

# Spiritual Fellowship

## INTRODUCTION.

- A. There are plenty of differing ideas regarding religious fellowship.
  - 1. Some might say that all believers are in fellowship, even if their doctrines are contrary to one another.
  - 2. Others might say that as long as the person went through water baptism, then they are in fellowship.
  - 3. Others think only of physical relationships when they talk of fellowship.
  - 4. Some act as if fellowship is limited only to their judgment. Whomever they deem to be “out of fellowship” is out of fellowship.
- B. With this lesson, we will do an extensive study of spiritual fellowship.
- C. With this lesson, we will:
  - 1. Show a few word definitions which are pertinent to our understanding of the concept of fellowship.
  - 2. Show that true fellowship begins with the Father in heaven and Jesus Christ.
  - 3. Show the benefits of being in fellowship with the Father in heaven.
  - 4. Show the facts regarding being in fellowship with other Christians.
  - 5. Show at what this spiritual fellowship is severed or broken.

## I. ESTABLISH WORD DEFINITIONS.

- A. Let us first define the English word “fellowship.”
  - 1. “1 : COMPANIONSHIP, COMPANY 2 a : community of interest, activity, feeling, or experience b : the state of being a fellow or associate 3 : a company of equals or friends : ASSOCIATION 4 : the quality or state of being comradesly” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
  - 2. Business association or fellowship. Social association or fellowship. To jointly participate with someone else in a specific endeavor or action.
- B. Let us now define five Greek words used in the Bible which are translated as fellowship or something similar.
  - 1. Koinonia {koy-nohn-ee'-ah}
    - a. Definition - “1) fellowship, association, community, communion,

joint participation, intercourse” (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon)

- b. Usages in the KJV: noun - fellowship 12, communion 4, communication 1, distribution 1, contribution 1, to communicate 1
- 2. Koinonos {koy-no-nos’}
    - a. Definition - “1) a partner, associate, comrade, companion 2) a partner, sharer, in anything” (Ibid)
    - b. Usages in the KJV: noun - partaker 5, partner 3, fellowship 1, companion 1
  - 3. Metoche {met-okh-ay’}
    - a. Definition - “1) a sharing, communion, fellowship” (Ibid.)
    - b. Usages in the KJV: noun - fellowship 1
  - 4. Koinoneo {koy-no-neh’-o}
    - a. Definition - “1) to come into communion or fellowship with, to become a sharer, be made a partner 2) to enter into fellowship, join one’s self to an associate, make one’s self a sharer or partner” (Ibid.)
    - b. Usages in the KJV: verb - be partaker 5, communicate 2, distribute 1
  - 5. Sugkoinoneo {soong-koy-no-neh’-o}
    - a. Definition - “1) to become a partaker together with others, or to have fellowship with a thing” (Ibid.)
    - b. Usages in the KJV: verb - have fellowship with 1, communicate with 1, be partaker of 1
- C. To summarize the general idea of fellowship:
- 1. To be in association of
  - 2. To participate with someone in something
  - 3. To share
  - 4. To have in common
  - 5. To partner with someone in something
  - 6. To join in something
- D. How is fellowship or the principle of fellowship used in the Bible?
- 1. Refers to a Christian’s relationship to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

2. Refers to a Christian's relationship to other Christians.
3. Refers to Christians working together in matters pertaining to the Lord.
4. Refers to a person's relationship with works of darkness.

## II. WHERE DOES FELLOWSHIP BEGIN?

- A. Spiritual fellowship (partnership, sharing, or communion) must first be established with God. To enter this fellowship, partnership, sharing, or communion, one must turn to Jesus Christ.
  1. The saving faith for man is the revealed mystery of God. (Colossians 1:25-27; 2:1-3; Romans 16:25-26)
  2. God granted Paul, and the other apostles, the right to "make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery." (Ephesians 3:1-9)
- B. When a person follows the "mystery of salvation," revealed in the word of God, he will do the will of the Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21), which was first taught by Jesus Christ and then by his apostles. (Cf. Hebrews 2:3-4)
  1. Jesus taught, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16, NKJV)
  2. Jesus taught, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" (Mark 16:15-16, NKJV)
  3. Jesus taught, "*Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.*" (Luke 24:46-48, NKJV)
  4. Peter taught, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38, NKJV)
  5. Peter taught, "*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*" (Acts 3:19, NKJV)
  6. Paul taught, "*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Romans 10:9-10, NKJV)

