

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

## Church Fellowship: Syllabus

Notes —

### CLASS #1:

- I. Introduction.
- II. Fellowship in the Early Church.
- III. The Necessity, Nature, and Neglect of Church Fellowship:
  - A. Introduction to Section III.

### CLASS #2:

- III. The Necessity, Nature, and Neglect of Church Fellowship: (cont.)
  - B. The Necessity of Church Fellowship.

### CLASS #3:

- III. The Necessity, Nature, and Neglect of Church Fellowship: (cont.)
  - C. The Nature of Church Fellowship.
  - D. The Neglect of Church Fellowship.

### CLASS #4:

- III. The Necessity, Nature, and Neglect of Church Fellowship: (cont.)
  - D. The Neglect of Church Fellowship. (cont.)
  - E. Conclusion.
- IV. A Modern Day Application: Christian Fellowship and Tribalism.
  - A. Introduction.
  - B. Loyalty.
  - C. Implications of **One** Household.

### CLASS #5:

- IV. A Modern Day Application: Christian Fellowship and Tribalism. (cont.)
  - D. The Lord's Supper.
- Exam.

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## Church Fellowship: Exam

### Possible 20 Point Questions

- 1) Describe the sharing of fellowship by referring to sharing in, sharing out, and sharing with (pp. 156, 157).
- 2) Explain how fellowship is crucial and essential in the witness of the church (pp. 167-170).
- 3) Describe how fellowship is based on relationship (pp. 181-184).
- 4) Explain how the fear of confession hinders fellowship (pp. 188-190).
- 5) Use the concept of the **One** body of Christ to promote fellowship in the Church (pp. 199-200)
- 6) In 1 Cor 11:27 what does an “unworthy manner” mean (pp. 203-205)?

### Possible 10 Point Questions

- 1) Briefly describe one of the “secrets” of fellowship in the early church (pp. 157-159).
- 2) List three scriptures that offer “one another” instructions (p. 165).
- 3) Briefly explain the implications of the fact that the term “saint” is always in the plural form (p. 171).
- 4) What is the meaning of “koinonia” (pp. 179-180)?
- 5) List and briefly explain two general hindrances to fellowship (p. 185).
- 6) List three specific fears that hinder fellowship (pp. 185-188).
- 7) Briefly comment on this statement: “We do not have to create fellowship. We already are a fellowship (p. 192).”
- 8) Define “tribalism” (pp. 194-195).
- 9) Use Eph 2:11-22 to argue against prejudice (p. 199).
- 10) List three bases for division in the Corinthian church (pp. 201, 202).
- 11) What is “not judging the body rightly” mean in 1 Cor 11:29 (p. 206)?
- 12) What is the solution to the problems of tribalism (p. 207)?

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## I. Introduction.

Notes —

### A. The Power of Fellowship (Sharing and Togetherness).

1. During World War II, Adolph Hitler's scientists conducted experiments to find the most effective type of punishment or torture for eliciting information from prisoners.
  - a. They found that solitary confinement (being isolated from other people) was the most effective form of torture. After a few weeks of solitary confinement, most men would cooperate with the enemy.
  - b. 'Fellowship' is an Old English word which simply means "sharing and togetherness."
  - c. The human need for fellowship is very high. Indeed, fellowship is more than a need. It is a basic part of human life. We must have social interaction. Without fellowship we will die.
    - 1) Studies have shown that newborn babies are more adversely effected by a lack of human contact than by a lack of food.
    - 2) A newborn baby will live longer without food than it will live without human contact and affection.
2. Solitary confinement (a lack of human sharing and togetherness) resulted in weakness. The prisoner fell to the temptation and abandoned his own value of loyalty.
  - a. In the same way, Christians who lack spiritual fellowship with other Christians will be weakened. They will inevitably abandon their values and fall to the temptations of the enemy.
  - b. The Christian's need for spiritual fellowship with others is more than a need. It is a basic part of the Christian life. Without it Christianity can not exist, because without it Christianity can not be practiced in its fullness.

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- c. Spiritual lives die when there is no spiritual fellowship with others. No Christian can stand alone. God has formed the **people** of God, not simply the **person** of God. His goal is to have a **family**, not simply an **individual**.

## Discussion Point

Conduct a brief discussion about the effects of being isolated as a Christian and how fellowship with other believers helps to overcome those effects.

### B. The Contents of This Course.

1. The necessity of fellowship in the Church does not automatically mean that there is fellowship in the Church or that it is easy to practice that fellowship.
2. From the beginnings of the Church we can see that life in the family of God is not always practiced the way it should be practiced. It is difficult to live in such a large family and always get along with each member.

### Author's Comment:

**There is a sting of reality in the words of the following poem:**

**To dwell above with saints we love,  
O, that will sure be glory.  
But to dwell below with saints we know,  
Well, that's another story.**

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3. This course is divided into three sections:
  - a. A brief study of fellowship in the early Church.
  - b. A more extensive study of the theology of fellowship according to the Bible. We will focus on three topics:
    - 1) The **Necessity** of church fellowship.
    - 2) The **Nature** of church fellowship.
    - 3) The **Neglect** of church fellowship.
  - c. A modern day application of church fellowship principles applied to African tribalism problems in the African church. Here we will consider how the concept of Church fellowship can be the cure for a common spiritual sickness in the Church of tribal areas.

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## II. Fellowship in the Early Church.

