

THE APOSTLES' FELLOWSHIP

Acts 2:42; 1 John 1

Intro: One of the verses that we talked about in connection with the church at the beginning is this forty-second verse in Acts 2, just stated as telling us something of what the early believers in the church experienced in their relationship with each other. It says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Each one of these is a very vital part of what the Lord was doing in their hearts.

As I have been looking at this verse again this week, I was impressed with the fact that Luke seems to be indicating here that fellowship was the result of the doctrine. Fellowship speaks of the wonderful relationship, first of all, that we have with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of our salvation.

The Bible is really a story of fellowship, isn’t it? In the Book of Genesis, where we have the account of creation and where Adam and Eve had an experience of fellowship with the Lord that was certainly most precious to them, it says in verse 8 of chapter 3 that “they heard the voice of the LORD God (or the sound of the Lord God) walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.” It seems that before they sinned they enjoyed a very precious relationship with God. It would be wonderful if we knew more about what that relationship was. Sin is what ruined the fellowship.

As you go through the Scriptures and you see how God worked in the lives of people, one of the first statements of a man who delighted God and who enjoyed real fellowship with the Lord was Enoch. While men at that time were living to be almost a thousand years of age, remember, as the genealogy is given to us there in Genesis 5, we start with Adam and go down through all of those names, everyone of them was nine hundred years and so many more when they died; but when we come to Enoch, it says that “Enoch lived sixty-five years and begat Methuselah: and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” (Genesis 5:21-24) There is probably no better definition of fellowship than this: “Enoch walked with God.” So, instead of living

nine hundred years, he lived a little over three hundred years, three hundred sixty-five years, but it seems that the Lord so delighted in his fellowship with Enoch that He took Enoch home early.

Then, in connection with the flood we have the statement concerning Noah, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." (Genesis 6:8-9).

Then, as we get into the life of Abraham, you remember that He had received a promise that he was going to have an heir and that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He must have understood that the Lord was talking to him about salvation. He got to be ninety-nine years old and still did not have a son, and the promise seemed unfulfilled. He had said before, when the Lord promised that He would be his shield and his exceeding great reward, so that the kings that he had defeated to set Lot free, if they had been thinking of retaliation against Abram, Abram himself seems to have been thinking about it. The Lord said to him, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." (Genesis 15:1) Then it was that Abraham presented to God his disappointment that he had no seed, and thought, "Well, maybe one of my servants is going to be my seed," which was the custom, apparently, when a man and wife did not have a child.

When he was ninety-nine years old, it is interesting that what the Lord said to him was, "I am the almighty God..." That is, I can do what I promise to do. "Walk before me and be thou perfect. Walk before me and be thou perfect." What the Lord was concerned about in Abraham's life at that time was his walk. Our walk is our fellowship with the Lord.

One reason I think we love the Psalms so much is because the Psalms speak so much of the struggles and difficulties that primarily David, but many others went through in their lives: how David faced delays and faced his enemies and obstacles that just seemed to come after him one after another. Yet, in reading the Psalms we see how his heart went out to the Lord, How he yearned for a closer fellowship with the Lord, how he was a man who could not be satisfied without the Lord and without the blessing of the Lord. So the Psalms is really a book of fellowship. In fact, the whole Bible is a book of fellowship, isn't it? While we may have difficulty. We talk a lot about fellowship and sometimes have a little difficulty defining what we mean, fellowship has to do with our rela-

tionship to God. He has given us the truth of His Word and He has brought us to Himself. He leaves us here on earth and day by day we are learning what it means to walk in fellowship with Him.

You remember that the Apostle Paul said in dealing with the Corinthian church, a church that was full of all kinds of problems, he reminded them at the very beginning that “God is faithful who has called us into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ.” The church at Corinth had gotten into its difficulty because their fellowship with the Lord had been interrupted because of all of the sins that they had gotten involved in. We have been united to the Lord, as we saw this morning in talking about the Lord’s Supper, and He is in us and we are in Him. He never expected us to live as though we were sufficient in ourselves. In fact, the more a person grows spiritually, the more conscious he is going to be of his dependence upon the Lord in all of the experiences of life that we go through.

This is a very wonderful subject, and when Luke said, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,” he is talking about the way they learned the truth of the Word of God and then the effect that that truth had in their lives and in their relationship with the Lord.

Now, I want to mention some things tonight that figure largely in our fellowship, and it is suggested here in this verse and we see it in some of the other passages that I want to use tonight, especially 1 John 1. Luke seems to indicate here that there can be no true fellowship without true doctrine. You see this emphasized again and again in the Word.

The apostles’ doctrine.

