

Fellowship

(Week 5)

Central Truth: *“The Body must respond to itself as parts connected at the heart.”*

Fellowship Defined

(Day 21)

Fellowship equals the Body acting in a normal and healthy fashion toward itself. We put aside the notion that fellowship is programmed or created through organization or activity, and we come to see that it is known as we accept and embrace who we are in Christ, and act as brothers and sisters who desire to and are commissioned to work together. When we become precious to each other (someone for whom Christ died), bonding and oneness begin to take place.

We need to engage in service projects together. We need to do good works about which the Body has a passion and a unique niche within our community. We don't know as much about this because we don't know each other well spiritually. We need to plan “face to face” time and share our hearts together in dialogue about our dreams and spiritual gifts and passions.

Harmony of purpose results when the Body acts in a normal and healthy fashion toward its calling and its world; when we become convinced that the world will never be won to Jesus by our professionalism or our knowledge, but only by our oneness backing up our witness. We will then elevate the importance of harmonious ministry to its rightful place. The results will be in touching outsiders and restoring relationships with inactive members.

We must strongly communicate that the vision God gives us makes every member significant and vital, that every member is a key player in His plan and purpose. Time is too short and the family of God too close to continue the “us and them” game. Phrases like “THEY won't listen even if we tell them,” “THEY don't understand what's involved in having preschoolers,” “THEY took away our fill in the blank,” “THEY spend all the money on the fill in the blank.” We have a large communication job to build and rebuild the spirit of “WE” in our church family.

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” (Philippians 2:2)

To become a welcoming church we must seek out guests for the purpose of serving them rather than just being nice to them. We must become a Body which works hard to build bridges of relationships to encourage guests to return, along with establishing new

members. Some fellowship follows “natural” lines of relationship, and some has to be orchestrated and may even feel awkward at first. Whether we have new members’ receptions, or whether it takes some rotational pattern among volunteer homes from each age group, it has to be intentional at first before it becomes second nature.

We need to also require of all members some involvement in a ministry from the time they join us, not for the maintenance of programs, but for the connections needed within the Body to build fellowship. Some of these expressions of love will need to grow out of the joy of being in the same class or small group together, as certain groups begin to meet after evening service at a restaurant, or in members’ homes. These are some good things to which we need to return, and there are new activities we need to start for the future growth of fellowship.

Points to Ponder

What comes to mind when you hear the word “Fellowship?” What are some ways First Baptist Church can promote fellowship? What can you do personally to promote fellowship?

Fellowship – The Power of Oneness

(Day 22)

This section is an excerpt from a sermon prepared by Steve Andrews. You are encouraged to read this sermon in its entirety located in the Appendix section of our Vision Walk.

A second grade teacher gave an assignment to her class for the students to bring an item from home that represented their religious background. She wanted to teach the kids about the diversity in the world about worshipping God. At show and tell time, they began to share what their particular item meant to their faith. A Catholic child brought some rosary beads and shared with the class how they used the beads in prayer. There was a Native American child who brought a dream catcher. He told the class how to place dream catchers above their head to capture their dreams that they had in the night. It would filter out the bad ones and hold the good dreams in their memory. A Jewish child brought a candle and shared how it was used to celebrate Hanukkah. One kid pulled some food out of his bag. He said, “I’m Southern Baptist, and I brought a chicken casserole.”

There are many misconceptions about fellowship as illustrated in the opening story about bringing chicken casserole. When we think about fellowship, we think of an event that would take place beyond the regularly scheduled church services. It’s an informal gathering where the saints enjoy each other’s company. These fun meetings of the saints include fellowship, but fellowship is far more than hanging out with friends. Jesus calls attention to the fact that genuine fellowship is one of the most powerful tools for evangelism for the church.

Read John 17:19-26

Our text says that Jesus prayed for all who would call upon His name to be one, and a watching world would be drawn to believe in Christ (John 17:20-21). Here Jesus shares one of the most overlooked tools of evangelism. Jesus says, “When a watching lost world looks at a Body of believers, they see something that they can’t find anywhere else. They desire love, support, encouragement, and acceptance, and they will be drawn to the Savior.” He didn’t say the world is going to be drawn because of great preaching. He didn’t say great singing would cause hoards of people to be drawn to Christ. He said, in effect, “I’m praying that they will be one as the heavenly Father and I are one, and that unity will draw them to the gospel.”