### A. The Testimony of Fellowship.

1. Lucian (120-200 A.D.) was a very famous Greek writer in the days of the early Church. He was not a Christian, but when he observed the strong fellowship between Christians he wrote the following words:

“It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator has put it into their heads that they are brethren.”<sup>1</sup>
2. Lucian was skeptical, but he could not ignore the fact that these Christians were sincere in their fellowship.
3. The sincere fellowship between Christians was a great testimony of the early church. We need to ask ourselves today: “Is the fellowship in our churches providing a positive testimony to unbelievers?”
4. We will see later in the course, fellowship and evangelism are directly related.

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## Discussion Point

Is the fellowship of our churches different than the fellowship of the early church?  
If so, why do you think it has changed?

### B. The Sharing of Fellowship.

#### 1. Sharing **in**.

- a. The Christians in the early Church understood that it was their fellowship with God that was the basis for their fellowship with each other (1 Jn 1:1-4).
- b. Fellowship with others was based on a **common** belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ.
- c. They had in **common** the beliefs they “shared in.” (See Jude 3 and Tit 1:4).

#### 2. Sharing **out**.

- a. The Christians in the early Church also had in **common** the things that they “shared out.”
- b. They gave out the same Gospel (Lk 5:10).
- c. They had a **common** responsibility to share their material possessions with those in need.

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## 3. Sharing **with**.

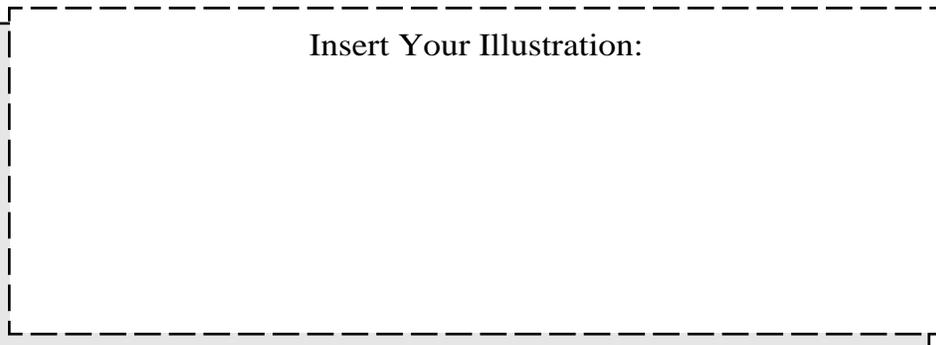
- a. The Christians in the early Church “shared with” each other reciprocal responsibilities and relationships (see Phil 4:15 and Rom 15:27).
- b. Consider Rom 1:11, 12.
  - 1) There was a give and take relationship within the Christian community.
  - 2) The important word in this context is “one another” (the Greek word is “alaython”). The practice of community in the Church was based on a series of New Testament commandments that included this term.
  - 3) The Christians were to do certain things “one to another.” They were to give and to receive. They were to “share with” each other. We will study the “one another” commands in more detail later in the course.

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## C. **The Key Aspects of Fellowship.** How was this type of fellowship made possible in the early Church?

1. All Christians became witnesses.
  - a. It was commonly accepted and understood that a Christian was a witness. The common practice of “witnessing,” of giving public testimony for Christ naturally formed strong relationships between Christians.
  - b. This is still true today. Fellowship in a church is strengthened when evangelism is a focus of its members.

Insert Your Illustration:



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2. Owners became stewards.

- a. There was a renewal of the mind in the area of money and possessions. Christians understood that God owned everything. They viewed themselves as stewards of material things. This, of course, affected their fellowship greatly. It was much easier for them to share their things because they had the perspective of a steward.
- b. This is still true today. The more we see ourselves as stewards, the more likely it is that we will share. Sharing is the essence of fellowship.

Insert Your Illustration:

3. Self interest was lost due to a holy passion for Jesus.

- a. The cross was embraced. Early Christians understood that the Christian life was a life that took up the cross daily. They gave up their own lives. It is much easier to share (fellowship) with others after you have let go of yourselves.
- b. This is still true today. The cross frees us to have sincere fellowship. The direction of fellowship is toward others. The direction of the cross is toward others. The cross and fellowship are brothers.

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Insert Your Illustration:

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4. They act in small groups.
  - a. The early Church understood that without small groups fellowship would simply become a theory (or just an idea). They practiced their Christianity in the context of small house churches. Their fellowship was real and effective.
  - b. This is still true today. We can not have the intimate relationship that the New Testament commands requires in the midst of hundreds of people. In some way we must be a part of a smaller group so that we can truly (not theoretically) practice having fellowship.

## **Discussion Point**

Use the previous concepts to promote discussion about the key aspects of fellowship: witness, stewardship, denying self, and small group fellowship.

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## III. The Necessity, Nature, and Neglect of Church Fellowship.

### A. Introduction to Section III.

#### 1. Study Ps 133:1.

- a. Why would Christians choose to not take advantage of the blessing and joy of fellowship?
- b. Perhaps the real question is: "Is it even possible for a Christian to negate the blessing and joy of fellowship? Is fellowship simply an optional aspect of the Christian life?"
  - 1) The Biblical answer to this question is no. Fellowship is not an option, it is a commandment.
  - 2) Thus, Ps 133 ends with the words: "For there the Lord commanded the blessing."

#### 2. Renewing our minds.

- a. Some Christians think that the type of fellowship that is seen in the New Testament Church is a "radical" aspect of Christianity.
  - 1) However, the New Testament passages do not read like that. The accounts of this "radical" form of Christianity are presented in a "matter of fact" way. The New Testament form of fellowship was "normative," not "radical."
  - 2) For example, Acts 2:44 is presented very naturally. We do not get the idea that there was a forced type of fellowship. It was the fellowship that comes from the understanding that we have been born into the same family.

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## Author's Illustration:

A brother does not say to his sister: "Let's try to organize a family. We can get a mother, father, and a little brother to form a family."

