



DEVOTED TO THE FELLOWSHIP

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 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, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” [Acts 2:42-47](#)

This description of the newly-birthing church in Jerusalem provides one of Scripture’s clearest pictures of what the Christian community should look like. Though the Body of Christ has had two thousand years to mature since then, and has grown to comprise millions of believers worldwide, it would be hard to find a congregation today that matches this inspiring precedent. However, Jesus will return for a Church that will be more glorious than anything previously seen. To become that Church, we must continue to recapture the commitment to God, His people, and His purpose that we see in the book of Acts.

BEING DEVOTED

The first thing we should note is the attitude with which the early Church approached their relationship with God and their life together. [Acts 2:42](#) tells us that the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The Greek could be translated to say that they were “wholly given over to” or “adhering themselves to” these things. It conveys the idea of total, ongoing commitment in heart and mind.

This is a foreign concept to many today. People tend to think of church involvement merely in terms of attendance, and it can be a fairly casual step into—and out of—church “membership.” However, nothing about our life in God is to be casual or half-hearted. We are told: “**And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength**” (Mark 12:30). This passionate approach to God will be reflected in how we outwork the calling He has for us together.

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

“**Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul,**” Acts 4:32a

One of the things that the early Church was devoted to was “**the fellowship.**” Sometimes, Christians can tend to think of “fellowship” merely as socializing with others in the church, but it has a much stronger meaning than this. The Greek word is *koinonia*. It literally means joining or partnering with others in something. It is another example of a word that would not have had a particularly religious connotation at the time. In fact, when we read in Luke 5:10 that James and John were Simon Peter’s “**partners**” in his fishing business, the word used there is from the same root. It conveys the idea of being united with other people by and for a common purpose.

It is important to note that Acts 2:42 tells us that the believers “**devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship.**” It isn’t just that they were avid listeners, but that they were devoted to outworking together what they heard. True fellowship is not present unless we are responding together in obedience to what God is telling us to do. Of course, this cannot happen unless individually we are being obedient to God. Therefore, before we look further at the shared aspect of our life in Christ, we must remind ourselves of the importance of our personal response.

THE INTEGRITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Obviously, Christian fellowship can only exist between Christians:

“**Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?**” 2 Corinthians 6:14

However, the degree to which even Christians can experience fellowship will depend on the individual relationship each has with God. Integration requires integrity. Ongoing sin in the life of a believer will hinder our communion with God and with others:

“**If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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.**” 1 John 1:6-7

Therefore, for the sake of our intimacy with God and our fellowship with one another, we must “**abstain from every form of evil**” (1Thessalonians 5:22). We must never be guilty of hypocrisy, acting one way in church circles and another way elsewhere (see Luke 12:1). Instead, we must pursue godliness in every aspect of life. For example:

- **In the home**, our attitude should be one of patience, understanding, and kindness, and our conduct should be consistent with God’s will for the family:

“**Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.**” Colossians 3:18-21



- **In the workplace or school**, the Christian should be honest, respectful, faithful, and hard-working, and should never be guilty of lying, contentiousness, unreliability, or laziness:

“Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.” [Colossians 3:22](#)

In fact, we should act righteously in every relationship and every interaction in the world: “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” ([Romans 13:7](#)). How we conduct ourselves in life reflects not just on our own personal testimony but also on the congregation to which we belong, on the Church generally, and indeed on the Lord Himself:

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” [1 Peter 2:12](#)

THE INTEGRITY OF THE BODY

So, maintaining personal integrity is the only way to ensure the integrity of the body of believers. This will flow into how we relate to one another. Regrettably, there is always potential in the church for relational issues to arise that, if not addressed properly, can have devastating consequences. Many a congregation has collapsed as a result of disagreements, jealousy, suspicion, or gossip, grieving the Lord and causing the world to ridicule and dismiss the Church. We must guard and act against such strategies of the enemy. We will briefly consider just two potential problems, though the principles involved in dealing with them have much wider application.