- C. What happens at the point of conversion:
  - 1. One is saved. (John 3:16; Mark 16:16)
  - 2. God forgives sins. (Acts 2:38)
  - 3. One arises to walk in a newness of life. (Romans 6:3-7)
    - a. One is baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. (v 3)
    - b. One will arise to walk in a newness of life. (v 4)
    - c. One has been set free from sin. (v 7)
  - 4. One is baptized into Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4)
  - 5. Since one is baptized into Jesus Christ, he is baptized into the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)
  - 6. This is why when one repents of this sins and is baptized, the Lord adds him to the church. (Cf. Acts 2:38, 41, 47)
    - a. The church is the body of Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:22-23)
    - b. Jesus is the head of His body, the church.
- D. When a person is converted, he enters into fellowship with God.
  - 1. One enters the fellowship of Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:9)
  - 2. One enters the fellowship of the heavenly Father. (1 John 1:3)
  - 3. One is conformed to the image of Jesus. (Romans 8:28-29)
- E. This fellowship or communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is seen in the fact that Christians are children of God and brethren of Christ. (Romans 8:14-16,17)
- F. As children of God, we are to be “partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:1-4)
- G. Fellowship with the Father can only be maintained by walking in the light. (1 John 1:5-7)

### **III. THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.**

- A. Before we procedure any farther, consider the benefits of being in fellowship partnership, association, or joint sharing with God.
  - 1. Fellowship affords Christians the means to go to the Father in pray. (Cf. John 15:7)
    - a. Jesus Christ is the intercessor for those in fellowship with the Father.

- (1) Romans 8:31-34
- (2) Hebrews 7:25
- b. The Holy Spirit also makes intercession for those in fellowship with God. (Romans 8:26-27)
2. Fellowship affords a peace of mind. (Philippians 4:6-7)
3. Fellowship affords victory over death.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 15:50-56
  - b. Romans 8:37
  - c. 1 John 5:4-5
4. Fellowship affords freedom from bondage to sin. (Romans 6:1-14, 17-18, 22)
5. Fellowship affords us protection from those who would sever us from the love of Christ. (Romans 8:35-39)
- B. Do not take your fellowship with God lightly.
  1. Establish your fellowship by faithfully serving the heavenly Father.
  2. Develop your fellowship.
  3. Grow your fellowship.
  4. Then enjoy the many wondrous benefits of fellowship with the heavenly Father.

#### **IV. IN FELLOWSHIP WITH BRETHREN.**

- A. Please understand first and foremost that your fellowship with fellow brethren in Christ is contingent upon your maintaining your fellowship with the heavenly Father. (1 John 1:3-7)
  1. We may assume that a person is in fellowship because he or she attends the worship services. However, if they are walking in darkness, then they are not in fellowship. (We will discuss this fact later in this study.)
  2. There may be a person who we determine is out of fellowship. However, if they are serving the Lord and walking in the light, then our charge against them becomes nothing more than a lie.
- B. Our fellowship is based upon our sharing a common fellowship with Jesus Christ. However, there are other areas wherein we share or jointly participate in spiritual matters.

1. We walk in the light of the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:3,4)
  2. We are fellow citizens of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19-22)
  3. We are partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:1-6)
  4. We are citizens of heaven. (Philippians 3:20-21)
  5. We are sanctified. (Hebrews 2:11)
  6. We are of one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. (Philippians 1:27; Romans 15:5-7)
  7. We strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-6)
- C. We also share in doing the work of our Lord and Savior. Sometimes this is shared individually and other times collectively.
1. We participate in the worship of our heavenly Father. (John 4:23-24)
  2. We can work with others to teach the lost. Paul considered Titus his “partner and fellow worker.” (2 Corinthians 8:23)
  3. We can support preachers.
    - a. The church in Philippi shared with Paul by helping to support him as he preached. (Philippians 4:15)
    - b. The one who is taught the word shares with him who teaches the word. (Galatians 6:6; cf. 3 John 1:5-8)
  4. We can extend the “right hand of fellowship” to fellow labors. James, Cephas, and John extended to Paul and Barnabas the “right hand of fellowship.” (Galatians 2:9)
  5. We help saints when they are in need, when the opportunity and means arise.
    - a. Romans 12:13
    - b. Consider the example set by the church in Macedonia. (2 Corinthians 8:1-7)

## V. **WHEN IS FELLOWSHIP BROKEN?**

- A. As I said earlier in the lesson, your fellowship with the Lord does not depend on the perception of others.
1. If you are not walking in the light, serving the Lord, then the great fellowship between you and the Father in heaven no longer exists. (1 John 1:6)

