

FELLOWSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

- 1) “**Fellowship**” is a term found in the Bible and used by many religious people today
- 2) Is it limited to our worship and work together as Christians? Or does it also include our socializing together in various ways?
- 3) We need to understand what the Bible teaches about “fellowship” and how to only use this term as it is used in the New Testament

I) “**KOINONIA**”

Acts 2:42 – Fellowship	2 Cor. 9:13 – Sharing	Phil. 3:10 – Fellowship
Rom. 15:26 – Contribution	2 Cor. 13:14 – Communion	Philemon 6 – Sharing
1 Cor. 1:9 – Fellowship	Gal. 2:9 – Fellowship	Heb. 13:16 – Share
1 Cor. 10:16 – Communion (2)	Eph. 3:9 – Fellowship	1 Jn. 1:3 – Fellowship (2)
2 Cor. 6:14 – Fellowship	Phil. 1:5 – Fellowship	1 Jn. 1:6 – Fellowship
2 Cor. 8:4 – Fellowship	Phil. 2:1 – Fellowship	1 Jn. 1:7 – Fellowship

(Based on NKJV; other words are sometimes used to translate *koinonia*, such as “taking part in,” “participation,” “partnership”)

Definition:

“That of sharing in something with someone...‘refer(s) primarily though not invariably to participation in something rather than association with others: and there is often a genitive to indicate that which one participates or shares.’”

(“Communion” R. P. Martin, [quote from A. R. George, *Communion with God in the New Testament*, p. 133], *New Bible Dictionary*, second edition, ed. J. D. Douglas, p. 223)

A) *Sharing in something with someone*

- 1) Virtually all “fellowship” is a sharing or having something in common with others
- 2) The NT does not refer to everything or everyone we share with as “fellowship”
 - a) Two Christians may be in business together – may be good with some advantages but this is not a “fellowship” instructed for Christians

B) *Primarily participation in something rather than association with others*

- 1) Association alone does not necessarily mean we are having fellowship
 - a) Christians often associate with people of the world at work and school, as well as in recreation and families, but this is not “fellowship” in the Bible use of this word – we may associate with people of the world, but we must not participate in the evil of this world (1 Cor. 5:9-10; Eph. 5:11; no association or participation with brethren in sin or false teachers – 1 Cor. 5:9, 11; 2 Jn. 10-11)

C) *There is often a genitive to indicate that which one participates or shares*

- 1) Means that the verse or context of the word “fellowship” will often tell the area of fellowship by naming the person or thing we have fellowship with
- 2) Examples of 1 John 1:3, 6, 7; 1 Corinthians 10:16; Philippians 1:3-5

II) **What the New Testament Reveals We Have Fellowship In**

- A) God, Jesus Christ, the apostles, one another (1 Jn. 1:3-7)
- B) The Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1)
- C) The body and blood of Jesus (1 Cor. 10:16)
- D) The gospel when we support those preaching the gospel (Phil. 1:5)

E) The saints when contribute to help with their needs or share our faith and good works with them (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 2 Cor. 9:13; Philemon 6; Heb. 13:16)

*These are not the “fruit of fellowship,” but actual fellowship itself; missing on the list are cases of “social intermingling” – eating common meals, recreation, camping retreats, etc.

III) “Fellowship” in Acts 2:42

A) Many see *four* separate items the early Christians “continued steadfastly in” – apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers

1) This “fellowship” is often defined as eating, visiting, socializing, etc. (appeal to v. 46)

2) But the second and third items are not separated by an “and” (Gk *kai*) and therefore might best be understood as one item literally translated as “*fellowship in the breaking of the bread*” (Lord’s Supper)

3) Therefore, we have *three* items continued steadfastly in – the apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship in the breaking of the bread, and prayers

B) This proves again that Biblical fellowship is consistently spiritual in nature just as the nature of the kingdom is spiritual in nature – a spiritual kingdom offering spiritual salvation and spiritual fellowship

1) The mission of Jesus: Seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10)

2) The commission given to the apostles: Go preach the gospel (Mk. 16:15-16)

3) The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)

4) The kingdom is *not* eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17)

5) “Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” (1 Cor. 11:23)

6) The “power unto salvation”: The gospel (Rom. 1:16)

C) There is a place and time for having social time together – “breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46)

1) These social interactions were **never** referred to as “fellowship” in the Biblical sense, therefore there is **no scriptural authority** for local churches to build and maintain “fellowship halls” and recreation centers as part of their divinely given work, or to label such social interactions as the work of “spiritual fellowship”

Conclusion

It is vital to call Bible things by Bible names, to do God’s work in God’s way, and to define Bible words with Bible meanings. This is what it means to be led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14) and to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9). God revealed these things for our understanding and guidance in truth. We please God when following His word. May this be our desire and goal in all things as we enjoy the spiritual salvation and spiritual fellowship of His spiritual kingdom!

(much of the information and organization for this study was obtained and revised from the excellent biblical study, Fine Tuning “Fellowship” by Harold Hancock)