

Who Put The “Fellowship” in Fellowship Halls?

We often use the same words people of the past used, but what they meant and what we mean are very different. One hundred years ago, nobody used the words “cool” or “text” the way we often use them today. The same is true of many Bible words. Most likely, the next time you hear the word “love” on the radio or television it will not be used to mean the same thing that God meant when He used the word “love” in John 3:16. Today, people use the word “love” to mean a strong feeling or even a sinful, sexual relationship. When the Bible uses a word, we need to understand what that word does and does not mean.

The word “fellowship” is another word that today is often used in a way that is different than the way it is used in the Bible. For example, when something happens at a “fellowship hall,” what does it usually involve? If your answer is donuts, fried chicken, sports, and such then read all fourteen New Testament passages which use the word “fellowship” (these are from the NKJV).

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

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

Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. (1 Corinthians 10:20)

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

...imploing us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (2 Corinthians 8:4)

...and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9)

...and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; (Ephesians 3:9)

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. (Ephesians 5:11)

...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, (Philippians 1:5)

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, . . . (Philippians 2:1)

... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (Philippians 3:10)

... 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. (1 John 1:3)

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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. (1 John 1:6-7)

Now, think about these passages.⁽¹⁾ Which passage(s) teaches--

1. Christians fellowshiping by gathering to socialize?
2. the church had fellowship by participating in sports, games, or various forms of recreation? (Both sports and theatre were VERY popular in the societies where the gospel was preached during Bible times)
3. that fellowship includes eating our daily bread together?

What Fellowship Is

Bible dictionaries define “fellowship” as “to share and participate together.” These verses (above) show that spiritual fellowship is more than that. Consider that though God shares physical blessings with all men, this does not put Him in fellowship with all men (Matt. 5:45; 7:13-14). Jesus ate meals and spent time with sinners, but He did not have fellowship with them (1 Jn. 1:6-7). Christians share things with sinners but can have no fellowship with them (2 Cor. 6:14).

By learning the unsearchable riches of Christ, we understand and are called into the true fellowship with God (Eph. 3:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:9). We are called by and into Christ through the gospel for there we learn to have faith in the power of God and to be baptized into Christ (2 Thess. 2:14; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27). This is the foundation of all fellowship with God. Our fellowship with God continues if we walk in the light, so our decisions and actions either maintain or break fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:6).

Having fellowship with God permits us to have fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:7). More than just sharing or working together, fellowship involves sharing in a work which builds man’s relationship with God and requires that all who are working together are spiritually united with each other in Christ (Phili. 1:5; 1 Jn. 1:6-7). As the passages listed above show, our fellowship with other Christians involves things such as worshiping God, providing the physical needs of saints who cannot provide for themselves, and providing the physical needs of those preaching the gospel.

What Fellowship Is Not

While most people today consider fellowship to include activities such as eating breakfast, playing basketball, watching movies, etc. together, God revealed no such connection (see the above list of verses). This false idea of fellowship, almost universally accepted today, has waxed worse and worse as men have deceived and been deceived (2 Tim. 3:13). One of the most obvious deceptions is “The Fellowship Hall,” a church-funded place to eat, play, and relax. When using the word “fellowship” the way it is used in the Bible, such a building is not truly a “fellowship hall” but is merely a recreation hall or a cafeteria. The typical purposes for and actions within such facilities do not meet the definition, purposes, or actions of the fellowship which God has provided and revealed. This fellowship does not occur in activities typically associated with modern fellowship (recreation) halls.

Anyone, including any church of Christ, who has built a cafeteria and called it a fellowship hall (under the guise that eating our daily bread together is fellowship) has deceived those for whom those things were provided, subtly skewing God’s concept of fellowship. They also have prepared the way for church-funded gymnasiums and all other sorts of recreational facilities. If eating together is the fellowship God revealed, then so is throwing a ball to or running beside one another.

People today who believe that fellowship includes anything that Christians do together have not been taught, nor yet personally rightly divided the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Elders and preachers who promote this false concept of fellowship must give an account for their stewardship (2 Tim. 4:3-5). Christians must be taught and learn that church-sponsored relaxation and recreation are unrelated to the fellowship of God and His church and have no more approval from God than does cannibalism or instrumental music.

Conclusion Modern distortions of fellowship have carnalized the concept of Christians working together in the gospel. This is a major distraction from the spread and growth of the gospel, even

causing churches of Christ to dedicate significant amounts of time and money which ought to be dedicated to true fellowship, to this re-definition of fellowship. If anyone speaks of fellowship, let him speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). Whatever you do in the name of true fellowship will be in the name of the Lord causing many people to give thanks to the Father (Col. 3:17).

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⁽¹⁾ Consider a few comments on the above verses.

Acts 2:42 mentions fellowship alongside teaching, the Lord's supper, and prayers. At the least, it includes the money Christians laid at the apostles feet. As other verses will show, when Christians shared their possessions with Christians who were in physical need, God called this fellowship.

1 Corinthians 1:9 is a reminder that Christians were called to work with Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:20 is a warning against participating in worship of false gods. By this, they would have fellowship with the demons.

2 Corinthians 6:14 shows that light and darkness cannot accept each other or work together.

2 Corinthians 8:4 shows that when Christians share their physical possessions with other Christians who lack the needs of life, it is considered a "gift" and "fellowship." While Christians should individually choose to share with the lost, this sharing is not fellowship. Thus, not all sharing is fellowship.

Galatians 2:9 shows Christians encouraging each other to teach the gospel to all the lost.

Ephesians 3:9 teaches us that Paul preached the gospel so people could understand the fellowship God offered to man, which was not fully revealed (thus a mystery) until the gospel was fully preached.

Ephesians 5:11 warns Christians against sharing in sinful deeds. Instead, Christians must reprove the wickedness.

Philippians 1:5 records Paul expressing thanks to fellow Christians who shared many things with him as he preached.

Philippians 2:1 shows that the Holy Spirit is involved in providing our fellowship with each other. This would be similar, if not identical, to the "unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3).

Philippians 3:10 tells of Paul's desire to know (better understand) what God offers to man through Jesus' sufferings.

1 John 1:3 teaches us that by accepting the apostles' first-hand testimony, we are united with them and with God.

1 John 1:6-7 reminds us that learning and doing what is right results in fellowship with God and His people. Sin in our life is a barrier between fellowship with God and His people.