

“THE CHURCH ON PURPOSE”

“On Purpose In Fellowship”

Scripture Reading – Philippians, 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

‘God... has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’






1 Corinthians, 1:9A, NIV

THE CHURCH ON PURPOSE is based on the example of the Early Christian Church.

‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.’

Acts, 2:42-47, NIV

In Acts, 2:40-47, we read of five purposes God desires for his Church:

-  **EVANGELISM** (Acts, 2:40-41)
-  **DISCIPLESHIP** (Acts, 2:42)
-  **FELLOWSHIP** (Acts, 2:42, 44, 46)
-  **MINISTRY** (Acts, 2:45)
-  **WORSHIP** (Acts, 2:42, 46-47)

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In this series, we will concentrate on this amazing summary of the Early Church.

When they actively engaged in EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP, FELLOWSHIP, MINISTRY, and WORSHIP, what was the result? **‘THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED’.**

If we do as they did, can our same Lord add to our number **‘THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED’?**

“ON PURPOSE IN FELLOWSHIP”

If the Church exists to reach people for Jesus and to teach people how to become like Jesus and to live like Jesus, then it must also be responsible to care for people's needs in the name of Jesus...

‘Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”.’

John, 13:34-35, NIV

If there is a faithful proclamation of the Gospel, there must be a programme to faithfully teach and train those who respond to Christ's claim on their lives. This must be carried out in an atmosphere and setting showing caring Christian love. **That setting is called FELLOWSHIP...**

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

Dictionary: *‘friendly association with others, companionship.’*

Encarta: *‘communion, society: a sharing of common interests, goals, experiences, or views; companionship or friendly association; similarity: membership in a group, or sharing of characteristics with others.’*

Thesaurus: *‘association: affiliation, club, group, society; companionship: camaraderie, comradeship, friendship, friendliness, partnership.’*

Christian fellowship involves all these things, but it includes much more.

‘If there is no mutual trust, there [can be] no fellowship. Christian fellowship means trust that is felt by another. Whilst some view fellowship as thrilling – because the possibility of fellowship with God and one another makes life worth living – others view it as threatening – because they fear intimacy with God or being open and vulnerable with people.’

“UNDERSTANDING THEOLOGY II”, R T Kendall

Perhaps fellowship in the Church today is exemplified by this story.

‘A primary school class was asked to bring in a symbol of their faith for a “show and tell”. The first child said, “I am a MUSLIM and this is my PRAYER MAT”. Another child said, “I am JEWISH and this STAR OF DAVID is a symbol of my faith”. Another child said, “I am a ROMAN CATHOLIC and this is my ROSARY”. Another child said, “I am a SALVATIONIST and this is my TEA CUP. Finally, one child stood up and said, “I am a SOUTHERN BAPTIST and this is my CASSEROLE DISH...”’






You might be a Southern Baptist if your definition of FELLOWSHIP involves food!

You might be a Salvationist if your definition of FELLOWSHIP involves tea and biscuits...



'How did the Early Church fellowship without coffee and cakes or tea and biscuits?'
Howard Hendricks

It is a good question... 'How did the Early Christian Church experience fellowship?'

The New Testament uses five Greek words to describe Christian fellowship.

-  **KOINONIA** means 'COMMUNION' or 'SHARING IN', and is used twenty times.
-  **KOINONEO** means 'DISTRIBUTING' or 'SHARING', and is used eight times.
-  **KOINONOS** means 'PARTAKER' or 'ONE WHO SHARES IN', and is used ten times.
-  **METECHOS** means 'PARTAKING' or 'SHARING IN', and is used six times.
-  **METEKO** means 'TO SHARE OR PARTAKE', and is used eight times.

True Christian fellowship necessarily has two parts:

-  We experience 'vertical' fellowship' with God.
-  We experience 'horizontal' fellowship' with one another.

If ON PURPOSE FELLOWSHIP is to be Bible based, it must include three factors...

1. TRUE FELLOWSHIP CALLS US TO CHRIST

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.'

Acts, 2:42, NIV

We have already considered this as a part of ON PURPOSE DISCIPLESHIP.

However, it is so much more than that. Surely it also refers to their life and experience in and of Christ. They were also working out the impact Christ had made on their lives within the context of the Early Christian Church. They were the true pioneers of Christian fellowship, **KOINONIA**.

True Christian fellowship commences with our relationship to Christ.

'God... has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.'

I Corinthians, 1:9, NIV

Richard Halverson, once Chaplain of the US Senate told the following story...

'My son was playing in the garden with his friends, when the conversation turned into one of those 'My dad can beat your dad' routines. One boy said, "My dad knows the City Mayor". Another said, "That's nothing! My dad knows the State Governor". Then my son said, "That's nothing! My dad knows God". I slipped away from my place of eavesdropping with tears streaming down my face and reached my study. Falling down on my knees, I earnestly prayed: "Oh, God, I pray that my boy will always be able to say, 'My dad knows God'".'

John writes about having fellowship with others... but it begins with God.

