



FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE OF THE SAME FAITH

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3

What is fellowship?

Because the Lord Jesus filled his life with the Word of God and never sinned, he enjoyed true fellowship with His Father. They were of one mind and purpose, which is why Jesus could say that he and his Father were one (John 17:11). They were one because they shared the same way of thinking, not because they were part of a Trinity (Lesson 16). They were one because Jesus did God’s will completely.

Jesus prayed that his followers “*may be one, even as we are one*” (John 17:11). He wanted believers to be one with him and His Father. When we are baptized we become sons and daughters of God. He wants a close relationship with us in this life. Baptized believers can have fellowship with God and His Son now, because they are trying to do God’s will. But they still sin. Complete fellowship will only be achieved when they are made immortal and therefore no longer able to sin. Only then will they be completely at one with God.

Members of God’s family have something very special in common with each other. They have fellowship with each other because of their fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus. We can understand this by thinking about everyday life, where we see people becoming friends because of a common interest or shared experience. In the same way, true believers have fellowship together because of their common faith, their shared hope and their way of life which is so different from people in the world. Christian fellowship is based on a belief in God’s Word, and since this is so important to true believers it affects them all greatly and so they have a strong fellowship with other true believers.

Bible fellowship is therefore a special close relationship with God and the Lord Jesus, through belief and baptism. It results in a strong bond with others who also share the same privileged position of being God’s sons and daughters, and therefore share a common purpose and way of life. All over the world, men and women share fellowship together when they belong to the family of God. Christian fellowship is not the same as just getting on well with someone – it is a spiritual relationship which depends upon sharing the same faith in God.

Fellowship means sharing. Bible fellowship means sharing beliefs, hopes and worship together with fellow-believers.

“Be separate”

The apostle John writes about fellowship in his first letter. He explains that true believers are people who believe the truth about the Lord Jesus and who try to practise it. Christian fellowship only exists between people if they have a close relationship with God themselves.

1 JOHN 1:3,5-7	NOTES
<p><i>That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us;</i></p> <p><i>and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.</i></p> <p><i>God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>John’s readers could have fellowship with him and other believers because of what they had learnt about Jesus.</p> <p>Fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus is the basis of fellowship between believers.</p> <p>Because God is totally righteous, we cannot be in fellowship with God and please ourselves. We have to try to live according to the true doctrine.</p> <p>By seeking God’s ways we can have fellowship with others who walk in the light, and we will enjoy forgiveness of sins.</p>



To enjoy fellowship with God and His Son we need to be separate from the world. The New Testament commands followers of Christ to live apart from the world. This does not mean leaving the world – that would be impossible – but, rather, to live differently from the world and its godless ways as Abraham did (Hebrews 11:8-13). Jesus prayed for his followers that they would be kept by God from the evil in the world, adding:

“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify (separate) them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:16,17).

The world was regarded by Jesus and his apostles as an evil and wicked place (1 John 2:15-17). It is full of people who have no desire for the things of God, and who make life hard for true Christians to do as God commands. James 4:4 tells us that *“whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”*. People of the world have different standards as well as a different way of life. What is most important to us is of little or no interest to them. We dare not share our lives with people of the world, so having brothers and sisters in Christ who share a love of God’s Word helps us in our discipleship. People who have wrong religious beliefs, as well as people who do not respect God, can lead true believers astray from God.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were made for each other and were meant to help and support each other (see Genesis 2:18). Their marriage showed fellowship – sharing all that God had given, enjoying one another’s company, working together and appreciating together all God’s blessings. This fellowship existed because both were at one with God. Man, woman and God were in harmony.

When Adam and Eve broke God’s law (Genesis 3) this fellowship with God was broken. God is holy and cannot accept sin, nor can sinners exist in His presence. Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. As well as ending their close contact with God, their sin affected their human relationship – Adam blamed Eve for what had happened. This is a lesson for us. Only when we *“walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another”*. Our sins prevent us having fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:2) and can affect our fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

Fellowship at Pentecost

There was a wonderful response to the teaching of the apostles at Pentecost. Many believed in the death, resurrection and teaching about Jesus and were baptized. They enjoyed fellowship together because they all accepted the apostles’ teaching and now had a different purpose and way of life. They showed their fellowship by sharing their possessions and breaking bread together in homes:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:42,44-46).

This example of the first century believers, in meeting for fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, is one Christadelphians today still follow. They have different standards from the people in the world and so seek the fellowship of others with the same way of life. Every week members living in the same area meet to worship God and to remember Jesus in the way he appointed in the ‘Breaking of Bread’ service.

The Breaking of Bread

Disciples of Christ need regular contact if they are to grow together in love, and in truth (Hebrews 10:24,25). The breaking of bread to remember the Lord Jesus and his great salvation is the centre of true Christian fellowship. By eating a small piece of bread and drinking a sip of wine we remind ourselves of the huge cost for our salvation when Jesus died on the cross (1 Peter 1:18,19). It encourages us to remember the promise we made at our baptism – to serve God and not to please ourselves. It is a time to ask ourselves whether we really are walking in the light. It is important to share this simple feast with the right attitude as 1 Corinthians 11:26-29 shows.





