of the "one another" passages in the NT. The title of this series of messages is Building Up One Another.

The NT frequently uses the term "one another" when describing how believers should interact with each other. This sermon series will examine several significant actions Christians are to take toward one another to help build up the local church. When we obey these one another passages, the church itself will become stronger. This series of messages is intended to help members of a local church to recognize their responsibilities to one another and to strengthen the unity and ministry of the church as members follow these principles.

There are many verses in the NT that use this "one another" language, but one of them that summarizes this entire series would be

1Th 5:11 *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and **edify one another**, even as also ye do.*

I'll have a whole message on what it means to "edify" one another, so I won't say much about it right now, other than "edify" means "build up." These one another statements tell us how to build up one another. God's intent is that we build up, help, and encourage one another. When we fulfill these one-another ministries, we build up the church.

One-another church ministry is primarily based on the NT concept of fellowship. The care and concern church members display toward one another is a result of the fellowship those members enjoy. Unfortunately, many believers misunderstand what the Bible means when it speaks of fellowship. Too often when Christians think of fellowship, they think in terms of eating and visiting. Nothing wrong with that, but such a definition falls a bit short of the NT expectation for fellowship. Since fellowship is a very important part of building up one another, this study will begin by considering the concept of fellowship.

Ac 2:42 *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this material in this chapter is adapted from J. Hampton Keathley, "One-Another Commands from Scripture" at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

The biblical word “fellowship” (*koinonia*) is based on the word “to have in common.” To “have fellowship” with someone means that you share something in common with one another. Fellowship implies communion or communication based on things held in common.

**Quote:** The fundamental [meaning of the word] is that of sharing in something with someone.<sup>2</sup> ... Fellowship means companionship or partnership and communion with others on the basis of something held in common.<sup>3</sup>

Since fellowship is so important and forms an essential foundation for understanding the ministry we are to have with one another, let’s look at the main concepts of NT fellowship.

#### I. Fellowship Implies a Relationship

1 Corinthians 1:9 *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 John 1:3 *that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

A. Any group of people can have a degree of fellowship around commonly-held beliefs, values, or interests. The world is full of groups that have common interests in sports, education, recreation, work, etc.

B. However, the fellowship Christians experience with one another should far surpass the kind of camaraderie that other groups may have.

Christians are in the same family; we should have the same value system; we should all be devoted to Christ and to his church. And so these shared commitments and interests should lead us to have a profound and deep sense of fellowship with one another.

C. Christian fellowship centers on a relationship with God through Christ. All Christians confess that Jesus is Lord—the is the common, basic confession of faith. Genuine Christians have repented of sin and put their faith in Jesus to save them.

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<sup>2</sup> R. P. Martin, “Communion,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 217.

<sup>3</sup> R. Allan Killen, “Fellowship,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea (Moody Press, 1975).

- D. We can have fellowship with others because we have fellowship with God. Our relationship with God is what brings us into fellowship with others who have that same relationship.

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.*

1 John 1:6–7 *If we say that **we have fellowship with Him**, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

- E. Christians generally also affirm that certain sinful lifestyles are incompatible with true Christianity. If someone is living in habitual, unrepentant, serious sin, then it's very likely that he is not a genuine Christian.

1 Corinthians 5:11 *But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.*

I.e., that kind of behavior demonstrates that a person is not a genuine believer. We cannot have Christian fellowship with such a person.

- F. To have fellowship, then, implies sharing together in common activities based on our shared relationship with Christ. We fellowship around our shared beliefs and values. When we gather together because of our shared faith, we are fellowshiping.
- G. And we deny Christian fellowship with unbelievers and with those who deny the faith by their gross sinful behavior. We deny Christian fellowship with those who hold doctrinal views that are unbiblical or heretical (e.g., cults).

**Illus.:** It's recently been in the news that Mormons have strongly asserted that they are Christians. We would deny that assertion; they are certainly not Christians; they are cultists.

Likewise, even people habitually engaging in all kinds of depraved behavior still think of themselves as Christians. We deny that because the Bible denies that.

**Note:** The word “fellowship” when describing one’s relationship with God is synonymous with salvation (1 Jn 1:3). If you are saved, you have fellowship with God. Technically speaking, genuine Christians cannot be “out of fellowship” with God. Sin can hinder that relationship and take away the joy of our salvation, but sin cannot break our union with God.

## II. Fellowship Implies Partnership

A. The faith in Christ that we have in common brings us into partnership. Believers become partners with one another as they share biblical concerns, goals, priorities, and leadership.

Christians partner together for do the work of the ministry.

B. The word “partnership” describes how we are related to each other in our relationship with God: we work together in a common purpose to achieve common goals for the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 28:18-20; Phil 1:27).

2 Corinthians 6:1 ... *workers together with Him* ...

Our ultimate goal as believers is to bring glory and honor to God. God’s goals, concerns, and priorities ought to be ours; we accept them for ourselves. We value what God values. And this brings us into closer fellowship with one another.