Several characteristics of Christ-honoring fellowship can be identified simply by using the word UNITY as an acronym:

- “U” represents the word uplift. Follow the commands of God to uplift one another.
- “N” stands for the word need. God has placed us here so that we can meet the needs of others.
- “I” stands for integrity. Glory calls attention to the holiness and the purity of God. Jesus represented the glory and the holiness of God, and we have received the call to represent that same type of integrity or holiness.
- “T” means trust. Where there is integrity, the saints of God are willing to trust one another. You can focus on your assigned area because you trust other saints to do their job.
- “Y” stands for yielding. Two areas of our lives require yielding. First, we yield to the Lordship of Christ. Then, having yielded to the Lordship of Christ, we have the capacity to yield to one another in the glorious cause sharing the gospel. We should be willing to yield our selfish desires to the greater goal of extending the love of Christ to a lost world.

Several centuries ago, ancient China wanted to secure its borders from its northern invaders. They had an ingenious plan. They built a great wall to protect the border. It was so thick that no one could knock it down. It was so long that no one could get around it. They posted soldiers at different places. It was built wide enough on the top, for chariots to patrol. If they heard of an attack at a distant location, they could easily get to it. They were up high, giving them a superior advantage over their enemies. They knew that they had protected their borders sufficiently against all enemies. But, in the first 100 years of the Great Wall of China, the nation was invaded three times. How? An enemy bribed the gatekeeper and entered into the land undetected.

When we diminish the importance of unity in the Body of Christ, we risk being invaded by the enemy. God has called us to divine fellowship. That fellowship is one of the most powerful tools of witness to a lost and dying world. If we don’t protect it, strive for it,

and do everything we can to promote it, we open the gate to the enemy. The enemy will attack your family and your church, causing ineffectiveness and destruction.

Points to Ponder

Often times our fellowship tends to be with the same circle of friends without much expansion of who we truly get to know in the church. How can we at FBC make our fellowship more inclusive of each other so that we truly become a family?

It is good for the Body to fellowship together, but it is also good for healthy fellowship to be used as a witness to the lost. How can we make our fellowship more evangelistic?

Restoring Broken Fellowship (Part 1)

(Day 23)

“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

Rick Warren paints a beautiful biblical picture of reconciliation in his book entitled *“The Purpose Driven Life.”* Today and tomorrow we will look at excerpts from Day 20 of this work. You are encouraged to read this chapter in its entirety.

Relationships are always worth restoring. In fact, the Bible tells us that God has given us the ministry of restoring relationships as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:18 above. Paul taught that our ability to get along with others is a mark of spiritual maturity.

If you want God’s blessing on your life and you want to be known as a child of God, you must learn to be a peacemaker. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).* Peacemakers are rare because peacemaking is hard work.

Peacemaking is not avoiding conflict. Jesus himself provoked it on occasion for the good of everyone. There are times we need to avoid conflict, but sometimes we need to create it, and sometimes we need to resolve it. We must continue to pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Peacemaking is also not appeasement. Always giving in, acting like a doormat, and allowing others to always run over you is not what Jesus had in mind. He refused to back down on many issues, standing ground in the face of evil opposition.

So how do we effectively become ministers of reconciliation as God called us to be in 2 Corinthians 5:18? Here are seven biblical steps to restoring fellowship:

Talk to God before talking to the person. If you will pray about the conflict first instead of gossiping to a friend, you will often discover that either God changes your heart or he changes the other person without your help. All your relationships would go smoother if you would just pray more about them.

As David did with his psalms, use prayer to “ventilate vertically.” Tell God your frustrations. Cry out to him. He’s never surprised or upset by your anger, hurt, insecurity, or any other emotions. So tell him exactly how you feel.

The apostle James noted that many of our conflicts are caused by prayerlessness: *“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.”* (James 4:1-2). Instead of looking to God, we look to others to make us happy and then get angry when they fail us. God says, “Why don’t you come to me first?”

Always take the initiative. It doesn’t matter whether you are the offender or the offended. God expects you to make the first move. Restoring broken fellowship is so important that Jesus commanded that it even take priority over corporate worship. He said, *“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”* (Matthew 5:22-23).

Acting quickly also reduces the spiritual damage to you. The Bible says sin, including unresolved conflict, blocks our fellowship with God and keeps our prayers from being answered, besides making us miserable. The success of a peace conference often depends on choosing the right time and place to meet. Don’t meet when either of you is tired or rushed or will be interrupted. The best time is when you both are at your best.

Restoring Broken Fellowship (Part 2)

(Day 24)

Sympathize with their feelings. Use your ears more than your mouth. Before attempting to solve any disagreement, you must first listen to people’s feelings. Paul advised, *“Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”* (Philippians 2:4). Focus on their feelings, not the facts. Begin with sympathy, not solutions.