The family is not humanly pieced together, but is divinely appointed.

A father asked his daughter: "Are you glad that Billy is your brother?"

The daughter replied: "Well, I really did not have a choice."

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Insert Your Illustration:

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- b. Our minds must be renewed with respect to our spiritual families.
  - 1) Fellowship is not an option in the Church. It is a requirement.
    - a) It is required in order to obey God.
    - b) It is required in order to grow in your relationship with God.
  - 2) The sharing that we see in the fellowship of the New Testament Church is not “radical.”
    - a) Yes, compared to worldly fellowship it is radical.
    - b) However, relative to the Bible it is normative.
  - 3) The members of the Church must renew their minds to understand and accept the implications of the requirements of living in a family. Families spend time together and share things. The members of a family share their lives with each other.

## Discussion Point

Discuss the need for fellowship and the obstacles that prevent real community and fellowship from happening in your local congregations.

### B. The Necessity of Church Fellowship.

- 1. Fellowship is a **requirement** for successful Christian living. It is a **priority** in the Christian’s life.
  - a. **A requirement.**
    - 1) Ralph Martin, in his book The Family and the Fellowship, writes:  
  
“The new life in Christ requires a social context for its maintenance and maturity. The Christian life is possible only within a network of interpersonal relationships that both lay their claims upon us and invite us to contribute our best.”<sup>2</sup>

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- 2) Paul, in Eph 4:15, 16, points to the Body of Christ as being the vehicle through which Christians mature.
- 3) The concept of the Body of Christ assumes and requires interaction (fellowship) between its various members (Prov 27:17).
- 4) The concept of the Body of Christ is consistent with the concept of synergy.
  - a) Synergy is the phenomenon that results in the whole being greater than the sum the parts (Eccl 4:9-12).
  - b) It is the result of an evangelist working together with a teacher. Their combined ministry is greater than the sum of their individual ministries. They complement each other and add to each other's ministry.
  - c) Synergy requires fellowship.

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**Insert Your Illustration:**

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- 5) The Church is the gathering together of “the called out ones.” (This is the direct translation of the Greek word ‘church,’ ekklesia in the New Testament.)
  - a) When Paul writes to “the called out ones” in Eph 4:1 it is in the context of the instructions given in 4:2.
  - b) Read Eph 4:2.
    - (1) To be called out (to be in the Church) necessarily involves fellowship with other “called out ones.”
    - (2) Fellowship becomes an obvious requirement when we begin to see the nature of many of the instructions that are given to the Church.
    - (3) As is the case in Eph 4:2, many instructions to the Church are “one another” oriented. They are instructions that include doing something “alaython” (one to another).

## Discussion Point

Study the following diagram of “one another” instructions found in the New Testament. Use the diagram to challenge the students. Ask them if they are actually doing the things that are required of them as Christians. Remind them that a “one another” instruction necessarily requires the practice of fellowship.

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<b>“ONE ANOTHER” REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>SCRIPTURE</b>
Devotion to ONE ANOTHER	Rom 12:10
Give preference to ONE ANOTHER	Rom 12:10
Have the same mind toward ONE ANOTHER	Rom 12:16
Accept ONE ANOTHER	Rom 15:7
Admonish ONE ANOTHER	Rom 15:14
Greet ONE ANOTHER (affection)	Rom 16:16
Wait for ONE ANOTHER (courtesy, respect)	1Cor 11:33
Care for ONE ANOTHER	1Cor 12:25
Serve ONE ANOTHER	Gal 5:13
Bear the burdens of ONE ANOTHER	Gal 6:2
Encourage and build up ONE ANOTHER	1Thes 5:11
Live in peace with ONE ANOTHER	1Thes 5:13
Seek that which is good for ONE ANOTHER	1Thes 5:15
Showing forbearance to ONE ANOTHER	Eph 4:2
Be kind to ONE ANOTHER	Eph 4:32
Be subject to ONE ANOTHER	Eph 5:21
Bearing with and forgiving ONE ANOTHER	Col 3:13
Confess your sins to ONE ANOTHER	Jms 5:16
Pray for ONE ANOTHER	Jms 5:16
Love ONE ANOTHER	1Pt 1:22
Be hospitable to ONE ANOTHER	1Pt 4:9
Be humble toward ONE ANOTHER	1 Pt 5:5
Have fellowship with ONE ANOTHER	1Jn 1:7

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6) David Watson, in his book Called and Committed, reports:

“This sense of Christian community for all disciples was so strong and fundamental in the first century that salvation apart from the church was considered impossible.”<sup>3</sup>

a) It was the reality of this type of commitment to fellowship that created an strong sense of something radically new and different.

(1) Fellowship was a visible and necessary aspect of the Church.

(2) The early disciples’ understanding of “church” would have completely fallen apart without a strong sense of fellowship.

b) The necessity of fellowship in the early Church is fully realized in 1 Cor 5.

(1) To be excluded from fellowship was the most severe form of discipline.

(2) For this type of discipline to be effective, fellowship must exist. It is a logical requirement.

## **Discussion Point**

Use the previous concepts about the requirement of fellowship to promote further discussion and to answer questions.

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## b. A Priority.

- 1) Howard Snyder, in his book The Community of the King,<sup>4</sup> points to the following four Biblical truths that should establish the priority of fellowship:
  - a) The concept of the people of God.
  - b) The model of Christ with His disciples.
  - c) The example of the early Church.
  - d) The explicit teachings of Jesus and the apostles.
- 2) John Wesley (the founder of the Methodist movement) could see no alternative to forming small fellowship groups as he considered the implications of the previous four truths. Fellowship was a focus of the revivals that developed under this movement.
- 3) Howard Snyder suggests that Jesus spent more time preparing a community of disciples than proclaiming the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, fellowship must be a priority in our Christian lives.

