

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS: COMMUNITY & COMMUNION
(FROM CHAPTERS 4-5)

REVIEW**Lesson 1 — Koinonia: A Word Study (chapter 1) [fellowship with one another]****Sharing Together —**

1. **Community relationship (Acts 2:42)** — “It is [primarily] a relationship, not an activity.” (JB)
2. **Partnership** — The added concept here is *mission*, “a community in action.” (JB)

Sharing With —

1. **Communion** — This “means communicating intimately, or sharing with one another on a close personal and spiritual level.” (JB)
2. **Sharing material possessions (Acts 2:44-45)** — This is one of the most common usages of *koinonia*, but also one of the most overlooked.

Summary: Key = we share a common life; let us then share in that life! Is this not how our God works (Romans 8:32)?

Lesson 2 — Union and Communion with God (chapters 2-3) [fellowship with God]

This built on and fleshed out that key—that we share a common life, the life of God. “There is something more fundamental to true community than our relationship with one another: our relationship with God. Without this relationship with God, there can be no spiritual relationship with one another.” (JB)

- “The most basic meaning of relationship has to do with an objective fact. “ (JB) “We must first have an objective, living relationship with God before we can enjoy an experiential relationship with Him.” (JB)

1. Union — objective fact (Ephesians 5:30; John 15:1-11): four ways to live:

- The first way is to **attempt to do it on your own**.
- The second way is **deciding to do nothing at all**.
- The third way is the “**Lord, help me**” approach.
- The fourth way is the **abiding-in-Christ way**.

2. Communion — subjective reality (Psalm 27:4)

- Our communion should be more than just having a quiet time in the morning; it should be an **all-day affair**. “What do I think about when I do have discretionary thinking time?”
 - The morning quiet time lays the **foundation** for our all-day communion with God because it tunes our hearts to commune with Him the rest of the day.
 - Bridges spent much time on the topic of communion throughout the day.
- If the morning quiet time is the **foundation** of that communion, Scripture meditation and prayer are the **framework** of it. MY NOTE: This may not be the only way to obey, but do you have a better idea?

“This vertical aspect of fellowship (union and communion with God) provides both the foundation and the pattern for the horizontal aspect (fellowship among believers). A community relationship among believers presupposes a living relationship with God and is, in fact, dependent on it. Where there is no vital union with Christ, there can be no sharing of the common life that believers have in Him. In the same manner, if believers are to share with one another in communion, they must first have something to share, something obtained only through communion with God.” (JB)

Objective fact of union with God → subjective experience of communion with God → objective fact of union with other believers → subjective experience of community with believers

INTRODUCTION

So, Lesson 2 covered the first two links in that chain; Lesson 3 covers the next two links in the chain. And, if we haven’t understood and aren’t applying Lesson 2, we will shallowly practice and enjoy Lesson 3.

COMMUNITY

The New Testament teaching about *koinonia* reminds us that while “God saves us as individuals, He immediately incorporates us into the body of Christ.” (JB) 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.”

- “As important as membership in a local congregation is, *koinonia* expresses even more than that.” (JB)
- “The relationship expressed by *koinonia* does not describe a membership but a common life that we share together in Christ.” (JB)

DISCUSS — How might church membership cheapen the NT idea of *koinonia*? How does church membership enrich it?

“All believers share a common life in Christ, whether or not we recognize it. We are in fellowship with literally thousands of believers from every nation of the world.” (JB)

- Although we have never met most of them
- Although we disagree with many of them over various issues of faith and practice
- Although we struggle to like some of them

“The realization that we do in fact share a common life with other believers should stimulate within us a desire to share experientially with one another. This is the whole thrust of the New Testament teaching on *koinonia*.” (JB)

Key Text:

Romans 12:5 — “Each member [of the body] belongs to all the others.”

- “There is a mutual ownership of one another: I belong to you and you belong to me.” (JB)
- “Because we do belong to one another, we are to express this belonging in acts of mutual concern and caring for one another.” (JB)

Romans 12:10, 13, 15 — “Be devoted to one another in love....Honor one another....Share with God’s people who are in need....Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

1. *Caring for one another (“be devoted to one another in love”)*

1 Corinthians 12:25 — Each part of the Body “should have equal concern for each other.”

Evaluation: “What is our response, for example, when we hear of a fellow believer who has fallen before some temptation? Is it a response of criticism and condemnation, of gossip and a holier-than-thou shaking of our heads? If so, we are not practicing biblical *koinonia*.” (JB)

Illustration: “Can you imagine the ear making the following comment to the eye? ‘Say, did you hear about the serious trouble the foot is having? My, my, isn’t it too bad? That foot surely ought to get his act together.’ No, no, our bodies don’t behave that way at all! Instead the entire body cries out, ‘My foot hurts! I feel awful!’” (JB)

Application: “When one part hurts, no matter what the reason, the restorative powers of the entire body are brought to bear on that hurting member. Rather than attacking that suffering part or ignoring the problem, the rest of the body demonstrates concern for the part that hurts.” (JB)

- *Two enemies of mutual care one for another:* (1) attacking those caught in a problem and (2) ignoring the problem
- *Two benefits of mutual care:* does away with (1) criticism and (2) condemnation
- *Specific application:* apply the Holy Spirit through your loving and concerned prayer for the troubled member
- *Specific warning:* slandering one another through gossip and criticism (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

2. *Honoring one another (“honor one another”; cf. Romans 10:16)*

This eliminates competition among believers.