Don’t try to talk people out of how they feel at first. Just listen and let them unload emotionally without being defensive. Feelings are not always true or logical. In fact, resentment makes us act and think in foolish ways. David admitted, *“When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.”* (Psalm 73:21-22). We all act beastly when hurt. Patience comes from wisdom, and wisdom comes from hearing the perspective of others. Listening says, “I

value your opinion, I care about our relationship, and you matter to me.” The cliché is true: People don’t care what we know until they know we care.

To restore fellowship *“Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.” (Romans 15:2)*. It is a sacrifice to patiently absorb the anger of others, especially if it’s unfounded. But remember, this is what Jesus did for you. He endured unfounded, malicious anger in order to save you: *“For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me’.” (Romans 15:3)*.

Confess your part of the conflict. If you are serious about restoring a relationship, you should begin with admitting your own mistakes or sin. *“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:5)*.

Confession is a powerful tool for reconciliation. Often the way we handle a conflict creates a bigger hurt than the original problem itself. When you begin by humbly admitting your mistakes, it defuses the other person’s anger and disarms their attack because they were probably expecting you to be defensive. Don’t make excuses or shift the blame; just honestly own up to any part you have played in the conflict. Accept the responsibility for your mistakes and ask for forgiveness.

Attack the problem, not the person. You cannot fix the problem if you’re consumed with fixing the blame. The Bible says, *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1)*. You will never get your point across by being cross, so choose your words wisely. A soft answer is always better than a sarcastic one.

In resolving conflict, how you say it is as important as what you say. God tells us, *“The wise in heart will be called understanding, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.” (Proverbs 16:21)*.

Cooperate as much as possible. Paul said, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” (Romans 12:18)*. Peace always has a price tag. For the sake of fellowship, do your best to compromise, adjust to others, and show preference to what they need. A paraphrase of Jesus’ seventh beatitude says, *“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.” (Matthew 5:9)*.

Emphasize reconciliation, not resolution. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to agree about everything. Reconciliation focuses on the relationship, while resolution focuses on the problem. When we focus on reconciliation, the problem loses significance and often becomes irrelevant. We can establish a relationship even when we are unable to resolve our differences.

This doesn't mean you give up on finding a solution. You may need to continue discussing and even debating – but you do it in a spirit of harmony. Reconciliation means you bury the hatchet, not necessarily the issue.

Points to Ponder

Ask the Lord to bring someone to mind where fellowship has been broken. Pause right now and talk to God about that person. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit seek out that person and begin the process of reconciliation.

Application

(Day 25)

There are many practical things that we can engage in as we accept the responsibility personally and corporately for “Fellowship” under the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit. These include, but are not limited to:

- Fellowship must be planned as well as spontaneous
- We must become intentional about including and connecting
- Plan to have new member receptions regularly
- Activate Care Groups in Sunday School classes
- Expand telephone reassurance ministry among homebound and widows and those recovering from illness
- Conduct projects particularly designed for fellowship building (i.e. painting classrooms, community service, etc.)
- Continue to work through the Deacon-led Ministry teams to touch and serve with the entire congregation

Points to Ponder

Would you commit to be a Care Group leader in your Sunday School Class? Would you be willing to open your home to expand fellowship opportunities? Would you be willing to participate in a fellowship building project? What spiritual gifts can you exercise to promote fellowship?

Fellowship - The Power of Oneness (John 17:19-26)

Written by Steve Andrews

This sermon explores Jesus' prayer in John 17 by identifying the power and the prescription for developing unity and fellowship.

Introduction

A second grade teacher gave an assignment to her class for the students to bring an item from home that represented their religious background. She wanted to teach the kids about the diversity in the world about worshipping God. At show and tell time, they began to share what their particular item meant to their faith. A Catholic child brought some rosary beads and shared with the class how they used the beads in prayer. There was a Native American child who brought a dream catcher. He told the class how to place dream catchers above their head to capture their dreams that they had in the night. It would filter out the bad ones and hold the good dreams in their memory. A Jewish child brought a candle and shared how it was used to celebrate Hanukkah. One kid pulled some food out of his bag. He said, "I'm Southern Baptist, and I brought a chicken casserole."

I. The Power of Unity

A. Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions about fellowship as illustrated in the opening story about bringing chicken casserole. When we think about fellowship, we think of an event that would take place beyond the regularly scheduled church services. It's an informal gathering where the saints enjoy each other's company. These fun meetings of the saints include fellowship, but fellowship is far more than hanging out with friends. Jesus calls attention to the fact that genuine fellowship is one of the most powerful tools for evangelism for the church.