### Discussion Point

Use the previous concepts to discuss the prioritizing of fellowship.

2. Fellowship is **crucial** to the life of the Church. It is **essential** in the witness of the Church.
  - a. **Crucial.**
    - 1) The Church is the body through which Jesus continues to work on the earth.
    - 2) Fellowship is not simply extra weight to carry on the body.

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- 3) Fellowship is like the ligaments and sinews which connect the different parts of the body together.
  - a) If there are no ligaments, then the body can not hold together. If there is no fellowship then the Church will fall apart.
  - b) For the body to keep functioning, the parts need to stay connected. For the Church to keep functioning as it should, the members must remain in unity. They must stay connected to each other. This is done though fellowship.

**Insert Your Illustration:**

**b. Essential.**

- 1) David Watson writes:

“We live in an age of personal insignificance, and great loneliness. More than ever the church needs to recapture the priority of community in Christian discipleship.”<sup>6</sup>

- a) Watson’s point is clear. The Church has a great opportunity. The world has left many people lonely and starved for real fellowship.
- b) The Church is the only thing that can truly fill the empty lives.

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## 2) Fellowship and evangelism.

Notes —

### a) Fellowship is the ultimate goal of evangelism.

- (1) The main focus is not on converting people. It is not even on discipling people. The main focus of evangelism is to bring others into the family of God. It is to bring others into the Body of Christ and the fellowship of that Body.
- (2) Jesus came to build His Church. He came to form a people (community) of God. Indeed, this must be our primary goal and motivation in **Biblical** church growth.

### b) Fellowship is the basis of evangelism.

(1) We must have something to offer to people.

(2) Watson writes:

“Until the kingdom of God can be demonstrated in our relationships of love with one another, we have nothing credible to say to an unbelieving and broken world.”<sup>7</sup>

(3) Jn 13:35 reveals that our love for one another is the world’s evidence that we are the children of God.

(4) Our credibility (and therefore the credibility of the Gospel) depends on how well we can demonstrate love for one another.

(a) If the world can not see us showing love to each other, then why would they believe our message about love?

(b) The nature of God is the Trinity and the essence of the Trinity is fellowship.

(c) If the Church wants to present a God of fellowship, then it must demonstrate that same spirit of fellowship.

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## Author's Illustration:

A business that does not exist does not conduct advertising to promote a nonexistent business.

Evangelism without a corresponding community is like an advertisement without a corresponding business.

The customer is attracted to the business because of the advertisement. However, when he arrives at the advertised location of the business, he finds that it does not exist. This is false advertising.

Unfortunately, the same thing happens sometimes in Christianity. The new believer hears the evangelism and is attracted to the church. However, when he arrives he can immediately see that the family of God that was part of the "advertising" (evangelism) is cold and uncaring. He could understandably shout, **false advertising**.

## Insert Your Illustration:

### Discussion Point

Discuss how fellowship is crucial to life within the church and essential for witness of the church. Answer any questions.

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3. Fellowship is **assumed** in the Word of God and is **inherent** in His plan.

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a. **Assumed.**

1) In the New Testament, the Bible refers to believers as “saints.”

a) Of the 62 times this reference is used, 61 times the word “saint” is in the plural form.

b) The only exception is when Paul says in Phil 4:21 to “Greet every saint.” Even the exception indicates the same meaning.

2) The Bible assumes the fellowship of believers. It assumes the plurality of the people of God.

a) The Bible assumes that the people of God are a group, not an individual.

b) It assumes that the Church is a community in fellowship, not an individual alone.

b. **Inherent.** Fellowship is inherent in who we are in the plan of God in three aspects.

1) Fellowship is inherent in who we are in creation.

a) Study Gen 1:26.

(1) Notice that we are made in the image of “us.”

(2) Of course, “us” refers to the Trinity. Remember, the essence of the Trinity is relationship. The Trinity is the manifestation of the perfect community (fellowship). To be created in the image of “us” is to be created in the image of a perfect fellowship.

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b) Now study Gen 1:27.

- (1) Because all of this is true, man is then created as a fellowship. He is created male and female.
- (2) The man, alone, was incomplete. Thus, God creates the most basic community or fellowship (that of marriage).
- (3) Indeed, a sense of fellowship is inherent to who we are in creation. We were created as social beings. Consider again the medical fact that a new born baby left alone for some weeks will die even though it receives food.

2) Fellowship is inherent in who we are in the Fall.

- a) Man is by nature a social being. However, in the fall man's nature was distorted. He became alienated from himself and others.
- b) Nonetheless, fellowship is inherent to who we are in the fall because of the things we have in common.
  - (1) We are all sinners (Rom 3:23).
  - (2) There is only one solution (Jn 14:6).
  - (3) Thus, we have a **common** problem and a **common** solution.
  - (4) This is a basis for fellowship (consider 1 Cor 10:17). The same thing is true in the world.

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## **Author's Illustration:**

Some of the strongest communities or groups of people have formed around a common problem and a common solution.

Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. (A program created by the mother of a teenager who was killed by a drunk driver.)

Neighborhood crime watch teams. (Groups formed to prevent crime in local areas).

Russians and Americans came together in World Wars I and II because they had a common problem, who was their enemy named Hitler, and a common solution called "victory in the war".

How much more true should this dynamic of bringing people together be in the Church. We have a common problem, and a common solution of eternal significance, not simply temporal importance.

