

FELLOWSHIP

A Study of Koinonia and Related Words in the New Testament

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I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Fellowship is an important Bible topic.

1. The goal of the entire work of God, Christ, and the H.S. is to have fellowship with their creation (mankind). This was first accomplished with mankind in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1-2) and it will culminate there as well (Rev. 21-22). On the other hand, the Devil does not want to be in fellowship with God (2 Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6), and he does not want others to be in fellowship with God (Gen. 3:22-24). We have to decide if we want to be in fellowship with God, or, if we want to be separated from God due to the influence from the Devil.
2. The “common faith” (Tit. 1:4) and “common salvation” (Jude 3) of all the saved is the goal of God’s work and word to mankind. God wants Gentiles and Jews to partake together of the tree of salvation (Rom. 11:17). Christians have a “like precious faith” with each other (2 Pet. 1:1). What God wanted for Israel – “the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12) – he wants for all people in the church.
3. Jesus partook of the same flesh and blood to save mankind (Heb. 2:14).
4. All people are called by the gospel to have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). Note: The division at Corinth hindered this fellowship (1:10-11).
5. The Devil does not want you to be in fellowship with God and Christ. He wants isolation, not participation. He separated from God (Jude 6) and he wants you to be separated (Gen. 3)

B. Fellowship is working together with God and other faithful Christians to accomplish a “common” good for God, for ourselves, and for the world.

1. Working together in man’s work - fishing (Lk. 5:10).
2. Working together in the Lord’s work – receiving (Philemon 17).
3. The study in this outline focuses on the use of the word *koinonia* in the NT. There are, of course, several other words in the NT that teach the concept of fellowship that need to be studied as well – words like unity, united, together, one, one another, same, same mind, like, etc.

C. There is Joy in Proper Fellowship (1 Jn. 1:4; Phil. 2:1-2).

II. BODY.

A. What are the English words for fellowship?

1. Communion, common, communicate, companion.
2. Contribution.
3. Distributing, distribution.
4. Fellowship.
5. Partaker and participation.
6. Sharing.

B. What are the Greek words for fellowship?

1. Koinos - κοινός (adjective).
 - a) Sometimes the Gr. *koinos* refers to the Jewish custom of calling things “defiled” (Mt. 15:11; 18, 20; Mk. 7:2, 5, 15, 18, 20, 23), “common” (Acts 10:14-15, 28; 11:8-9), “polluted” (Acts 21:28); “unclean” (Rom. 14:14; Heb. 9:13); i.e., things not authorized by the OT or by Jewish tradition; Jewish ceremonial uncleanness.
2. Koinoo - κοινώω (verb).
3. Koinoneo - κοινωνέω (verb).
 - a) Sunkoinoneo (συγκοινωνέω) = fellowship; partaker; participate (Eph. 5:11; Phil. 4:14; Rev. 18:4).
 - b) Sunkoinos = partaker (Rom. 11:17; 1 Cor. 9:23; Phil. 1:7; Rev. 1:9).
 - c) Ekoinonesan (κοινωνέω) = partake; share (Rom. 15:27).
4. Koinonia - κοινωνία (noun).
5. Koinonikos - κοινωνικός (adjective, 1 Tim. 6:18).
6. Koinonos - κοινωνός (noun).

C. What is fellowship?

1. Fellowship is a sharing in, or a participation with, someone or something. In the NT, fellowship is found in a common spiritual bond among Christians (Eph. 3:6). Fellowship is not found in being human, American, Republican / Democrat, ethnicity, social activity, etc.
2. Note: There are many “fellow” words in the NT (fellow-servants, fellow-prisoners, fellow-workers, fellow-soldiers, etc.), but none of them pertain to social and recreational activities.

D. Who can I fellowship?

1. Vertical fellowship.
 - a) God (1 Jn. 1:3).

- (1) We have fellowship, a relationship, with God himself.
- (2) We also are “partakers” with his divine nature – we become like him in his holiness, righteousness, love, forgiveness, etc., (2 Pet. 1:4)

b) Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3; see the Gr. *σύμμορφος* in Rom. 8:29 and Phil. 3:21). Note: We are to follow Paul’s example because he followed the example of Christ (see the Gr. *συμμιμητής* in Phil. 3:17).

c) The H.S. (Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor. 13:14; see the Gr. *metochos* in Heb. 6:4).

2. Horizontal fellowship.

a) We must have a proper fellowship with God first. Then, we can be in fellowship with faithful brethren (Acts 2:42; Rom. 11:17; 1 Jn. 1:3, 6-7). Note: Acts 2:42 may be a reference to the “fellowship” of the contribution to needy saints (2:44; 4:32), but it is not a reference to eating common meals (2:46).

3. Note: In 1 John, vertical fellowship is affected by horizontal fellowship, and vice-versa (see 1:3-6; 4:20ff; etc.).

E. What is the standard of fellowship?

1. What John “declared” is what allows for fellowship (1 Jn. 1:3).
2. Walking in the light and being cleansed from all sin (1 Jn. 1:5-7). Note: In John, walking in the “light” is walking in the words of Jesus (Jn. 1:4-5, 7-9; etc.).
3. We cannot have fellowship if we do not walk in the light and if we “lie and do not the truth” (1 Jn. 1:6).
4. Abiding in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9-11).
5. The words of the H.S. (Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor. 13:14; see the Gr. *συμμαρτυρέω* in Rom. 8:16). We cannot have “the communion of the Holy Spirit” if we ourselves are not holy (2 Cor. 13:14).
6. Jude wrote of the common salvation (Jude 3).
7. Fellowship (unity) is maintained upon the words of the apostles (Jn. 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-16: the right walk, the right attitude, the right effort, the right plan/platform, the right leadership, and the right maturity).