1 Corinthians 11:26-29 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

This becomes a wonderful time of fellowship as we come closer to God and His Son by asking forgiveness and meditating on the sacrifice of our Lord.

The bread and wine are symbols of the body and the blood of Jesus. There is nothing magical or mystical about them; for example, the bread does not change into the actual body of the Lord Jesus, as some people wrongly believe.

Jesus said to his close followers, *"Do this in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19), which allows only baptized believers to share this service of remembrance. Christadelphians therefore only break bread with other baptized members of the community (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). They recognise that it is important to have fellowship only with others who believe the same basic Bible truths, to keep the doctrine pure (see 1 Timothy 1:3,4; 2 Timothy 1:13,14; Titus 2:1). If you become a Christadelphian by being baptized into Christ, all other Christadelphians are your brothers and sisters. (Remember the name 'Christadelphian' means 'brothers in Christ'.) It is a great joy to belong to such a family. Christadelphians are one in Christ (Galatians 3:27,28).

We read of the first century Christians breaking bread on a Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2) so Christadelphians usually break bread on a Sunday. This is different from the Sabbath (Saturday).

Spirit and truth

A Samaritan woman asked Jesus whether people should worship on Mount Gerizim near where they were talking, or at Jerusalem. Jesus gave an answer which she must have found surprising. He said that neither place mattered, and then added:

*"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will **worship the Father in spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him"* (John 4:23).

In AD 70, about 40 years after that conversation, both Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim could not be used as places of worship because the Roman armies had swept through the land of Israel and destroyed its religious places. Those Jews who survived the wars, and who did not escape, were taken into captivity and sold as slaves. So if their religion was to depend upon temples and holy sites, they would have had to give it up. Jesus was showing that true worship has nothing to do with buildings and shrines; instead it has to do with belief, sincerity, and truth.

"Spirit and truth" in the quotation above is a very important combination. Some people today claim to have, or be led by, the spirit. But when you talk to them, you soon realise that they do not know what the Bible teaches. Perhaps they believe in going to heaven at death, whereas the Bible clearly teaches that God's kingdom will be set up on earth. Or they might believe that Jesus Christ is part of a Trinity, when the Bible teaches that Jesus' life started when he born, having been conceived by the action of God's power, the Holy Spirit, on Mary. People who claim to have the Spirit, but who lack Bible truth, must be wrong.

True worshippers today are not impressed by large churches or places of worship. The true church is not about buildings but people; and it does not matter how many people there are. What really matters is what they believe, and how they worship God. It is good to have the right spirit in worship, but this comes from believing Bible truth and doing what is right with God.

God's dwelling place

True believers are God's dwelling place – He wants to live in them and with them every day of their lives. Paul said to the Corinthian church:





“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16. See also Ephesians 2:19-22).

Church buildings are not important. Jesus never built one and he described the magnificent temple in Jerusalem as a den of thieves and robbers. He wanted his disciples to follow him and not the temple priests. His Last Supper was held with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, and there the apostles met to worship afterwards (Acts 1:13). The services of the apostles in the early church took place in homes (Colossians 4:15) or hired rooms (Acts 28:23-31).

Worshipping together or apart

Instead of using the word ‘church’, Christadelphians often use ‘ecclesia’ (the Greek word for ‘church’ in the Bible, which means ‘those called out’). The Bible word ‘church’ does not refer to a building but to a group of people called out from the world. They meet to break bread; to study God’s Word together, and also have meetings to preach the Gospel to non-members. Some ecclesias also have activities for children.

Like the first century believers, there are no priests, because the Lord Jesus is our High Priest. The believing men (brothers in Christ) share the duties of the service. At the breaking of bread meeting one brother presides – he arranges the hymns and readings and prayers, and calls upon others to help with these duties. Another will have prepared a short talk to encourage the congregation – the exhortation. When those present have been suitably prepared to remember Jesus, the emblems of bread and wine are shared together – just as Jesus did at the Last Supper long ago (read Luke 22:14-30).

There is usually a collection during these breaking of bread meetings, and this is an opportunity for giving however much people want to give (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). No-one else knows how much an individual gives. The principle of giving is important as it is an act of fellowship, or sharing, as well as a small way of thanking God for His great love in giving Jesus. The money collected is used in many ways, including supporting preaching work and our members who are isolated or sick.

Christadelphians break bread on their own if no other believers live nearby, but they are still in fellowship with Christadelphians worldwide, who will also be breaking bread on the same day. In time, it may please God to call other believers in that area and thus allow the development of a new ecclesia of worshippers.

Summary

1. Fellowship is a special relationship that a believer enjoys with God and the Lord Jesus through belief and baptism. It results in a bond of fellowship between those who share the same beliefs and way of life.
2. True believers cannot have fellowship with those who do not accept true Bible teaching.
3. We must seek fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus through prayer, meditation and Bible reading.
4. The closest fellowship with God, the Lord Jesus and our fellow-believers is when we share the bread and wine at the Breaking of Bread service.
5. There will be perfect fellowship with God in His kingdom on earth.

A verse to learn: 2 Corinthians 6:16

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’

Passages to read: 1 John 1; 1 Corinthians 10