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## **Insert Your Illustration:**

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- 3) Fellowship is inherent in who we are in Christ.
  - a) The initial purpose that Jesus had for His followers was to have fellowship with them.
  - b) Study the order of purposes in Mk 3:14 (be with him, then be sent out to preach).
    - (1) Notice that community precedes evangelism. Fellowship with Jesus and with each other comes first, because as we have seen, fellowship is a foundation of evangelism.
    - (2) Remember, when Jesus called them to be **with Him** He did not call an individual. He called a group. Yes, this group would share everything. They had a common purse. They had a common purpose. They shared their time, their joys, their sorrows, their triumphs and pains.
  - c) Study Jn 13:15.
    - (1) Jesus gave an example of how the community should operate. He then told the members of the community that they should do the same things.
    - (2) Jesus developed the idea of community (fellowship), gave the example of how it should operate (service in humility), and then encouraged the community to continue. Later on, He also sent the Spirit, who was the One who enabled the community to continue.

## Discussion Point

Use the previous concepts to promote further discussion about how fellowship is assumed in the Word and inherent in God's plan. Answer any questions.

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## 4. Conclusion to Necessity of Church Fellowship.

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- a. We must repeat that fellowship with God must be the basis for fellowship with other Christians (see 1 Jn 1:3).
  - 1) Just as Church fellowship precedes evangelism, knowing God precedes Church fellowship.
  - 2) There is a definite order in the listing of the two greatest commandments (see Mt 22:37-39).
- b. Review the flow of the previous points.
  - 1) Fellowship is **required** of members of the family of God.
  - 2) This is not one of the lesser requirements. It is a **priority**.
  - 3) It must be a priority because it is **crucial** in the life of the Church.
  - 4) It is **essential** in the growth of the Church.
  - 5) It is so crucial and essential that it is **assumed** in the Word of God.
  - 6) It is assumed because it is **inherent** in who we are in the plan of God.
- c. Therefore, to conclude in this section which focuses on the necessity of church fellowship: Fellowship is necessary because it is natural. We should naturally be in fellowship with one another. We are in the same family!

### Discussion Point

Briefly discuss any questions or comments related to the necessity of church fellowship.

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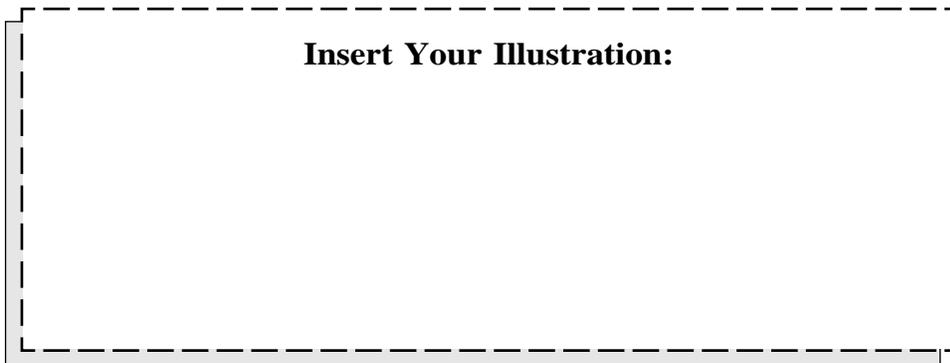
## C. The Nature of Church Fellowship.

1. Introduction to the nature of church fellowship.
  - a. Christian fellowship must be a Christ centered fellowship.
  - b. It must be a sharing of the life of Christ, which is identified by three key attributes.
    - 1) The life of Christ is the life of the cross. Thus, our fellowship must be based on the cross.
    - 2) The life of Christ was a life of sharing. Thus, our fellowship must be based on sharing (koinonia).
    - 3) The life of Christ was a life of relationship. Thus, our fellowship must be based on relationship.
2. Fellowship based on the cross.
  - a. The cross brings selflessness.
    - 1) Jesus' life was a life of selflessness (Mk 10:45).
      - a) His coming was an act of selflessness (Phil 2:6, 7).
      - b) His death was the climax of selflessness (1 Tim 2:6).
    - 2) Without a denial of self, a laying down of rights, and a dying to self, it is impossible to have **Christian** fellowship. Instead, we will only have a Christianized humanistic community.
      - a) Christian fellowship is a cross centered fellowship that is based on "agape" (divine) unconditional love. It builds itself because it gives of itself.
      - b) Humanistic fellowship is a crossless fellowship that is based on "phileo" (human) conditional love. It destroys itself because it takes for itself.

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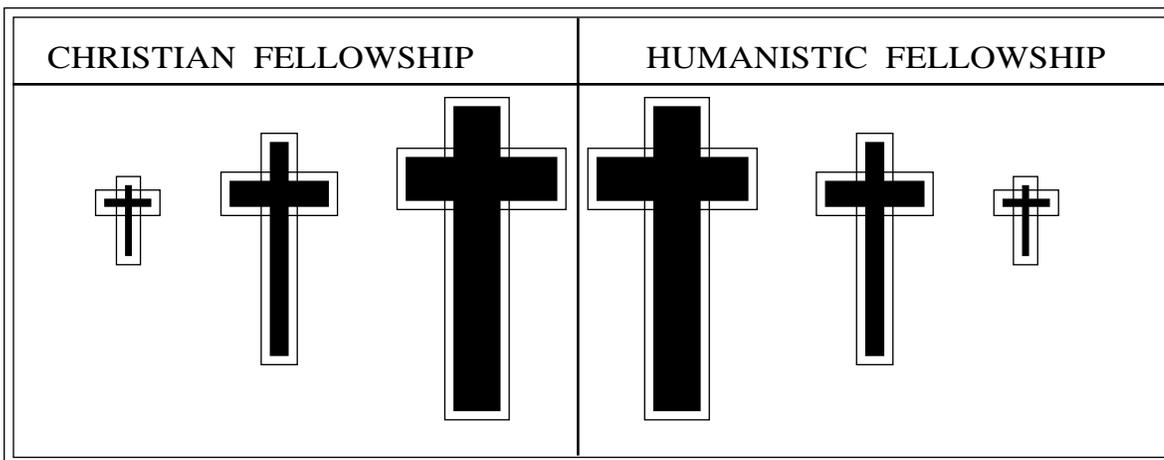
- 3) A Christian community is distinguished by its members who willingly lay down their rights for the sake of the community.
- a) It is not to say that we have no rights. It is to say that we are willing to lay them down for the sake of fellowship (See Cor 9:4-11, 12 and 2 Thes 3:9).
  - b) When rights are selfishly held onto, then service, love, and fellowship are usually let go of.

