

Fellowship

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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“All by myself”

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All by myself, don't want to be all by myself”. Famous song – simple sentiment. Very few people are loners, liking their own company. Most are like this song “Don't want to be all by myself”. In fact the nature of society means that actually none of us can live without anyone else.

TENNIS

As we seem to have nothing on telly at the moment except sport, I thought I'd give you a few sporting examples. We usually associate Tennis with being a lone sport. People usually compete as individuals. But think carefully – apart from the fact that people do play as doubles or in teams such as the Davis Cup or the Olympics, there is no such thing as a tennis loner. To play tennis, you need someone else! It isn't a one man game! We can't play tennis all by ourselves!

FOOTBALL Much is the same with football. You can have a kick around by yourself but to play, you need to be part of a team. In fact unless the team is complete, you can't compete effectively.

ENGLAND TEAM

The truth is that humans are social beings and we just cannot do without one another. It's how we are made and that's how God made us. That said, we generally we like to associate with those that are like ourselves people we have something in common with.

BRASIL

That is the diversity God has made the human race into. As we will find out in a later week, it's that diversity that is as enriching as our unity.

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so, we are made to be social animals. Why did God make us that way: because we are made in God's image. One of the amazing truths about God is that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God but plural – a Trinity. We are introduced to God in the plural in the first verse in the Bible. In the beginning God created God word in hebrew for God there is the word “Elohim”. It's a plural word. Even more significant in Genesis are the words where God says “let US make man in our own image.”. God is fellowship – He's not a lonely figure looking for company – but he enjoys our company when we come seeking Him.

God hasn't just made us as people to be together, but in Christ God has made us to function together as His people as the body of Christ.

In the next few weeks we are going to be exploring fellowship, being in fellowship with God and with one another. So what can we say about being a Christian in relation to fellowship?

LONE STAR First of all, we can say that the the Christian faith is not a lone star occupation. You've come across them and so have I: people who once ran well as Christians but now don't worship with God's people. If we challenge them, they say they haven't abandoned their faith. They say: Jesus is OK but the church..... well, they've been put off and they no longer worship – perhaps they had a bad experience of church or whatever. So their faith is “personal”. They see no need of fellowship.

I would like to think that we who are part of church have a much more positive view of church but that's not always the case. Attitudes towards church can be negative, critical, almost apologetic. I rarely come across anyone who tells me how amazing their church is. Usually they tell me the problems. We say how important faith in Christ is – and it truly is – but we play down church almost as something not important. We say how we should promote Jesus and not promote church because going to church doesn't make people Christians. It doesn't. But it's an absolutely vital part of God's plan of salvation to all those He calls to faith in Christ.

Yet as we will see in this series, church is something God ordained, with Christ as it's head and Holy Spirit empowered. How could it possibly be unimportant or irrelevant. It's vital. It's central to our faith. God has made us to have fellowship with one another as part of the body of Christ. Church should be so good that we go out and tell people "come here and find the living Christ because He's among us!" Would you ever say that about this church? Why not? We are His body! Of course people should find Jesus through us.

Can our church ever be like that? Yes. Because church is ordained of God. We do it through our fellowship together – with one another and with Christ! In fact we don't grow spiritually without fellowship. So what is fellowship?

KOINONIA is the Greek word in the NT for fellowship

KOINONIA is defined in this way: Fellowship, communion, sharing, contributing, to hold something in common. There are two things we can say about fellowship when we trust and follow Jesus.

POINT

- we have fellowship with Christ. We enter into an eternal relationship with the living God in Christ. - *9 God is to be trusted, the God who called you to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.* What's amazing about this is that we have a sharing with God. He's part of us by His Spirit. "Fellowship" was never used to describe man's relationship to God before the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell the church. It is an exclusively post-pentecost relationship. (Kyle Pope). This is something special to us. Once we were far away from God, now he has communion with us. He shared Himself with us. Mind-blowing isn't it? It gets more challenging

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- we have fellowship with those Christ has fellowship with. When we enter into fellowship with God, we enter into fellowship with everyone else who is in fellowship with God. We are *"called to be God's holy people, who belong to him in union with Christ Jesus, together with all people everywhere who worship our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."* That's everyone who belong to Him. We're automatically sharers, participators together in the work of God. It's the response to the lone stars who say Christianity is personal, individual. It isn't. If you enter into fellowship with God, you are automatically in fellowship with everyone else – whether you like them or not! And is we are in Christ as they are in Christ – then we all have equal value before Him as they are in fellowship with Him in exactly the same as ourselves. Quite a challenge isn't it?

Having said that Koinonia is an action word. Fellowship is sharing something in common, it's contributing towards something. We have been brought together to DO something. The church of God has a mission. It's not the work of the Holy Spirit alone, it's Him working with us and through us to bring about the purposes of God. Here's a definition of Koinonia by a guy named Bob Gilliam which summarises what the biblical meaning of koinonia is:

KOINONIA – Gilliam

Fellowship is a relationship of inner unity among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's will on earth. Bob Gilliam

Unity creates action. Kyle Pope puts it this way:

A close study of the usage of this word shows that action is always included in its meaning. Fellowship, you see, is not just being together, it is doing together! This is a point almost universally ignored by Christian groups today.

How true that is. We often say how important unity is amongst the church of God – but so often it has its limit. We'll explore that idea in a later week.

One of the greatest expressions of our unity as a church is marked by what we are going to do this morning and that's communion. Communion is koinonia. It was given to us by Jesus to share. Why? So that we may be constantly reminded that the reason we are God's people – and the reason we are in fellowship with one another – is because as Paul put it in our passage this morning: *called you to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

There's another verse in chapter 10 that we often mention in relation to communion.

VERSE

The cup we use in the Lord's Supper and for which we give thanks to God: when we drink from it, we are

sharing in the blood of Christ. And the bread we break: when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ. Because there is the one loaf of bread, all of us, though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf.
Corinthians 10:16-17

What makes us the people of God? Jesus. His blood was shed and His body was broken for us. We need a constant reminder because we so have the tendency to trivialise His death or trivialise the fellowship He has brought us into – fellowship with Himself and fellowship with others He's called.

So as we come to communion, let me sum up like this.

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Our fellowship with one another can reflect our fellowship with Christ

Our fellowship with one another comes out of our fellowship with Christ. If we don't think fellowship is important, or church is important, then how important is our faith to us. How important is Jesus? If He's important, then it should reflect in our desire to live our lives according to His will. For some, a poor relationship in church, or a poor view of church, reflects what they think of Jesus.

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Our fellowship with Christ affects our fellowship with others.

It works the other way around too. If we understand just what Jesus has done for us, and that He brings us into relationship with others as He has included us in His church, then we need to examine our relationship with the others He has called. Now fellowship is sharing, it's contributing. So if church isn't what it should be, do we walk away and become a lone star? No, that's not sharing, that's not contributing. If God has called us, then we are meant to be part of it. So therefore our contribution should enrich the church. Rather than just having a bad view of church, we should be saying "can I help?". "What can I do?" Because that's what koinonia is all about.

So where I want us to go in the next couple of months is to realise that because the Church is God-appointed, headed by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, then this local expression of the body of Christ should do something we desire to join together to make it into a fellowship that draws people to Christ. A church fellowship that we would recommend to anyone we come across. A church fellowship that brings Jesus to this community in a fresh way.

I know that sometimes it hasn't been like that. As we come to communion, let's recognise those times when we've not been like Jesus to one another, and to this community and pray that the Holy Spirit will empower us afresh to see how amazing God intends the body of Christ to be, to play our part in it and to transform us into the people we should be.