I talked a little bit about this. We looked at Acts 2 and saw, from the teaching of the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost when he preached and three thousand came to know the Lord as Saviour, something of what they believed. Their belief and his preaching indicated that at the heart of everything they believed was what the Word of God teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we were to follow this through, and the epistles of the New Testament certainly give us this, the early apostles believed firmly in the deity of the Lord Jesus. They believed in His perfect humanity and they believed that in coming to earth, becoming a man, that in no way changed His deity. We had the temptation of the Lord this morning in our Sunday School lesson. It seemed that what Satan was really seek-

ing to do when he tempted the Lord was to just find out if there was any way in which becoming a man had put the Lord Jesus Christ in a vulnerable position where He could be tempted and would fall into sin. You see, the testimony of the New Testament is united in the fact that in becoming a man it in no way changed the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They believed that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross was a sacrificial death, that He did not die because of His own sin, because He had no sin; He died for the sins of those He was going to save. When we talk about the Lord's Supper, as we did this morning, we need to remember that we are not worshiping a dead Saviour. To the early apostles Jesus Christ was a great reality. They walked with Him. They preached about Him. They turned to Him in their times of trial and testing. You see this especially in the Apostle Paul's epistles. They believed that the Lord was accepted back into heaven, He was seated at the Father's right hand, and that He is living there to intercede for us.

They believed that He was coming again. They believed that the day would come when the Lord Jesus Christ would reign upon the earth. All these wonderful truths that give us the teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ figure into our fellowship with Him. We talk to Him and we walk with Him and we learn of Him. This is what it means to enjoy fellowship with Him.

When we come together in church, this gives us an excellent opportunity to learn more of Him, not just when the message is being proclaimed, but even in our conversation with each other.

Now, if you will turn to 1 John 1, this is one chapter that lays special emphasis upon this subject of fellowship. One of the main reasons we keep encouraging you to read your Bible and to memorize the Word, as many of us are starting to do--and we would love it if everybody in Trinity Bible Church would do it--our fellowship is with the Lord through His Word and through prayer. The Apostle John, as you know, wrote at the end of the first century. As far as we know, he was the last surviving apostle. He had had a lot of time to minister and to think over the truths that he had been preaching. Already error had started to come into the lives of many of these people, and they were being taught things that were contrary to the truth of the Word. So it is important to understand this as you begin this very simple and wonderful epistle, because he speaks of the Lord and says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have

heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life..." He is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. We've seen Him. We've looked upon Him. We've touched Him. "(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)" With the Father in eternity past, manifested to us when He came to earth, and he said, "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)

Here he is indicating what I think that Luke was teaching us in the second chapter of Acts. That is, that if we have a distorted view of the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the tragedies of this is that it is going to affect our fellowship. In the early church, the gnostic were responsible for circulating the truth that Jesus Christ was not a real person. They denied His humanity and they approached it in different ways. Though John does not mention them, and Paul does not mention them by name when he writes, for example, in Colossians, but he is dealing with the same truth that was an attack upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. So he just emphasizes this over and over again: We heard Him, we saw Him, we enjoyed fellowship with Him, and we are disturbed that this teaching is influencing some of the believers, making them question the truth concerning the Lord Jesus. He says, "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. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." (1 John 1:3-4)

We get a lot of consolation, don't we, out of the teaching concerning the humanity of the Lord Jesus. We love the teaching of His deity. We know that He is God and that He is all wise and all powerful, and that in His dealings with us we can always depend upon Him. He is always faithful to us. But one of the truths concerning the humanity of the Lord that is such a blessing, which the gnostic were trying to take away from the Christians, was that He is touched with all the feeling of our infirmities because He was tempted in all points like as we are. And, you know, one of the most comforting things about our walk with the Lord is that when we come to trials and testings in our lives--and we are facing them constantly, different kinds of testings--it is wonderful to know, isn't it, that the Lord understands what we are going through. He has been there before and He is able to sympathize with us and enter into our sufferings.

More than that, He meets our needs. So, the Apostle John looked upon this teaching as a threat to the fellowship of the believers in that day. In verse 4 he indicates that fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and the fellowship that we have with each other is one of the things that gives us fullness of joy. That is one reason we love to get together, isn't it, because of the blessing that it is.

Now. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." God is absolutely righteous. He has never been touched by sin and there is no darkness in Him. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and we ourselves are walking in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. So you see, fellowship with the Lord has its doctrinal aspects, and that is brought out here by the Apostle John in the first three verses, but it also has its practical aspects because, if we are going to walk in fellowship with the Lord, we have to walk in the light as He is in the light. That is exactly what John says in verse 7: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." I am sure that this is one reason the Lord established the Lord's Supper, to do this in remembrance of Him, because this is the place where we come together, and, if there has been any interruption in our fellowship with the Lord, as we remember Him and what He did for us and continues to do for us, this is the way that our fellowship with Him is restored.