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**Discussion Point**

Use the following diagram to promote discussion about fellowship and selflessness.



Note: In the Christian community, the fellowship increases because the cross increases. A “cross community” equals a strong community. As death to self increases the life of the fellowship increases.

Note: In the humanistic community, the fellowship decreases because the cross decreases. A “crossless community” equals a weak and fake community. As death to self decreases the life of the fellowship decreases. Without the cross, fellowship eventually dies.

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b. The cross brings service.

1) Fellowship is based on the cross in two different ways. Both ways need to be understood and practiced.

2) If self denial is practiced without service, then there is the danger of moving into mysticism. Christianity must not stop at self denial. It must continue in service.

a) The Christian community is an “other” oriented community.

(1) It is a community whose members try to outdo one another in showing honor (Rom 12:10).

(2) It is a community whose members think of each other as more important than themselves (Phil 2:3).

(3) It is a community that focuses on the good of the other. More than anything else, these members should be conscious of their responsibility to each other and their willful desire to put each other first.

b) Its members imitate its founder who said the words of Mk 10:45.

(1) Natural authority develops in the community through service.

(2) Domination and oppression is not part of the community.

c) And so, the structure of the community is unique. Its leaders are its servants. Authority takes on the character of service.

**Insert Your Illustration:**

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

## Discussion Point

Notes —

Use the previous concepts to promote discussion about fellowship and service.

3. Fellowship based on koinonia (sharing).
  - a. The Greek term “koinonia” is not used until after the day of Pentecost. When the group gathered together in Acts 1 a different Greek term was used.
    - 1) After the day of Pentecost the word “koinonia” is used to describe the fellowship of believers.
    - 2) The only way to have the type of fellowship that is required in the New Testament is to have it in the power of the Spirit evidenced by transformed lives.
  - b. The Greek term “koinonia” can be defined as having “all things in common.”
    - 1) We have a common problem and a common solution (1 Cor 10:17 uses the word “koinonia”).
    - 2) The understanding of this “common situation” as a basis for “koinonia” is the motivation of the writing of the letter to Philemon.
    - 3) The heart of koinonia is sharing.
    - 4) We have a shared faith (Tit 1:3), a shared grace (Phil 1:7), and a shared salvation (Jude 3). These things form the foundation of koinonia.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

## Notes –

5) The sharing of material possessions was not a law. It was a desire. It was not done with respect to obligation. It was done with respect to privilege (see Acts 2:43-47 and 4:32-35).

a) The idea of koinonia is very complete. It includes sharing in every aspect of life. David Watson offers the following challenge:

“This striking statement exposes the superficiality of many church fellowships today. It is interesting that “koinonia” occurs in the context of the sharing of money or possessions more frequently than in any other context. It means much more than singing the same hymns and joining in the same church meeting. It will involve the full commitment of our lives, and of all that we have, to one another.”<sup>8</sup>

b) The Christian community today must challenge itself with the words of Acts 4:32.

(1) The sharing of possessions was an outpouring of love. It was a logical response to a sincere belief and understanding of being part of a family. Family members share their things. They share everything.

(2) The sharing of possessions was an acknowledgment and manifestation of the unity the early Christians knew in Christ through the Spirit.

(3) For real fellowship to exist, we must agree that our brother has equal rights to the things that our father has entrusted to us (review Acts 4:32).

(a) The practice of sharing possessions should not be forced (communism). It is not an end in itself. It is not a goal.

(b) Rather, it is a natural response of the sincere acknowledgment of the true relationship of brothers and sisters who have the same Father.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

**Insert Your Illustration:**

Notes —

## **Discussion Point**

Use the previous concepts to promote discussion about fellowship and sharing. Answer any questions.

4. Fellowship based on relationship.
  - a. The word relationship is an intimate word. Especially among Christians, its meaning and manifestation should avoid the superficial. It should be real.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes —

## Author's Illustration:

Some Christians think that relationship simply means eating ice cream together. A “fellowship” in many North American churches, for example, consists of eating ice cream after the Sunday meeting.

Sometimes we spend so much time eating ice cream cones that we have no time to minister to the needs of hurting people in our midst.