GOSSIP

“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.” [Proverbs 16:28 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Authentic church life creates an environment of friendship and trust, in which many personal things are shared. When information is inappropriately passed on, and particularly when confidences are broken, the effects can be very damaging. Scripture strongly condemns gossip, and we need to eradicate this poison from the church. However, where people are genuinely interested and involved in one another’s lives, it can sometimes be difficult to know when the sharing of information is legitimate and when it is gossip.

The root of gossip is malice (see, for example, [1 Timothy 6:4 \(NIV 1984\)](#) and [3 John v.10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)) and the goal, both in the telling and the hearing, is sensationalism (“[The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts](#)” [Proverbs 18:8 - NIV 1984](#)). It is, therefore, helpful to ask ourselves these questions when considering whether to share or listen to information regarding another: Is my intention to benefit the person concerned? Am I, on some level, enjoying the sharing of this information, even though it relates to something negative? Would I be happy with the person concerned knowing about this conversation?

Before leaving this subject, it is important to note that we should also exercise wisdom and discretion when discussing church-related concerns (whether regarding individuals or the congregation) with those outside the church. Quite apart from the issue of confidentiality, such people are unlikely to be able to help in resolving the issues, so what is the point of sharing them?

GRIEVANCES

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” [Galatians 5:14-15](#)



Misunderstandings can arise and mistakes can be made in any relationship—and of course, Christians are still able to act in a deliberately sinful way at times. In any of these situations, we must respond rightly, and Jesus directs us how:

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” [Matthew 5:23-24](#)

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” [Matthew 18:15-17](#)

Whoever is in the wrong, it is always up to you to make the first move. If you know (or even suspect) that you have offended a brother, don’t wait for him to come to you—go and put matters right. If you feel a brother has wronged you, don’t wait for him to come to you—go and put matters right. If the attempt does not succeed, try again. When necessary, [Matthew 18:15-17](#) shows how to involve other people. We are exhorted in [Ephesians 4:3](#) to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” In humility and submission to God, we must do everything we can to bring about restoration.

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”
[1 Corinthians 1:10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS

“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” [Colossians 3:13](#)

Of course, a vital component in resolving relational problems is forgiveness. We are repeatedly commanded in Scripture to forgive one another—so the assumption is that there will always be plenty of need for this in church life! Christians, of all people, should be good at forgiving others, since we are all beneficiaries of the most amazing and undeserved mercy. We must commit ourselves to being those who continually flow in the grace and mercy of God towards one another, in obedience to Him and for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ.

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others... Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” [Romans 12:4-5, 10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

“AND THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’
TEACHING AND THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF
BREAD AND THE PRAYERS.”

[Acts 2:42](#)



1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Independence is not a viable option for us—we belong to one another. We must bear in mind that our relating within the body of Christ is in all ways to be an outworking of this fundamental instruction:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12

We must ask God to show us how He sees those around us and to enable us, by the Spirit, to know His love for them. Thus envisioned and equipped, we will find it easier to think and act in true love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (NIV 1984)

Here are some further practical expressions of our love for one another:

PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;” Romans 12:10 (NASB)

We live in an individualistic culture that advocates self-importance, self-advancement, and self-fulfillment. However, our focus as Christians is to be on God first, then on others, being more concerned for their good than for our own:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3-4

SERVING ONE ANOTHER

“...through love serve one another.” Galatians 5:13

Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28), and similarly we are in the church not primarily to receive, but to give. Every Christian has some means of serving, whether publicly or “behind the scenes.” Everyone should be actively seeking to contribute to the building up of the local church. There are many ways of doing so, and we would encourage you to speak with one of the elders to learn about ways you can serve. If you are a member of one of our Living Light churches, you can fill out the serving survey at livinglightchurch.com/serve.

ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER

“...encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Hebrews 3:13 (NIV 1984)

There are many Scriptural exhortations to encourage one another, and most of us know from experience the powerful effect of encouragement (or the lack of it). We should, therefore, take to heart the above instruction from Hebrews, determining not to let a day go by without encouraging someone. Any kind words we speak to others will no doubt be appreciated, but God is the God of all encouragement (see 2 Corinthians 1:3 - NIV 1984), and people will be most built up when our encouragement is conveying His mind and heart, lovingly communicating the truth of His Word.