2. If you are falsely accused and unfairly withdrawn from by a local church, if you are without fault, then you are in fellowship with the Father, all though others refuse you fellowship.
  3. Someone may refuse you fellowship. His refusal does not decide your fellowship with the Father in heaven. Your actions determine your fellowship with the Father in heaven.
- B. How can we determine when fellowship with the Father, and therefore with brethren, is broken?
1. When one walks in darkness. (1 John 1:6) If that person will confess his sins to the Father and repent, then God will forgive him. (1 John 1:8-10) Without repentance, one remains in darkness and, therefore, out of fellowship with the Father.
  2. When one does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. (2 John 1:9-11)
  3. When one is “unequally yoked” with an unbeliever. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
    - a. To what does “unequally yoked” not refer?
      - (1) Does not refer to spending time with one who is not a Christian. Jesus ate with the publicans and sinners. (Matthew 9:10-11; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:29-30)
      - (2) Does not refer to avoiding the immoral people of the world. Paul explains that his charge not to keep company with sexually immoral people was not referring to the people of the world, but to immoral brethren. (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)
      - (3) Does not refer to whom a Christian can marry. In other words, Paul’s admonition in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 has nothing to do with the marriage relation. No where in the context does Paul apply this to marriage.
    - b. To what then does “unequally yoked” refer? Being unequally yoked means to partner with someone or something in an action that is opposed to God and His standards. Consider the opposites illustrated by Paul.
      - (1) For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? (v 14)
      - (2) And what communion has light with darkness? (v 14)
      - (3) And what accord has Christ with Belial? (v 15)
      - (4) What part has a believer with an unbeliever? (v 15)

- (5) What agreement has the temple of God with idols? (v 16)
- c. Christians are to come out and be separate from the world. Paul wrote, *“Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.’”* (2 Corinthians 6:17-18, NKJV)
- d. Does 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 conflict with 1 Corinthians 5:9-11?
  - (1) While we must live in the world, our behavior cannot be that of the world which separates it from God.
  - (2) Our righteous actions must separate us from the sinful behavior of the world.
  - (3) As Paul wrote, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”* (Ephesians 5:11)
- e. In other words, Christians are not to engage in sinful activities with the people of the world.
  - (1) We can eat with them, as long as it does not involve some type of sin.
  - (2) We can be their friend, as long as the friendship does not call upon us to violate the word of God.
  - (3) We can marry them, as long as we do not allow the relationship to pull us away from the Lord and lead us into sin.
  - (4) If at any point our friendships, relationships, or contacts with the people of the world begin to pull us and influence us away from faithfully serving God, then we must either sever that relationship or gain control and say no to the sinful influences.
- f. A perfect example of Paul’s instructions regarding not being “unequally yoked” would be 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.
- 4. When one has fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. (Ephesians 5:8-11)
- 5. When one sins against a brother and is unwilling to repent. (Matthew 18:15-17)
- 6. When one is a fornicator, covetous, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard, or an extortioner. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)



- a. It is important that all the brethren in the local church honor the requirements and restrictions of this form of discipline. If some give solace to the unrepentant brother, then they will hinder his repentance.
  - b. When the brother repents, you are to receive him as one who is in fellowship with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 2:3-11)
7. When one causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ. (Romans 16:17-20)
8. When one does not abide in the apostles doctrine and teachings. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)
  - a. Again, it is important that all the brethren in the local church honor the requirements and restrictions that comes with this form of discipline.
  - b. Again, when the brother repents, you are to receive him as one who is in fellowship with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 2:3-11)
9. When one is divisive. (Titus 3:9-10)
- C. Does fellowship require sinless perfection? No.
  1. If we sin, if we will confess our sin to God and ask Him to forgive us, then He will forgive us and our fellowship with Him will not be lost. (1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2)
  2. Consider the example of the church in Ephesus. (Revelation 2:1-7)
    - a. The Ephesians had left their first love, yet their candlestick had not yet been removed.
    - b. Yet, Jesus told them to repent or else their candlestick would be removed.
  3. When a Christian is guilty of sin, he must repent or face losing his fellowship with the Father in heaven.
- D. Sin will sever our fellowship when we possess an unrepentant heart, attitude, and action.
  1. Some have fallen so far that repentance is virtually impossible. (Hebrews 6:4-6) This person is not in fellowship with the Father for he walks in darkness. (Cf. 1 John 1:6)
  2. Committing a sin for which you are unwilling to repent would be classified as a sin unto death or spiritual separation from the Father. (1 John 5:16)