## Insert Your Illustration:

- 1) Christian fellowship must be personal, intimate, and real.
- 2) We must go beyond superficial and casual concerns. We must become familiar with each others lives. How else could we have compassion (to suffer with) for our brother.
- 3) Our fellowship with God is intimate. We speak to God from the depths of our souls. Our fellowship with each other must be intimate also.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

- b. One of the fastest ways to destroy real fellowship is to base our relationships on accomplishing tasks.
- 1) We can not have intimate, real relationships when the primary reason for meeting together is to accomplish a task or to organize a project.
  - 2) The main reason to come together must always be to commune with God and each other. We must come together as brothers and sisters who desire the good of each other through seeking the good of the Father.
  - 3) When the main reason to come together is to accomplish a task, we invert the order of the Gospel. Faith before works is changed and becomes works before faith.
    - a) Jesus required a deep relationship with His disciples. He did not promote casual acquaintances or “working relationships.”
    - b) The tragedy of Western Christianity is that the focus that Christ had on filling the community with loving hearts has been replaced by a focus of filling up the community numerically.
      - (1) In some of our large gatherings we would never notice if 75% of the people who were at the previous gathering were not there as long as the 75% who were not there were replaced by other people. When we look at the members of the community as simply representing a filled place in the community, then we necessarily forfeit true community and fellowship.
      - (2) The result is a focus on filled chairs (having many people present) instead of on filled lives (lives filled with God’s Spirit).
    - c) This does not happen in a church that understands what real, intimate, and personal, relationships require. The members must interact with each other and share their lives. It is not enough to meet together and share a building.

Notes —

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes —

**Insert Your Illustration:**

**Discussion Point**

Use the previous concepts to promote discussion about fellowship and relationships. Is the focus of your meeting together to accomplish tasks or experience deeper relationships?

- c. How can we promote and experience real relationships in our fellowship?
  - 1) We must realize that the Christian community is ‘a called out’ people who are members of a covenant community. The covenant is with their Father and with each other.
  - 2) We must make this covenant something concrete and defined. In order to do this, we must make a covenant with a small group of believers.
    - a) A small group is necessary for fellowship to become concrete, real, personal, and intimate.
    - b) To think that we can have that kind of fellowship with 500 people is to make fellowship an unrealistic theory, instead of a reality.

**Discussion Point**

Briefly discuss any questions or comments related to the nature of Church fellowship.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

## D. The Neglect of Church Fellowship.

Notes —

1. General hindrances to fellowship.
  - a. Individualism (especially a vulnerability of Charismatic churches). It denies the existence of fellowship.
    - 1) Individualism can hinder our ability to look at other's needs as more important than our own needs (Phil 2:3).
    - 2) It can hinder our ability to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2).
    - 3) It can hinder our ability to submit to others (Eph 5:21).
    - 4) It can hinder our ability to outdo one another in honor (Rom 12:10).
  - b. Institutionalism (especially a vulnerability in main line churches).
    - 1) It denies the flow of natural fellowship by trying to regulate or force it.
    - 2) It tries to make fellowship a formula or a recipe.
2. Specific fears that hinder community.
  - a. The fear of dependency.
    - 1) The Western culture puts such a high value on independence that being dependent on others is thought of as a weakness.
    - 2) However, true Biblical fellowship accepts and desires the mutual dependency of its members.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes —

## Author's Illustration:

The foot's recognition of its dependency on the hand is only natural when it is time to take off its shoe.

The eye does not question its dependence on the mouth when it sees something good to eat.

The recognition and acceptance of unity in diversity within the body of Christ is essential for true fellowship, and also for effective evangelism and testimony.

## Insert Your Illustration:

- 3) Jerry Horner, in his book Living in the Family, writes the following words:

“When individual Christians humble themselves both to give and to receive from one another, facing each other in a circle of interdependency, the witness of the church to the world will be irresistible.”<sup>9</sup>

## Discussion Point

Discuss the problems that come with being unwilling to allow or acknowledge dependency upon one another.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

b. The fear of commitment.

Notes —

- 1) Fellowship without a clear declaration of commitment is like a marriage without wedding vows. Neither will make it through the storms that will come.
  - a) A marriage is built on covenant and commitment.
  - b) A husband and a wife do not need to decide in each situation whether or not they will help each other. They have already made that decision in their covenant with one another.
- 2) As Christians, we must realize that we are committed to each other.
- 3) We must make this commitment to all Christians. More specifically, we must make the commitment clear, concrete, specific, and practical to a small group of Christians.
  - a) We can not create this commitment, because it already exists. We must actively accept it.
  - b) We do not strive to be committed. We surrender to be committed.
  - c) Some Christians might say: “I do not want to commit myself to this ministry or that Spiritual discipline.” The reality is that if they are Christians, then they already are committed to other Christians. They must choose to accept or reject that commitment.

**Insert Your Illustration:**

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes —

## Discussion Point

Does your culture or personal background cause it to be difficult for you to make commitments and keep them?  
Discuss this common problem.

c. The fear of confession.

- 1) Confession of sins one to another (Jms 5:16) is an essential part of fellowship (as seen in many, if not all, of the revivals throughout Church history).
- 2) The only occurrences of the term “church” that are found in the Gospels are in the context of confession and a lack of confession (or loosing and binding).
  - a) Study Mt 16:18 and 18:17.
  - b) The power of fellowship (Mt 18:19) is also seen in the context of confession.
- 3) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book Life Together, points out that:

“He who is alone with his sin is completely alone. In confession the breakthrough to community takes place.”<sup>10</sup>

  - a) This is certainly true in our relationship with God.
  - b) It is also true in our relationships with each other. Strong cords of fellowship are created in the midst of the confession of sins.

**Insert Your Illustration:**

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

- 4) Christians remain alone in their sin because of the self righteous reaction of the church when sin is exposed.
- 5) There is an unhealthy and hypocritical attitude about sin in some parts of the church.
  - a) Often, when someone confesses their sins, others begin to not associate with that person. How ironic! In the New Testament Church the opposite was true. It was when someone refused to confess his sin others would not associate with him.
    - (1) In the New Testament, it is understood that the members of the Church are sinners (1 Jn 1:8).
    - (2) It is understood that they need to confess their sins (1 Jn 1:9).
    - (3) Moreover, it is understood that they need to confess their sins to one another (Jms 5:16).
  - b) The unhealthy attitude is a result of a false sense of purity and righteousness.
    - (1) We are filthy. Jesus is pure and righteous. It is Jesus in us that is the only thing that makes us pure and righteous.
    - (2) All have fallen short of the glory or “ever existing presence” of Jesus in their lives. That is, all Christians fail to let Jesus in their lives sometimes. Thus, all Christians sin to some degree. Thus, all Christians need to confess sins.
    - (3) This should not be a great shock to us. Our reaction should not be one of self-righteous surprise. We are all sinners and we all need to confess our sins.