'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify

to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.'

I John, 1:1-4, NIV

There are three principles behind true Christian fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP must be grounded in God's Word... because without this underlying strength, togetherness is impossible.

FELLOWSHIP is mutual... it depends upon the unity of believers.

FELLOWSHIP is renewed daily through the Holy Spirit... it combines social and spiritual interaction, and it is made possible only through relationship with Christ.

'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'

II Corinthians, 13:14, NIV

'Fellowship between God and believers reaches the climax of its expression in THE NEW TESTAMENT writings, stressing fellowship with Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural relationship, involving an association of persons who have attained fellowship with God through forgiveness of sin. A moral partnership with the Redeemer is implied. The cornerstone of Paul's theology, and the high peak of New Testament thought, is 'UNION WITH CHRIST'. Life to Paul was living with the eternal Christ. Such fellowship was the guarantee of the hereafter.'

"BLACK'S BIBLE DICTIONARY", J L Miller & M S Miller

2. TRUE FELLOWSHIP CALLS US TOGETHER

'All the believers were together and had everything in common.'

Acts, 2:44, NIV

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES frequently mentions that 'THEY WERE TOGETHER'.

The Early Christian Church was together in one place and together in one mind. The purpose of fellowship calls us together on the common ground of knowing Jesus Christ, so that our hearts and minds will reflect his character.

'If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.'

Philippians, 2:1-2, NIV

'Many people – even Christians – live only to make a good impression on others or to please themselves. But selfishness brings discord. Paul therefore stressed spiritual unity, asking the Philippians to love one another and to be one in spirit and purpose. When we work together, caring for the problems of others as if they were our problems, we demonstrate

Christ's example of putting others first, and we experience unity. Don't be so concerned about making a good impression or meeting your own needs that you strain relationships within God's family.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

'My relationship with God is part of my relationship with men. Failure in one aspect will cause failure in the other.'

Andrew Murray

'Fellowship with God and Christ inevitably led to the establishment of little cells of believers, brothers, comrades in faith, fellows closely knit by common experience of the living, resurrected Christ. These fellowships became the ECCLESIA – the earliest Christian Churches – enjoying what Paul described as "THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL".'

"BLACK'S BIBLE DICTIONARY", J L Miller & M S Miller

In fellowship, we must learn to say and act like we need one another.

I cannot fulfil the calls of fellowship by standing alone or being on my own. The members of our Corps fellowship do not grow best in isolation – but when we are all together (in one place) and all together (in one mind – the mind of Christ).

WHO ARE WE?

Our flags declare that we are **THE SALVATION ARMY** and the **MALTON CORPS**, but we are surely more than a label. We are the Body of Christ. We are the Church of Christ. We are the Family of God. We are not a group of people who meet together to sing songs, read a book, and listen to a talk. We are not here out of habit or tradition. We are not here because there is nowhere else to go. We are the People of God, locked into fellowship with him and with each other.

Our fellowship is not with the world, nor the things of the world.

'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.'

II Corinthians 6:14-16, NIV

3. TRUE FELLOWSHIP CALLS US TO CARE

'Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.'

Acts, 2:46, NIV

Perhaps Southern Baptists have it right, there is food in fellowship.

Fellowship calls for us to look out for one another. It is more than the attitude of *'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours'*. It runs far deeper than *'You watch my back and I'll watch yours'*. Fellowship runs deep in our love for Christ and calls us to love one another.



FELLOWSHIP CAN BE LITERALLY SPELLED OUT AS MONEY

Sometimes, **KOINONIA** refers to money... putting our money where our hearts are.

'For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.'

Romans, 15:26, NIV



FELLOWSHIP CAN BE SPELLED OUT AS MEMBERSHIP

When Paul and Barnabas felt like nobodies, it was a wonderful moment for them to be accepted by 'the pillars' of the Church. This is partly what Church membership means. The Church is affirmed when one asks for membership. The person is affirmed when one is accepted for membership. The mutual affirmation occurs with the heart-felt shaking of hands when the right hand of fellowship is offered, and taken.

'James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.'

Galatians, 2:9, NIV

'Community fellowship means people have to learn to care practically for each other.'

Eugene H Peterson

Application

'Fellowships of Christians were expected to show themselves worthy of that experience by shining with good works in the eyes of the non-Christian community. Their belief that Jesus would soon come again led many first-century fellowships to behave with exemplary conduct.'

"BLACK'S BIBLE DICTIONARY", J L Miller & M S Miller

THE RESULT?

'[They] praised God and enjoyed the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

Acts, 2:47, NIV

This week, I would like you to carefully and prayerfully consider four questions.



What do you expect to gain from our worshipping family?



What do you expect to gain from our wider church family?



What should our worshipping family expect from you?



What should our wider church family expect from you?

Why not compare your answers to the first questions with someone in the fellowship?

But you keep the answers to the last two questions to yourself and ponder them often!

*To this purpose, let us live so we may be able to say, **"Fellowship? We did it On Purpose!"***