F. What are the acts of fellowship?

1. Fellowship is not just association with someone else (being in the presence of someone). Fellowship is participation with someone in some activity.
2. Local churches, from their treasury, had “fellowship” in assisting (funds, material possessions, etc.) needy saints only (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Rom.

15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4, 13). Assisting (funds, material possessions, etc.) needy brethren (Rom. 12:13) and even those who are not Christians (Heb. 13:16; 1 Tim. 6:18). Note: “(the) fellowship” in Acts 2:42 could be a reference to the contribution to the needy saints, or to the Lord’s supper – “breaking bread”.

3. Sharing in the spiritual blessings of the gospel (Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:23; see the Gr. συμπαρακαλέω in Rom. 1:12 and συμπαθής in 1 Pet. 3:8; see the Gr. συμμετοχος in Eph. 3:6; see the Gr. συμβιβάζω in Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2, 19; see the Gr. συμβασιλεύω in 1 Cor. 4:8 and 2 Tim. 2:12).
4. Communion with the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 10:16). Note: Koinos is also used twice in 1 Cor. 10:18 (the Jewish altar), and 10:20 (the idol altar). We are to have communion with Christ in the Lord’s supper on Sunday, but we are not to have communion with the world rest of the week! Note: “(the) fellowship” in Acts 2:42 could be a reference to the contribution to the needy saints, or to the Lord’s supper – “breaking bread”.
5. Suffering with Christ and other Christians (2 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:10 (see the Gr. συμμορφώω in this verse); 4:14; 1 Pet. 4:13; Rev. 1:9; see συμπάσχω in Rom. 8:17 and 1 Cor. 12:26). We are to be companions with other Christians who suffer (Heb. 10:33; see the Gr. συμπαθέω in Heb. 4:15 and 10:34).
6. Partners with other Christians in the Lord’s work (2 Cor. 8:23).
7. Preaching God’s word together (Gal. 2:9). The “right hands of fellowship” in the preaching of the gospel. Both Paul and Peter preached the same gospel! Note: The words “fellowship of the mystery” are found in the KJV and the NKJV of Ephesians 3:9. However, “dispensation” (administration, plan) has better MSS support.
8. Assisting (in any way) a teacher of the gospel (Gal. 6:6).
9. Local churches supporting (with money) gospel preaching (Phil. 1:5, 7; 4:15 [see 2:30]; see the Gr. συμμιρίζω in 1 Cor. 9:13).
10. Sharing in a common faith (Tit. 1:4).
11. Sharing faith and love toward (pros) Jesus and toward (eis) our brethren (Philemon 5-6).
12. Being a partner in saving one’s soul (Philemon 17).
13. Partaking of the glory (heaven) that will be revealed (1 Pet. 5:1).
14. Sharing in a common salvation (Jude 3).
15. Note: Eating a “fellowship” meal together as a work of the local church is not found in the NT. “Fellowship” is never connected with social and recreational activities in the NT (e.g. a “fellowship hall” for eating in the church building). When we speak, let us not misuse a biblical word; let us speak as the Bible speaks (1 Pet. 4:11). “Love feasts” in 2 Peter 2:13

Jude 12 are not “fellowship meals” sponsored by the local church. Common meals to satisfy hunger are to be supplied at home (1 Cor. 11:34). Christians getting together for meals is certainly important, but this is not NT “fellowship”.

G. Who (or what) can I not fellowship?

1. Someone engaged in sin (Mt. 23:30; Eph. 5:11 [see the Gr. συμμετοχος in 5:7]; Rev. 18:4; comp. Psalms 94:20).
2. Demons via idolatrous sacrifices (1 Cor. 10:20).
3. Darkness (2 Cor. 6:14). Note: Paul uses 5 different words for fellowship in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16: (1) μετοχή (2 Cor. 6:14 only; but see μέτοχος in Lk. 5:17; Heb. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8), (2) κοινωνία (see all ref. in this outline), (3) συμφώνησις (2 Cor. 6:15 only; but see συμπολίτης in Eph. 2:9, σύμφυτος in Rom. 6:5, συμφωνέω in Mt. 18:19, σύμφωνος in 1 Cor. 7:5, and σύμψυχος in Phil. 2:2), (4) μερίς (Lk. 10:42; Ac. 8:21; 16:12; Col. 1:12), and, (5) συγκατάθεσις (2 Cor. 6:16 only).
4. Other men’s sins (1 Tim. 5:22).
5. Evil deeds from someone teaching something other than the doctrine (NT) of Christ (2 Jn. 11).
6. When a Christian is engaged in a sin and will not repent, brethren in the local church are not allowed to have “company” (Gr. συναναμίγνυμι) with that erring brother (1 Cor. 5:9, 11; 2 Thess. 3:14). This is what we call church discipline or disfellowship. Fellowship is restored when the erring Christian repents and when the local church forgives him (2 Cor. 2:5-11; 7:8-11).

III. CONCLUSION.

- A. Christian, Live Faithfully! Don’t Count the Blood of the Covenant an “Unholy” (Koinos) Thing (Heb. 10:29).
- B. There Will Be Nothing That “Defiles” (Koinoo) in Heaven (Rev. 21:27). You Can Be in Paradise and Be in Fellowship with God One Day!
- C. Do You Want the Joy of Fellowship (1 Jn. 1:4; Phil. 2:1-2)?