

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Jesus Christ said, “this **gospel** of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a **witness** to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matt. 24: 14). How is the Gospel a witness? For starters, of the coming Kingdom of God, of a coming day of judgment, and of God the Father and Jesus Christ who are Judge of all.<sup>1</sup> But the Gospel was also another witness—of the sacrifice for sins and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of God’s gift of eternal life to all who repent and obey.

These two aspects of the Gospel witness to two different audiences: people with hard hearts and those who are humble and contrite. People of the latter bent respond after the manner of those who heard the preaching of Peter on that monumental Pentecost day:

ACTS 2:37 Now when they heard *this*, **they were cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”

Receiving the Holy Spirit sets people apart from the rest of the world as the begotten children of God<sup>2</sup>. Aside from being a seed to eternal life, God places His Spirit in His children in order to have a RELATIONSHIP with them:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:9 God *is* faithful, by whom **you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ** our Lord.

Every relationship, at least ones that are good, involves time and communication. In effect, relationships are formed through fellowship—talking with each other. Those with God are called fellowship of the Spirit:

PHILIPPIANS 1:27; 2:1-2 Only **let your conduct [behavior] be worthy of the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I [*Paul*] come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, **with one mind** striving together for the faith of the gospel, ... 2:1-2 Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any **fellowship of the Spirit**, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, **being of one accord, of one mind**.

The Holy Spirit brings about a fellowship where all people, regardless of the differing personalities, are “of one accord [and] of one mind” with God and Christ:

JOHN 17:20-21 “I [*Jesus Christ*] do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 “that **they all may be one, as You, Father,**

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<sup>1</sup> John 18:36-37; Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:31-32; 10:39-42; 17:31; Rom. 8:16; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:2; et al.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 8:16.

**are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

A fellowship of the Spirit exists among the *ekklesia* because the Spirit from God the Father and Jesus Christ in the same in all. This means that those who have the Holy Spirit love God the Father and Jesus Christ, and all who love Them also love all other members of the Body of Christ<sup>3</sup>. It cannot be any other way—the Holy Spirit is the common thread among the *ekklesia* that binds us together just as God and Christ are one<sup>4</sup>. This fellowship is unique and special because only a few have ever known it. The primary reason for having the Holy Spirit is to have FELLOWSHIP with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and Their children for all eternity!

These days many (most?) spend much of their Sabbaths and Holydays *without* fellowship. Some might go to a church every week, but do they have TRUE fellowship? What happens at church? People listen to a sermon. What happens afterwards? Some small talk and then everyone leaves. Where is the fellowship? Fellowship requires time communicating with each another.

What I am about to say might sound like heresy, but fellowshiping on the Sabbaths and Holydays is *more* important than listening to a Bible study. Anyone can listen to a message during the week and get the same result, even if it is done alone. Fellowship in the Spirit, on the other hand, requires interaction with God AND His people. The Sabbaths and Holydays are, for many, the only time that they are able to set aside to be with brethren. While some do make time for true fellowship in the Spirit on Sabbath days, I dare say most do not. And if not on those days, then when? During the week with the demands of family and work?

This is not to say that all overlook the priority of fellowship. There are many who are unable to fellowship for logistical or health reasons. Even so, they have a deep longing for fellowship. How do I know? They have told me in words that were choked with tears running down their faces.

It is a great irony that fellowship is lost in the typical organized church setting because it is a gathering where one might expect it to be the objective. However, fellowship is often lost in the rigid formality of rules and decorum. It is lost in the emotionless prescribed songs, prayers, and messages within the solemn propriety of ties and high heels. All of this steals the true JOY of being in the presence of God! But that is not the way it was in the early days of the *ekklesia*:

HEBREWS 10:24-25 And let us **consider one another in order to stir up love** and good works, 25 **not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

“Assembling of ourselves together” is not limited to Sabbaths and Holydays. The fellowship of the Spirit can occur anytime and anywhere God’s people come

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 5:1-3.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 5:30.

together. These days that can be in homes, via the phone or Internet, or even primitive cards and letters. But I think this verse has another emphasis. What about those who have no fellowship due to circumstances beyond their control? Are WE—those who have the means and opportunity—forsaking THEM?? God forbid!

Fellowship in the Spirit is much more than weekly church attendance. Notice what happened *after* those who heard Peter's message on Pentecost were baptized:

ACTS 2:40-42 And with many other words he [*Peter*] testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. 42 And **they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

They "CONTINUED STEADFASTLY" to obey the teachings of the apostles, in fellowship, in breaking bread, and in prayers—TOGETHER. It does not say they came and listened to a sermon on the Sabbath and then went home. They spent TIME with each other. Above all, it was NOT just the Sabbath and Holydays:

ACTS 2:46-47 So **continuing daily** with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God** and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the [*ekklesia*] daily those who were being saved.

They fellowshiped DAILY. Well, you might argue, it was different back then. Granted; however, where is the fellowship on the Sabbaths and Holydays that everyone is so diligent to keep? If we pray daily with God the Father and Jesus Christ, why do we not have the same urgency to fellowship directly with each other? Fellowship in the Spirit is with God the Father, Jesus Christ, AND brethren:

1 JOHN 1:5-7 This is the message which we have heard from Him [*Jesus Christ*] and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that **we have fellowship with Him**, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Jesus said, "**where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.**" (Matt. 18:20). Fellowship is more than uplifting one another and edifying one another in love, it is also being together WITH our Father and Lord Jesus. What did Malachi say about that? "**those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them**" (Mal. 3:16). There is nothing more important and glorious to God our Father and Jesus our Lord than fellowship among those of the Spirit:

ROMANS 15:5-7 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant **you to be like-minded toward one another**, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that **you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** 7 Therefore **receive one another, just as Christ also received us**, to the glory of God.

Why is fellowship the most important purpose for having the Holy Spirit? Because God the Father and Jesus Christ desire to spend eternity with children who are ONE with them and each other. Eternity will not be spent listening to endless sermons but having the unspeakable joy of agape love relationships!

Do not get me wrong. Without the understanding that comes from hearing the Gospel there can be no fellowship of the Spirit. The Bible is crucial because it is the basis for a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ as well as understanding Their purpose for mankind. However, in the end, it is fellowship that matters. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was thinking of his time with them:

PHILIPPIANS 1:3 I thank my God upon **every remembrance of you,**

Paul was reminiscing about the people in Philippi, whom he called, "my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown." (Phil. 4: 4). And his experiences were good memories that, I am certain, he never forgot:

PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6 always in every prayer of mine making request for you **all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,** 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

If Paul had spent his entire time preaching to them, he would have never known them. It is impossible to spend as much time as he did with people and not get to know them. He talked with them and listened to them. They worshipped God and Jesus together. They ate together, sang together, prayed together, rejoiced together, and, perhaps, cried together when Paul left even though they knew they would be united in the Kingdom. BTthat is what fellowship in the Spirit is all about:

1 JOHN 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, **that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

Fellowship is about relationships. Do not avoid it. Do not refuse it. And certainly do not forsake it with those who need it. Make fellowship in the Spirit the priority.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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