- “When we think individualistically rather than corporately, we foster competition rather than cooperation and honor.” (JB)
- **Illustration:** Numbers 11:29—Moses and the 70 elders who prophesied (incl. 2 who hadn’t supported Moses)

Evaluation: “How do we respond when God blesses some other individual or another church or another Christian organization?”

COMMUNION (“spiritual fellowship”)

“[God’s] judgment that ‘it is not good for the man to be alone’ (Genesis 2: 18) is a principle that speaks not only to the marriage relationship but also to the necessity of spiritual fellowship among all believers.... Spiritual fellowship is not a luxury but a necessity, vital to our spiritual growth and health [cf. ‘Lone rangers are dead rangers,’ J. Harris]....One of the most important things we can share with one another is the spiritual truth God has been teaching us that might be of great help to fellow believers.” (JB) J. I. Packer — “God has made us in such a way that our fellowship with himself is fed by our fellowship with fellow-Christians.”

Proverbs 27:17 — “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 — “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”

- Two can produce more and learn more together.
- Two can admonish one another when one falls or is in danger of falling.

Hebrews 3:13 — “Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 — “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

- We need this to help us face temptation.
- We need this to help us towards love and good deeds.
- We need this to help us keep laboring in ministry.

Application: “The admonition of Hebrews 10: 24-25—‘Let us not give up meeting together’—is not fulfilled merely by attending church on Sunday morning, as is so often supposed. Rather, it is fulfilled only when we follow through with the instruction to encourage, spur on, or stimulate one another. This cannot be done sitting in pews, row upon row, listening to the pastor teach. It can be done only through the mutual interchange of admonishment and encouragement.” (JB)

Application: “To the extent that he recognizes Christian fellowship as primarily a community of all believers in Christ, he will be able to respond to Paul’s admonition to ‘honor one another above yourselves’...It is difficult to be critical or jealous of someone who belongs to you.” (JB)

3. **Reproving one another**

Colossians 1:28-29; 2 Timothy 4:2

Application: “We must...be concerned for those members of the body whose actions are causing us concern.” But we must voice such concern in a loving and caring manner, for since God does not reject them, neither should we. Revelation 3:19 — “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.” (cf. Hebrews 12:6). God took the initiative to restore fellowship, because He loved them and they belonged to Him. The same motivations (i.e., love and belonging) should drive us.

4. **Praying for one another**

James 5:16 — “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed...”

“We cannot ignore our individual, personal responsibility to grow in the Christian life. The body grows as each member grows. But the ultimate focus of our concern should be the same as God’s: growth of the whole body [cf. Ephesians 4:11-16, esp. v. 16]. I should be as concerned about the other members’ growth as I am about my own.” (JB)

Application: This is why Paul prayed so richly and spiritually for other believers (cf. Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12).

DISCUSS — Based on the concept of community that we’ve begun to paint with these four simple “one another” ideas, how should the rest of the body of Christ react when one of its members falls before some temptation? ...is wrestling with an important decision? ...is dealing with difficult pressure at work? ...is working hard to evangelize a loved one?

The apostle Paul knew the importance of spiritual fellowship — his desire was “that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:12).

1. *Spiritual fellowship with one another presupposes fellowship with God.*

- “If we are not having communion with God and learning from Him, we will have nothing to share with others.
- In addition, if we are not learning directly from God, we will not be alert and perceptive enough to learn from others....
- Fellowship with God is indeed both the foundation and the objective of our fellowship with one another.” (JB)

2. *Spiritual fellowship involves mutual commitment and responsibility.*

- “We must commit ourselves to faithfulness in getting together, openness and honesty with one another, and confidentiality in what is shared.
- We must assume the responsibility to encourage, admonish, and pray for one another.
- We must ‘watch out’ for one another, feeling a mutual responsibility for each other’s welfare.” (JB) I.e., you are your brother’s keeper!
- **Application:** “Such a high level of commitment is normally made with just one person or a few select people. Such a depth of fellowship simply cannot be maintained with every Christian, nor does God intend it. Though objectively we are in fellowship with every other believer throughout the world, in our subjective personal experience, such fellowship can be maintained with only a few. “ (JB) → This is why we have a Focus Group structure.

3. *Spiritual fellowship can be enjoyed via practical and specific activities.*

a. *We must share Scriptural truth with one another (1 John 1:1-3; Psalm 119:13; Ecclesiastes 12:9-12).*

- Record daily the most important truth you get from your Bible reading; schedule a weekly meeting to share that with a friend.
- Memorize Scripture together.
- Apply Scripture together.

b. *We must be open with one another (James 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:13).*

- “This involves the sharing of our sins, failures, and discouragements, as well as our blessings and joys.” (JB)
- “We cannot encourage, motivate, or pray for one another if we do not know the struggles the other person is facing.” (JB)

c. *We must be mutually accountable to one another (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5).*

- “Accountability is the willingness to be both checked on and challenged in agreed-on areas of one’s life....
- We might agree to be accountable to each other in certain disciplines...[or in] the area of so-called weaknesses.” (JB)

d. *We must pray with one another.*

CONCLUSION

In the midst of Israel’s spiritual declension, there was a group who feared the Lord and had fellowship together: “Those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name” (Malachi 3: 16). God takes great delight in our fellowship with one another; may we do the same!