## III. Fellowship Signifies Companionship and Communion

A. **Companionship:** sharing life; being associated together through a relationship we hold in common. We might call it community.

One of the great blessings of being part of a church is the companionship we can enjoy as fellow believers. All members of the community rejoice together and suffer together. We act in unity and in cooperation. We are all of the same body; we ought to act like a body of believers.

B. **Communication:** sharing ideas

In order for people to fellowship or to be partners with each other, they have to communicate. It would be pretty hard to develop a partnership with someone with whom you could not communicate.

1. Communication is the interchange or the sharing of concepts, feelings, ideas, information, needs, burdens, etc., so all members can share and thus minister to each other.

2. We share our own hurts, burdens, and aspirations; bear one another's burdens.
3. We listen to others so we may minister to needs according to the directives of the Word.

IV. Fellowship happens in various ways.<sup>4</sup>

- A. One of the most profound means of fellowship is the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:16-21, 11:23-26). At this event, we profess our faith in Christ, and we partake, symbolically, in the body and blood of Christ. Communion is a means of fellowship.
- B. We fellowship through church membership. Jesus established his church, and all believers should be part of a local church. The church is the bride of Christ, the pillar and ground of the truth. We must not forsake the assembly of believers. At church, we join together with like-minded believers in worship, instruction, fellowship, evangelism, and service.
- C. We fellowship in giving. We support the work of the church and missions through generous, sacrificial, regular giving. We act as a community in supporting the work of the church and of missions.
- D. We fellowship through ministry. We serve God by serving one another. We serve in various capacities within the ministry of the church—e.g., SS teacher, nursery, deacon. Further, we help those in need and share one another's burdens.
- E. We fellowship in suffering. Phil 3:10 mentions "the fellowship of his sufferings." Christians commonly suffer for their faith; the common experience of many Christians is suffering. We sympathize with one another as we endure various health issues. Even suffering can bring people into a common bond.

V. Fellowship Exists at Various levels.

I.e., there are degrees and limits to fellowship

Fellowship with others exists on a spectrum or on various levels.

*With unbelievers*, we have no essential Christian fellowship. We might have many other things in common, but not the Christian faith. We do not have true spiritual fellowship with unbelievers.

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<sup>4</sup> Following the list provided by R. Allan Killen, "Fellowship," in *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea (Moody Press, 1975).

*With some Christians*, we can have a basic level of fellowship because we agree on the fundamentals of the faith. We acknowledge one another as fellow Christians, even if we do not agree about much beyond that. We may not even be able to worship together because of our theological differences.

*With believers of the same faith and practice*, we hold many things in common in our beliefs and behaviors. Our fellowship with such people can be very close. We feel comfortable worshipping with such people.

And I suppose the closest fellowship pertains *within the membership of a local church*. Theoretically, members of a church should hold virtually the same faith. They subscribe to the same statement of faith. They agree to the same church covenant. They are members of the same body of Christ, and this ought to provide a basis for the most profound kind of fellowship.

All of the one-another responsibilities that I'll be talking about in this series happen within the context of the local church primarily. We want to support, promote, and maintain fellowship within the church, and we do that, largely, through these one-another responsibilities.

We do *not* extend Christian fellowship universally; there are limits and boundaries to Christian fellowship. Those who do not confess Christ or who do not hold the genuine Christian faith cannot come into the fellowship. They are outside the fellowship because they do not share the faith; we do not have the Christian faith in common.

2 Cor 6:14 *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

One final thing to mention: Fellowship among believers is fairly easy to disturb or lose. It shouldn't be, but often it is.

Typically, fellowship among believers can be upset through various offenses. Someone says something or does something—or fails to say or do something. Someone doesn't measure up to our expectations. Such offenses undermine our fellowship. It causes upset in our fellowship. And so we need to be careful and sensitive to others so as to promote fellowship and not threaten it.

One of the marks of a healthy church is that it is able to continue steadfastly in fellowship. That is, the members of the church are able to work through their differences, deal appropriately with frictions and offenses, and maintain their partnership in spite of these problems. They intentionally pursue fellowship and refuse to let minor annoyances diminish fellowship.

**Quote:** What is Christian fellowship? ... Fellowship occurs when Christians get together to discuss the Word of God and share concerns in the power of the Holy Spirit. ... When there is true fellowship, Christians don't [condemn] one another. They don't bite and devour one another. They don't provoke, envy, lie to, speak evil of, or grumble about one another. Since true fellowship builds up, Christians receive one another and are kind and tenderhearted toward one another. They forbear and forgive one another, serve one another, practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another, admonish, instruct, submit to, and comfort one another. That is the true fellowship of the Body. It is life touching life to bring blessing and spiritual growth.<sup>5</sup>

Fellowship is the basis and motivation for all of the "one another" responsibilities Christians have in the context of the church. Since we have a common relationship with God through Christ, it follows that we work together as partners, communicate properly with one another, and share our burdens and blessings. Fellowship is the basis for all other one-another ministry, so we have to get fellowship right in order to have all these other relationships right.

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<sup>5</sup>John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor Pub., 1996), 117.