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IS SOCIAL FELLOWSHIP HELPFUL?

Jim Stauffer

We know we are to have biblical fellowship with other saints, those of like precious faith. **Acts 2:42** *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* Further we understand we are not to have worldly fellowship with evil. **Eph. 5:11** *Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;.*

Strong's Dictionary of Bible Words defines fellowship, *koinonia* as, *a having in common, partnership, fellowship denotes the share which one has in anything, a participation, fellowship recognized and enjoyed; thus it is used of the common experiences and interests of Christian men.*

If we were to follow the word fellowship throughout Scripture we would understand biblical fellowship to be a sharing with brethren, God and Christ and every aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We share in the sufferings of our Savior and also those of our brethren.

The very obvious intended purpose of fellowship is to acknowledge that which we have in common and serve as a testimony of what we stand for and to encourage each other in that stance.

Because our fellowship with our brethren and with God and Christ is guided and directed by the "apostles teaching", we know biblical fellowship can not be determined by any man.

We cannot, for instance, have biblical fellowship in some project or activity that is not authorized in Scripture. Therefore when our worship is altered to suit the tastes of men we are not having biblical fellowship. Adding musical instruments to our song worship is not

in harmony with the instruction of the apostle Paul to have the melody made in our hearts. It does not comply with the specific command to "sing", which eliminates any other kind of music.

We cannot have biblical fellowship with those who would alter the work of the church and change its mission from spiritual to social. Trying to solve social issues with support of orphanages, battered wives shelters and many other good things that serve the community are not authorized responsibilities of the church. The church is to be the pillar and ground of the truth and a voice of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Social ventures are not the responsibility of the church.

It is therefore honorable when the local church has the courage to reject such alterations in the plan God has authorized in spite of the criticism they receive from others who participate and depict them as people who do not love others. Holding fast to God's word will lead us to care for others as He has directed.

Having laid the groundwork for biblical fellowship as a congregation of saints, we must acknowledge our role in encouragement. Social interaction plays a role in this responsibility. Churches are not social in nature, they are spiritual. We, as brethren are both. Who better to spend our leisure time with? Social fellowship is a good thing for disciples.

I know we are very busy maintaining our families, etc., but there are many ways we can encourage each other to remain steadfast. If we are to sustain a spiritual relationship with God and Christ, we must have a social one with other disciples.

Dealing with Last Year's Mistakes

One of the unseen blessings of memorizing Scripture is that doing this opens the door to our souls. Solomon showed this when he said that a man is what he thinks in his heart (**Prov. 23:7**). What is perhaps even more remarkable is that what we memorized when we were children is so much a part of what we are today. We all know about what happened to Jack and Jill, Little Miss Muffet and the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe. We owe a tremendous debt to those who helped us learn spiritual truths when we were so much younger.

I am not sure what teacher required that I memorize the opening stanza of a poem which I can so easily recall now six decades after I learned it. It was written by Lolita Hiroshi (I did not memorize her name, but found it on Google), but the moral truth found in it still impacts my life.

*I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never be on again.*

The reality is that such a place does exist. That land of beginning again is found in Christ. His grace is so amazing that He allows us to bury all the mistakes of the past and then to begin again. Paul said, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*" (**2 Cor. 5:17**). That old man is crucified and buried in baptism, and we are raised to walk in newness of life (**Rom. 6:3-6**). Mistakes of the past are gone and laid aside like an old garment, and we clothe ourselves in Christ-like apparel. This truth is vividly described in Paul's description of those in Corinth. Before becoming Christians, they were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and extortioners. There was no way, living that way, they could inherit the kingdom of God. But, Paul described what happened when they became Christians. "*But you were washed...sanctified...justified*" (**1 Cor. 6:9-11**).

They entered the "Land of Beginning Again." That same beginning is still available for those who have become Christians and made foolish mistakes. John says that the blood of Jesus cleanses us also (**1 John 1:7**). The Lord continues to see us without spot, wrinkle and without a single blemish (**Eph. 5:27**). With humble hearts we can live each day in the "Land of Beginning Again."

So, as this new year begins, let's take time to have an honest look at changes we can make. With His help every wrong can be made right. Memorize His words about the "land" in which we live. Write them on your soul, today!

Dan Jenkins viachurchofchristarticles.com

Focus On The Big Picture

A story was told of three young men who inherited a farm from their father. They decided they were going to make a go of becoming farmers. As planting season arrived, the three men got up early and walked towards the barn. As they approached, one of them saw the tractor in horrible shape, so he went to get some parts to fix it up. Another son saw that the fences were broken, so he went to the lumber yard and bought the lumber to fix the fences. The third son looked at the barn and the farm house and decided their farm would look better if they painted these structures, so he went to town and bought the paint.

As the story goes, they worked on the aesthetics but forgot one thing. The seed was still in the barn, and thus they did not get it planted, and they failed in becoming farmers.

Any reputable farmer will tell you that planting the seed is number one on any list. Afterward, the taking care of the crop is necessary, because if there is no crop to sell, there is no profit.

There is a similar story in the Old Testament in the book of **Haggai**.

In **chapter 2 verse 9** the question is asked: "*Is the seed still in the barn?*"

The passage in Haggai was making a point, and it should ring as true today as at any time. We sometimes get involved in taking care of the details that the overall project is lost. Many business owners get so involved in aesthetics and image, that they forget their purpose of business. A lot of restaurant owners work on the ambience and appearance of their restaurant, but if the food is bad, it does not matter to the customers how pretty the place is. Some service companies concentrate on appearance, but if their service is bad, they will not have any customers.