MINISTERING TO ONE ANOTHER

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV 1984)

The well-known passage on love from [1 Corinthians 13](#) comes in the middle of Scripture's most extensive treatment of why and how the body of Christ is to function in the gifts of the Spirit (see [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#)). We should be looking to build one another up in this way, taking every opportunity to respond to the Spirit's leading, whether by bringing a contribution publicly in a meeting, or by ministering to an individual.

OFFERING HOSPITALITY

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” [1 Peter 4:9 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

As far as circumstances allow, our open hearts to one another should be reflected in open homes, where we are happy to provide others with a place to stay, enjoy a meal, or just relax. This can be a particular blessing for those who live alone, or whose homes offer no Christian warmth or encouragement. We should not be overly concerned about having the house spotlessly tidy, or providing impressive meals. The essence of hospitality is our welcome and our willingness to share what we have, be it much or little.

MEETING TOGETHER

“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](#)

To be able to outwork fellowship, we need to be together! The believers in the early Church were very committed to this, and so should we be. Hopefully, we will always come away from meetings feeling built up, but this should not be our primary motivation in going. We should go to bless God and others. Having this perspective will help us to prioritize fellowship over other, more self-serving options.

Looking again at the church in Jerusalem, we see that **“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved”** ([Acts 2:46-47](#)). This passage indicates that there were public meetings, smaller gatherings in homes, and the sharing of life on a day-to-day basis.

THE CONGREGATION

“I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.” [Psalm 35:18](#)

The Sunday morning meeting is an excellent opportunity to come together to celebrate the goodness of God and to hear His Word to us. It also provides a very public testimony to the world. We should never take times such as these for granted, but should approach them with faith and excitement, fully available for all that God wants to do in and through us.

HOMEGROUPS

“...When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” [1 Corinthians 14:26 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Wonderful though the large gathering can be, it is not the best environment for everything that God wants to do in our lives. For example, it does not usually provide the opportunity to build significant relationships, ask questions,

learn to contribute, give and receive care, etc. Small gatherings such as homegroups usually provide a better context for these, and indeed for the consistent outworking of much of what we have looked at in this session. We, therefore, place a great emphasis on the importance of homegroups, and expect everyone who is part of this church to belong to one, with all this implies in terms of attendance and participation.

SHARING LIFE

“...all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.” 1 Peter 3:8

Even attendance on a Sunday morning and involvement in a homegroup is not enough. If we are devoted to the fellowship, we will seek out opportunities to spend time with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The believers in Jerusalem were so committed that they met together every day! This does not translate into a packed schedule of church events, but rather speaks of a desire to share life and rejoice in the goodness of God together. In doing so, we are to be Christ-like and Kingdom-minded, reaching across worldly barriers of age, race, upbringing, life circumstances, interests, etc.

CORPORATE PRAYER

“...they devoted themselves to...the prayers.” Acts 2:42

The commitment of the early Church to corporate prayer is clear throughout the book of Acts (see also Acts 1:14, 4:24-31 and 12:12). This commitment no doubt sprang from the apostles’ teaching, which would itself have been the passing on of Jesus’ teachings on prayer. Corporate prayer is an important aspect of fellowship, in which we join together in heart and voice, calling upon God to move mightily in, through, and beyond us.

A TESTIMONY TO THE WORLD

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Though He calls us into real community, God does not want us to be insular and exclusive, but rather to be interacting with the world and a visible demonstration of His love. We see that the church in Jerusalem, though focused on God and committed to one another, were “having favor with all the people” and that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). We believe for this to be our testimony too, as we give ourselves wholeheartedly to fellowship with God and one another.

RECOMMENDED READING

1. *The Safest Place on Earth* by Larry Crabb
2. *Hospitality Commands* by Alexander Strauch
3. *Does the Future Have a Church?* by Terry Virgo
4. *Paul’s Idea of Community* by Robert J. Banks

