

Fellowship Nurtures Good Works

By Nathan Warner

“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.”

(Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV)

In the book of Acts we see that the first Churches in Jerusalem *“were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”* (Acts 2:42). These Believers weren’t going through the motions here – they *devoted* themselves to **Scriptural teachings, Fellowship, Communion, and Prayer**. What was their motivation? Did they have really great speakers? Maybe they offered comprehensive programs? Perhaps they had a band performances or dance? No, Jesus Christ was their motivation for why they were devoted to these things! They were motivated by the very real salvation from sins and the rescue from eternal separation from God that Jesus provides. They were motivated in obedience to His commandments to love one another more than themselves (John 13:34-35)! They were motivated in obedience to Jesus’ command that they celebrate His sacrifice often (1 Corinthians 11:25)! They were motivated by His command to pray without ceasing (Matthew 26:41 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17)! God’s love for them and their love for God was their motivation for why they devoted themselves to these things.

While the modern Church is weak in all four areas of the original Church, it is perhaps weakest when it comes to true Christian FELLOWSHIP. And a lack of true Christian fellowship can hamper Believer’s dedication to Scriptural teachings, Communion, prayer, and good works.

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

Christian fellowship occurs when the members of a church body gather together in the name of Jesus – when we come together for Him and for one another, *“for where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst”* (Matthew 18:20). Christian fellowship occurs whenever two or more people come together in the name of Jesus, to honor, worship, and learn more about Him, and to share their gifts with one another.

After all, it is through fellowship – through the Body of Christ, for the Body of Christ – that the gifts of the Spirit work: *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**”* (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). *“For the body does not consist of one member but of many”* (1 Corinthians 12:14). Therefore, *“the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”* (1 Corinthians 12:21-27). The Body is not to neglect its members, just as the

members are not to neglect the Body. We are not to be a passive “audience,” but active in good works (through the gifts and service of the Holy Spirit) towards one another, which is the very meaning of Christian Fellowship.

WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

True Christian good works proceed from the Holy Spirit in us. Good works are found in every fruit of the Spirit: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law”* (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit is meant for others. It nourishes, heals, supports, and encourages those around us. God is working through you to touch the lives of others for good.

How do we know what good works are? It is by the inspiration of the Spirit of God that His Word prepares us to do them: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Yet, regardless of how good our good works are, they cannot make us “righteous” before God’s judgment – they cannot save us, *“for by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:8-10). Here too, we see that by becoming a Believer in Jesus, we have been born again, re-created as a new creation for doing good works.

NEGLECTING FELLOWSHIP CAUSES HARM TO THE BODY

How are the gifts of the Spirit employed and how can we possibly “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” when we neglect Fellowship? Fellowship is foundational upon which good deeds are built. Good works are done for others. How can you do good works for others when you are not in fellowship with others? How do you know what people’s struggles and needs are when you don’t spend time in fellowship with them? How can you be *“contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality”* (Romans 12:13), when you aren’t around to practice it, and don’t even know what people’s needs are? The modern church has crippled the Body of Christ by neglecting true Christian Fellowship.

Fellowship itself is one of the mightiest works for good. Why? Fellowship is encouragement to the Body, for we are *“mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine”* (Romans 1:12 ESV)! Paul longed to be with the Church in Rome, so that he could encourage them in their faith and they could encourage him in his faith! We may not realize it, but when we neglect fellowship with Believers, we are discouraging, dissuading, and hindering the faith of our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. We cause injury through absence. This is why the preacher says, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) We are to be in fellowship even when no one is falling, because *“iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another”* (Proverbs 27:17). We are benefitting one another’s faith and understanding when we are in Fellowship. But most importantly, we are to *“bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ”* (Galatians 6:2). How do we do that if we’re not around to bear them?

FELLOWSHIP CAN BE PAINFUL AT TIMES

Fellowship takes a lot of work, and it can be painful. Like any family, God's family has a lot of immature members. Beyond that, we all have immaturities, and we all still sin. At times, we all set our will ahead of God's will. When we do this, we will inevitably come into conflict with Believers who are seeking the Father's will. There can be a lot of judgment, conflict, and hurt in Church at times because of this. How do we deal with this? As long as Fellowship comes together for Jesus and for one another, we should not leave it. Like any large family, the more mature siblings lead by example: *"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God"* (Colossians 3:16). *"Be hospitable to one another without complaint"* (1 Peter 4:9), and *"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:2-3). No one said it would be easy to find Christian Fellowship and to stay in it, but we are to do it in obedience to our Lord and in support of one another.

We need to be supportive and accepting of our Brothers and Sisters in Christ, for Paul says, *"As the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches"* (1 Corinthians 7:17b).

"WHAT AM I GETTING OUT OF IT?"

Culturally, modern Christians have a serious problem with commitment and faithfulness in their Christian lives today. We treat Church the way we treat any other worldly organization in our society: "What is it doing for me?" "What am I getting out of it?" We judge the Body of Christ the way we judge all worldly venues. "That movie wasn't worth the money!" "That play was a waste of my time!" We judge everything by how well it serves our own personal interests. "We're not going to that restaurant again, those fries were salty!" If SHOPMART's prices aren't to our liking, we complain, get in our car and drive to the MARTSHOP across town instead. The world's only commitment is to what it gets out of something. Perhaps this world-view mentality has seeped into the modern Christian's approach to the Church.

But the Church isn't a shop, a club, or a worldly organization. It isn't something to be approached like a brand. We're not to be thinking, "This Church is too plain! I'll just shop for something with flavor!" as if we're taking samples in the chip aisle of MARTSHOP. God doesn't describe His Church as a business, club, convention, pageant, or community center. He says the Church is His FAMILY, and unlike our blood relations (who may still be unbelievers), He has brought His family together through faith in His Son. We ought to take our relationships more seriously in God's family. Jesus said, *"whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"* (Matt. 12:50). Do we neglect our earthly brothers, sisters, or mothers? Do we neglect our natural relations when attending to their needs and their will, even when It means sacrificing our interests? How much less should we neglect fellowship with those who seek to do "the will" of our Heavenly Father?

BE DILIGENT IN FELLOWSHIP

It is true that our Salvation does not depend on Christian fellowship, Church fellowship, or

Church attendance, but our Salvation also does not depend on good works, communion, prayer, and many other things that God has still called us to do. Does that mean we should neglect doing them? Should we half-heartedly obey our Lord and Savior who saved us simply because His salvation is not dependant on how well we obey Him? What does it mean to be undedicated to God's Word, fellowship, communion, prayer, and good works? Like the Church of Laodicea, we will become useless, lukewarm towards God, as Jesus said, *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot"* (Rev. 3:15a). Because of their lukewarm attitude to Him and others, Jesus warned them to return to being *"zealous"* (Rev. 3:19b). Like the Church of Jerusalem, we need to be zealous, to be DILIGENT towards **God's Word, Fellowship, Communion together, and Prayer.**

We also need to understand that no matter how good our works are, they don't mean much if we abandon fellowship in the love of Christ and fellowship in love of one another: *"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary. **But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first"*** (Rev. 2:2-5a).

The world is filled with uncommitted people in these days, and many uncommitted people will come and go in the Church. We must not let this discourage us, but we must remain zealous, diligent, and faithful to Jesus and towards one another in the love of God. Even so, Amen.