B. Might

Our text says that Jesus prayed for all who would call upon His name to be one, and a watching world would be drawn to believe in Christ (John 17:20-21). Here Jesus shares one of the most overlooked tools of evangelism. Jesus says, "When a watching lost world looks at a body of believers, they see something that they can't find anywhere else. They desire love, support, encouragement, and acceptance, and they will be drawn to the Savior." He didn't say the world is going to be drawn because of great preaching. He didn't say great singing would cause hoards of people to be drawn to Christ. He said, in effect, "I'm praying that they will be one as the heavenly Father and I are one, and that unity they will draw them to the gospel."

II. The Prescription for Unity

Using the word, **UNITY**, as an acronym, we can identify several characteristics of Christ-honoring fellowship.

“U” represents the word uplift. One way to develop unity within the body of Christ and in your home is to make a commitment to follow the commands of God to uplift one another. Imagine the incredible spirit of uplifting these men experienced in this final phase of Jesus ministry with his disciples. He spoke of their great contribution when He said, “Guys, you’re going to take my gospel to the world”. They’re thinking, maybe I’ll go to my hometown or to the next village. Jesus says, “I’ve chosen you because I believe you can change the world. The world is going to know about the love I have for them.” Can you imagine how that energized them?

The letter “N” in unity stands for the word need. God has placed us here so that we can meet the needs of others. My favorite story about meeting the needs of others is about the child who wanted a bike for his birthday. When his dad tucked him in for bed, he prayed with an extremely loud voice, “God, I really want that blue bike from Wal-Mart.” His grandparents were visiting, so the father instructed the boy not to be so loud, “Son, God’s not deaf.” The little boy said, “I know, but grandpa is!” That child knew that God usually meets needs through the lives of other saints. Unity becomes possible when we acknowledge our personal needs and our responsibility to help other with their needs.

“I” stands for integrity. Jesus says, “I have given them glory” (17:22). Glory calls attention to the holiness and the purity of God. Jesus represented the glory and the holiness of God, and we have received the call to represent that same type of integrity or holiness. Verse 19 says that they would be sanctified in Christ. I John 1:7 says if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. Unity flourishes when we live holy, clean, and pure lives. The dictionary defines integrity as a *state of being that is complete or unified*. Integrity means wholeness or completeness. The Bible reveals that Christ fills the longing of our soul, binds up broken hearts, or makes our life complete.

“T” means trust. When there is integrity, the saints of God are willing to trust one another. The experience of unity is accompanied by a confidence in your brothers and sisters to fulfill their responsibility without being coerced or begged. You can focus on your assigned area because you trust other saints to do their job. In these closing chapters of John, you find Jesus calling these men to be one in Christ by trusting one another with their lives. They are going to work together, serve together, and some are even going to die together.

The “Y” stands for yielding. Two areas of our lives require yielding. First, we yield to the Lordship of Christ. Because God has exalted Christ, we submit our life to the authority of Christ. Jesus is Lord. Then, having yielded to the Lordship of Christ, we have the capacity to yield to one another in the glorious cause sharing the gospel. The driving call is “that the world may know.” We should be willing to yield our selfish desires to the greater goal of extending the love of Christ to a lost world.

Conclusion

Several centuries ago, ancient China wanted to secure its borders from its northern invaders. They had an ingenious plan. They built a great wall to protect the border. It was so thick that no one could knock it down. It was so long that no one could get around it. They posted soldiers at different places. It was built wide enough on the top for chariots to patrol. If they heard of an attack at distant location, they could easily get to it. They were up high giving them a superior advantage over their enemies. They knew that they had protected their borders sufficiently against all enemies. But, in the first 100 years of the Great Wall of China, the nation was invaded three times. How? An enemy bribed the gatekeeper and entered into the land undetected. When we diminish the importance of unity in the body of Christ, we risk being invaded by the enemy. God has called us to divine fellowship. That fellowship is one of the most powerful tools of witness to a lost and dying world. If we don’t protect it, strive for it, and do everything we can to promote it, we open the gate to the enemy. The enemy will attack your family and your church, causing ineffectiveness and destruction.

Additional Sermon Starters

First Corinthians 1-4, Ephesians 4, and James 1 contain excellent material for sermons that expose threats to unity. Each text could be an expository message, or you could combine the texts for two messages titled *The Causes of Disunity* and *The Cure for Disunity*.

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