

Lesson 10: Purposes of the Church – Fellowship

Opening:

It is difficult to get people to commit to church these days. People are busy and it is often said that the church can't compete with sporting events, the demands of work (which no longer just happen from 8-5), and of course there is the need to sleep. Some have even said that going to church isn't necessary anymore because it is possible to just watch/listen to so many great sermons online. Church attendance isn't a new problem. The writer of Hebrews points out in Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Even in the early church, people found reasons not to meet together, but what if I told you that how we understand one word is critical to understanding why meeting together is so important? What if I told you that one word has been historically misunderstood, and if we could grasp the meaning of that one word it would change the way we view church? The word is fellowship.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from a German prison camp the book *Life Together*. In that book he noted: "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. A physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. How inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who, by God's will, are privileged to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians... Let him who has such a privilege thank God on his knees and declare, 'It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in fellowship with Christian brothers.'"

Do we long for and promote the kind of fellowship that Bonhoeffer was so grateful for?

Central Truths:

- One purpose of fellowship is to identify what we have in common, what we have been given by Christ.
- Fellowship is an expression of joy and spurring one another on to share the gospel.
- Fellowship provides encouragement to continue in the faith when struggles arise.

Purposes of the Church: Fellowship

Last week we noted that worship is the primary function for which we are created. We are designed to worship God (Psalm 95:6; John 4:23; Revelation 4:11). Worship draws out attention and focus to God, in appreciation for Christ, and into alignment with the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer.

Biblical fellowship or a form of *koinonia* is used in both verb or noun forms in the New Testament. The verb form is most often translated “to share” or “partnership” (See Philippians 1:7) and the noun form is “fellowship” (See 1 John 1:3). Most people think of fellowship as an activity. For example, we get together for Women’s Fellowships or Men’s Fellowships, or Community Meals, but the New Testament defines fellowship as more than these programmed activities. Biblical fellowship is sharing life together.

Look at Acts 2:42-47. Notice that everything the church did hinged on two things: the apostle’s teaching and fellowship. What does this text teach us are the outcomes of fellowship?

Examining of the Text:

Reading the Biblical Text: 1 John 1:3-7

³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we 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 his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Look at V. 3 First John notes that **biblical fellowship is an expression of our common inheritance.** It notes what we share because of Christ. Fellowship is

drawing together because of the work that Christ has done in us. We are called in to fellowship with Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:9). Every believer has a shared story. Our backstory may be different from those around us, but we all came to faith through the grace of Jesus. We have a common story. So Paul could write that we “share in God’s grace with Him” (Philippians 1:7) and he could write that what unites us in fellowship is the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14). Even taking the Lord’s Supper is an expression of our common inheritance. One purpose of fellowship is to identify what we have in common, what we have been given by Christ.

Look at V. 4 Second John notes that **biblical fellowship is an expression of our common service**. Verse 4 tells us that our joy is being made complete when we share the story of Christ’s love for us. Christians should have a common desire to share Christ with others through words and deeds that show others the love of Christ. We are to be partners with Christ and one another in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). The joy of fellowship is found when we see others come to know Christ. When we gather, we are to pray for those who do not know Christ, pray for God to call them to salvation, and for God to touch their lives with people who know Christ (John 4:31-38). When we come together as a church, do we find our joy in the fact that God has called others to Himself through us? One purpose of fellowship is to express joy and spur one another on to share the gospel.

Look at VV. 5-7 The third part of biblical fellowship is our **responsibility to care for one another**. We are to encourage one another to walk in the light. Fellowship involves meeting together for the purpose of encouraging others in the faith. When we fail to meet together we lack the encouragement we need to continue to “walk” with Christ through life. Romans 1:11-12 notes that Paul longs to meet with the church to encourage them in the faith, and that they might encourage him as well. One purpose of fellowship is encouragement to continue in the faith when struggles arise.

Applying the Text:

Fellowship in the church helps us fulfill our mission of loving God, serving others, and equipping disciple-makers. While we worship as a large group, fellowship is what should happen in small groups. It is where we develop deep relationships. We shepherd one another and “bear one another’s burdens” in small groups (Galatians 6:2). Teaching happens in small groups. This is where we are equipped

for making disciples and then challenged to do this throughout the week. Accountability happens best in small groups. We should encourage one another to live out our faith. We should be people who listen to and pray for one another and point each other to God's word.

Effective fellowship results in effective ministry. Small groups that exhibit the biblical principles of fellowship talk about Christ, share Christ and invite others to participate in their groups. If we fellowship well as a church, we will see Christ work so that we experience the outcomes we read about in Acts 2:42-47.