3. Consider the church in Laodicea. (Revelation 3:14-16)
  - a. They were on the verge of being “vomited” out by the Lord. (v 16)
  - b. They were “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” (v 17)
  - c. They were to repent so that they might be clothed once again. (v 18)
  - d. The church in Laodicea is described in such detail to indicate that they were farther along in the process of losing their fellowship that was the church in Ephesus. The description used by Jesus indicates a state of spiritual poverty which may imply their fellowship with the Lord had already been revoked.
- E. Fellowship with the heavenly Father will be severed when a Christian no longer has the necessary faith.
  1. Without faith, one cannot please the Father in heaven. (Hebrews 11:6)
    - a. Faith will sustain a person through temptations and trials.
    - b. Faith will pull a person out of sin through repentance.
    - c. Faith will maintain a person, even when they are still drinking from the milk of the Word because they are not mature enough to handle the meat of the word.
  2. Once faith is no longer present in a person’s mind and life, he is no longer in the fellowship of the Lord and Savior. Consider the example of Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom Paul had delivered to Satan. (1 Timothy 1:19-20)

## **VI. TWO FINAL QUESTIONS REGARDING FELLOWSHIP.**

- A. Do matters of judgment and conscience determine fellowship? No.
  1. We cannot bind our standards of judgment and conscience on other saints. (Romans 14:1-4)
  2. In matters of judgment and conscience, let each person be fully convinced. (Romans 14:5,12,22)
  3. This of course does not pertain to matters and decisions already legislated or determined in God’s word.
- B. Do disagreements regarding the understanding of Bible passages affect fellowship? Not necessarily.
  1. God recognizes that Christians must grow. (1 Peter 2:1-2; Hebrews 5:13-14)
  2. There will be times when the less knowledgeable Christians will err in understanding certain Bible passages. We must ask the question, “When does

such misunderstandings propel one into the realm of no fellowship with the Father?” To answer this question, we must review what breaks one’s fellowship with the Father.

- a. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to engage in sin, therefore sending him into darkness? (1 John 1:6)
  - b. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to no longer abide in the doctrine of Christ. (2 John 1:9-11)
  - c. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to be “unequally yoked” with unbelievers? (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
  - d. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to sin against his brother and keeps him from repenting? (Matthew 18:15-17)
  - e. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to be a fornicator, covetous, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard, or an extortioner? (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)
  - f. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ? (Romans 16:17-20)
  - g. Does one’s misunderstanding cause him to no longer abide in the apostles doctrine and teachings? (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)
  - h. Does one’ misunderstanding cause him to be divisive? (Titus 3:9-10)
3. Aside from the aforementioned separation factors, when will one’s misunderstanding or error in understanding a Bible passage put him danger with the Father in heaven?
- a. When he ceases to study so that he might grow. (2 Peter 2:1-2)
  - b. When his ability to teach is hindered due to his lack of growth. (Hebrews 5:12-14)
  - c. When his misunderstanding coupled with arrogance, causes him to become like Deotrephe. (3 John 1:9-11)
  - d. When his misunderstanding coupled with arrogance, causes him to judge himself by himself, not listening to those more knowledge, and more importantly, not listening to the corrections found in God’s word. (2 Corinthians 10:12-14)

## **CONCLUSION.**

- A. Saints must try, at all costs, to maintain fellowship with Jesus Christ, and therefore, with one another. They must maintain the unity, the oneness. (Romans 14:19;

Ephesians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 1:10)

1. If you have put your fellowship with the Father in jeopardy by sinning, then repent before the fellowship is lost.
  2. If you know of a brother how is in danger of leaving the fellowship with the Father, correct that brother and encourage him. (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20)
  3. Teach the younger and / or weaker Christians the Bible. Help to improve and increase their understanding.
  4. Subject yourself to Bible teaching by worshiping with the saints and studying daily from God's word.
  5. If the individual Christian will work to maintain his fellowship with the Father by walking in the light, then the fellowship and unity of the local church will follow in great abundance.
- B. If you are not a Christian, if you have not been baptized into Jesus Christ, then you are not in fellowship with God. Enter that fellowship today by becoming a child of God through obedience to Jesus' call to salvation.
1. Believe in Jesus (John 3:16, Mark 16:16)
  2. Turn to Jesus (Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38)
  3. Confess your belief (Romans 10:10)
  4. Be baptized into Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13)

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