Let us bring the application to our way of life and the meanings for the church. We sometimes are guilty of what we call 'window dressing'. We want to portray a picture of piety and faithfulness towards others, but inside we are guilty of worldliness. The truth eventually will come out; either being caught by others, or when we appear before God in judgment.

Some churches work on the building and auditorium to make it look pretty, but that does not confirm or approve the congregation as being faithful to the Lord.

The problem is that we have failed to see the big picture, and do what our goal should be. The church has the responsibility of teaching the word of God. That is what churches should do. Not only inside with the truth coming from the pulpit, but as each member takes the time to teach others outside of the assembly.

Each Christian should remember that appearance is good and can help to influence others, and set an example. But appearance is not everything. Our goal should be the same goal that belonged to Christ and

God. God is not willing that any perish. We should look at souls in the same way and not allow them to perish. True, most will ignore our pleas to return to God, but that does not give us the excuse of not even trying. If we are to be like Jesus, we must look to what Jesus was. He was a servant, first and foremost. We as Christians should be seeking what Jesus was seeking. To help people get to heaven. Now, here is where we need to make application of the lesson. We have the word of God in our bibles. Should we not be sharing this word with others? Should we not be providing the greatest need known to humankind? God's plan of salvation is man's greatest need. And we say nothing? There are those who pervert God's plan, and we say nothing? Do we not care about souls? Until we learn to care about souls, and expose them to the truth, we will not be like Jesus. That is our goal, is it not?

Remember in **Acts 8 verse 4** the Christians who had been scattered because of the persecution went everywhere preaching the word. Our application in this matter is that we should realize that perhaps we have been concentrating on the "thou shalt not's" so much that we have forgotten our primary goal. The primary goal is to give Jesus our hearts and bodies for His service, not ours.

We should be doing whatever we can to encourage our fellow Christians, and teaching those who are not Christians. If we truly become servants we will seek the better welfare of others, and not be so selfish to seek our own welfare first. We encourage them because we see a day approaching when it will be too late. The day when our Lord returns in the air and gathers up His own, and the rest are gathered up for judgment. The day of judgment will be the time when our faithfulness will become evident. If we are truly trying to help others get to heaven, we will be approved and invited into the feast of the Lord in Heaven. But if we have been doing nothing more than 'window dressing' and cannot get beyond the 'thou shalt's and thou shalt not's', then we will not be worthy. Don't get me wrong here, the thou shalt's and thou shalt not's are still important. We still have to observe and practice them. It is just that we have to practice them in light of the bigger picture. These are not for our personal use only, but for us to set the example for others. These are just the tools we need to be planting the seed. If the seed is not planted there can be no increase, and our efforts will fail.

Our job is to plant the seed, and the seed is the word of God. We must realize that it is God who gives the increase. So let us be like the seed sower in **Mat. 13**. Let us spread the message to all, and perhaps some will fall upon the good soil.

By Carey Scott, simplebiblestudies.com

Excuses 3 – I Don't Do Bad Things

As we look at excuses people make for their behavior we have seen that people say they will quit in time or that what they do doesn't affect others. Each of these has enough seeming truth to deceive the user into a false sense of complacency, but to deadly affect. Excuses are that way in all areas of life and not just the spiritual realm!

Today we look at yet another excuse folks give for their misbehavior and that is: "Well, I don't do BAD things!" or, "I could have done worse!" We have all used this excuse at one point or another, myself included to be perfectly honest. The reason we all use it is because it is so easy to look around and see other people who are doing things that are so much worse than what we know we are guilty of doing. This is a version of pointing to another to take the eye off own guilt.

The problem with all this is that another's guilt does not excuse my own. All that means is that they are guilty, too! My guilt is still there. And besides all that there is no such thing as sin which will NOT cause our souls to be lost. John says so in **1 John 1:8ff** *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* This covers all sins, not just BIG sins or BAD sins. It means ALL sin, and it ALL has to be covered by the Blood.

Cleveland Reddinger

Have Convictions -- Will Stand!

Again I say that I thank God for those Christians who are able to make proper discernment on weakness and strength, quantity and quality; who refuse to be swayed from Bible convictions by discouragements that weed out the weaklings. These know the WHY of *'a falling away.'* They know that part of our warfare must be fought with *'spiritual wickedness in high places;'* that sin and error crouch in camouflaged corners of even the kingdom of God. It takes a Gideon's army with broken pitchers of light to flush them from their dark hidings. This army has heard the short, sharp blast of the bugle call -- 'Stand, Therefore Stand.' We are entrenched behind the impregnable citadel of Bible convictions. Too soberly convicted to be flushed out by the tear-gas bombs of sentimentalism; too confident by the majority-that-God-makes to be routed by the bombardment of 'multitudes on the other side; too near the 'Captain of our salvation' to be intimidated by the screaming mischief-missiles of innuendoes, slander, and prejudicial epithets. Yes, we "Have Convictions - Will Stand."

by J.W. Evans

Eph. 2:19 So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;

1 Pet. 2:9 But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

HOURS OF WORSHIP

Sunday A.M. 9:30 Bible Study

Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

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SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE CLASS:
CHRISTIAN PARENTING - RON PECK

WEDNESDAY BIBLE CLASS: THE BOOK
OF ROMANS - J STAUFFER

SUNDAY SERMON: TO BE PRESENTED
BY BILL MILLER



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10