John was very, very concerned about this. He does not mention the word "fellowship" in the rest of his epistle. In fact, I do not think the word "fellowship" appears from here on to the end of the Bible, but he strikes a keynote here. You notice how he says, "Walking. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ" is continually cleansing us from sin. (1 John 1:6-7)

Another passage that I want you to see tonight is in 2 Corinthians 6. I do not like to burden you with the Greek words, but there are two words that the Apostle Paul used in this passage. I am thinking of the last part of 2 Corinthians 6. You will notice that in this he also speaks of fellowship in verse 14. The word that is translated "fellowship" here is not the same word that the Apostle John used and that is used by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:9. It is another word altogether. The word that they use in

those other passages is translated “communion” in the last part of the verse. He says here, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship (or communion) hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what (fellowship, or) communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14) When he speaks of righteousness and unrighteousness, he is talking about believers and unbelievers. When he talks about light and darkness, he is doing exactly the same thing. Then he adds, “And what concord hath Christ with Belial (which is one of the devil’s names)? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall by my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:15-18) Now that is fellowship. To be a Father unto them does not mean that He was not a Father to those who were disobedient, but it is one thing to know that God is our Father, it is another thing to experience the blessing of realizing what that means. David, you remember, pointed out that “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him. Here the Apostle Paul is pointing out in all of these contrasts--believers and unbelievers, righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, he that believeth with an unbeliever, the temple of God with idols. Then pointing out that God has taken up His abode with us and we are to walk separate from the world. So, our fellowship can be affected when we have incorrect views of the Lord Jesus, as the Apostle John was saying in chapter 1, but our fellowship can also be affected if we fail to maintain the separation that needs to exist between us and unbelievers. This does not mean that we do not have contact with people. We have contact with people, most of us every day, who do not know the Lord; but that is not the place of fellowship. Our fellowship is with those who know the Saviour. One of the problems in the Corinthian church which led to all of the other problems was that their fellowship with the Lord was not what it should be, and here he is calling upon them to come out and separate themselves unto the Lord so that they can experience what it means to have true fellowship with Him. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 he says, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, which we are studying in our

Tuesday Bible Class, you remember that he says right at the very beginning--we have had these verses given to us this Christmas time – “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” (Philippians 1:3-5). There is not anything on earth that can compare with the fellowship that we as believers enjoy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we think of this in relation to the Lord and we think of our fellowship with Him, we are not really contributing anything to Him; but we read His Word to learn of Him, we spend time in prayer bringing our requests to Him. We are drawing from Him that grace and strength that we need day by day. He is the One Who gives us understanding. So the basic idea in fellowship is that there is a participation, a sharing, that goes on in our fellowship with the Lord. When you think of fellowship among us as believers, we are sharing with one another what we know of the Lord and our fellowship with Him. So as we come together as the people of God week after week, it is this fellowship with Christ that is the means of our being strengthened. You can see that Paul the Apostle had been strengthened and blessed time and time again from the day that he went to Philippi to preach the Gospel, and he rejoiced in the people and the fellowship that he had with them and the Gospel from the first day until that time.

We have talked a little bit on Tuesday about trials that Paul was going through. He was in prison. In Philippians 3:10 and 11, though we have not gotten this far by a long way, you will notice that he says, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Now that is fellowship: Knowing the Lord, knowing His power, knowing how He ministers to us in times of suffering, how we come to the place where we are less and less inclined to trust in ourselves and more and more inclined to trust in Him.

In 2 Corinthians, at the end of the epistle, we have a prayer of the Apostle Paul. This is what it says, 2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (this is the same Greek word “koinonia) of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us the Word. It is the Holy Spirit who strengthens us through the Word. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us by the

Word. This is fellowship, fellowship with the Spirit of God.

So you see this again and again. The Book of Ephesians is another reference. Once you begin to pay attention to this subject, while the word itself is not used nearly as many times as some of the other words that we are concerned with, but here in Ephesians 3:8-10: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

The principalities and powers in heavenly places are angelic beings, and angelic beings are learning the meaning of fellowship, Paul says, as they observe what God is doing in our lives from day to day. So these are wonderful passages, and when we think of this marvelous relationship that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ: He is our Friend, He is our Shepherd, He is our Companion.

As we read through the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see men and women who walked with God and who learned of God and talked to Him, and who were strengthened by Him and who sought to live each day for His glory. That is the reason I say that when we read in the Acts 2:42 that “They continued in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,” this is like saying, “They heard the truth, and then lived by the truth.” They heard about the Lord and learned about the Lord and then walked so that they would not only please the Lord, but enjoy fellowship with Him.

So, as we come day by day to our Bible reading, let’s remember that the important thing in reading our Bibles is that we have the opportunity through the Word of getting to know the Lord better, and the Lord has ways of guiding us even when we are following a schedule of Bible reading. There have been many, many times in my own reading when I have just been amazed at the way the reading for the day has met my need in the circumstances that I happen to be going through at that particular time.

This is ours because of our relationship to Christ. There is not anything in all of the world that compares with what we experience when we enjoy

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true fellowship with Him. The Lord has given us a wonderful fellowship here at Trinity. Let's pray that this will be preserved, but it will only be preserved as every one of us continues to walk day by day in fellowship with the Lord. What we got from Him yesterday can help us today, but we need more today and we will need more tomorrow and in the days to come. It is wonderful that we can walk with Him and that we can trust Him and look to Him for the supply of our every need. I trust that all of us will learn to enjoy this wonderful fellowship with our blessed Lord day by day.