Notes —

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes -

**Insert Your Illustration:**

**Discussion Point**

How do you respond when someone confesses sin to you? Do you think differently of them because of their sin? Is there an atmosphere within your church that allows for confessing sin? Are you willing to initiate it if necessary?

6) Until we take off our masks (stop trying to hide our faults) and accept the fact that we have a sin nature, we will not be able to establish the atmosphere in the church for transparent fellowship to exist. We will not be able to confess our sins to one another.

a) David Watson speaks these words of truth:

“Genuine fellowship comes when Christians stop relating to one another as righteous saints, and accept one another as unrighteous sinners.”<sup>11</sup>

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

- b) Some theologies say that confession of sin is a denial of faith.
  - (1) Some extreme forms of “prosperity theology,” “victory theology,” and “positive **confession** theology” do not allow for confession of sins.
  - (2) They say that it would be a “negative” confession. They say to confess sin is to negate who we are by faith. They say to look to the victory and away from the defeat.
  - (3) These theologies focus so much on victory in the life of the believer that they seem to forget who the **victorious one** is. It is Jesus in us. It is not us in us. We are victorious in Him.
- c) To confess sin is not to deny faith because our faith is not in ourselves.

Notes —

## Discussion Point

Has your background discouraged the confession of sin to fellow believers? Can you see how this blocks true fellowship not only with others, but also with God? Discuss this issue.

- 7) The community of confession must be a community that is willing to take risks. It must be a community that is open and transparent.
  - a) Many Christians fear these types of ideas and words. It is a risk to be transparent. However, the alternative is to close the windows of our lives. We may all live on the same street but no one ever comes out of their house and no one ever lets others in.
  - b) We must not allow the fear of being misunderstood and offended to keep us from confessing our sins to one another.
  - c) The way to do this is to die to ourselves. A selfless person can not be offended because there is no self left to offend.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes —

**Insert Your Illustration:**

**Discussion Point**

Are you able to be vulnerable and transparent? Can you encourage others to be open and confess their sin if you demonstrate a contradictory example? Discuss.

**E. Conclusions to Necessity, Nature and Neglect.**

1. Perhaps as we focus on the thought that community is not an ideal, but is an already established fact, we will begin to allow real community and fellowship to occur.
  - a. We do not have to create fellowship. We already are a fellowship.
  - b. As with many other aspects of our walk with Christ, we must stop striving and start surrendering. We must stop trying to create something and start trying to obey Someone.
    - 1) We must stop trying to create and start accepting what has already been created by the Creator.
    - 2) We must stop dreaming of an ideal community and start living in the existing one.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

2. We must remember that fellowship with the Father assumes fellowship with His children. One can not successfully exist without the other.
  - a. We must accept brothers and sisters the way they are even if they are different than we are. This is a basic rule of a family. A brother does not refuse to have fellowship with a sister because of “personality differences” (consider Rom 15:7).
  - b. We seem to be united more easily to the fellowship of the flesh that is temporal than to the fellowship of the Spirit that is eternal. Fellowship in our physical families is important and necessary, but it is even more important and necessary in our spiritual family.
    - 1) We must have an eternal attitude. We should begin to live now in the community which we will live in for the rest of eternity.
    - 2) As sure as the kingdom of God is in our midst, the community of God is in our reach. Christian fellowship is possible in Christ.

Notes —

## Discussion Point

Briefly discuss any questions or comments related to the neglect of Church fellowship. Finish any discussion related to the necessity, nature, or neglect of Church fellowship.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes –

## IV. A Modern Day Application: Christian Fellowship and Tribalism.

### A. Introduction.

1. The definition of tribalism.
  - a. In Central Africa there are many different tribes. For example, there are the Batusi and the Bahutu.
    - 1) The Batusi are taller than the Bahutu. They are physically superior and have looked down on the Bahutu for generations. They have to some extent controlled the Bahutu. The Bahutu have an historic hatred for the Batusi.
    - 2) The Batusi and the Bahutu do not like each other. The loyalty to their own tribe increases the hatred toward the other tribe. They are separated by their perceptions of each other and by the loyalty/hatred dynamics.
    - 3) This is called Tribalism.
      - a) In India, it is called the caste system.
      - b) In South Africa, it is called apartheid.
      - c) In the United States, it is called discrimination against minority groups.
      - d) In the Church, it is called denominationalism.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

- b. Whatever the name might be, prejudice or discrimination comes from the same mixture of sin.
- 1) They come from selfishness and pride that are rooted in insecurity.
  - 2) Wherever you find this sin there is the same result:
    - a) Division.
    - b) Disunity.
  - 3) To say the least, tribalism can destroy the opportunity for real fellowship.

Notes —

## Discussion Point

Can you see how our ethnic, cultural, social, and even denominational prejudices are just like tribalism? Do you recognize this as sin? Are you prepared to be an example of someone who does not stand for these prejudices or discrimination?

2. The concepts of Christian fellowship and tribalism can not exist together.
  - a. Tribalism is a very strong force in Africa. It provides the various and diverse groups of people with a form of cultural identity and pride.
    - 1) It negatively affects the Church and slows the progress of the Gospel.
    - 2) When tribalism is practiced within the churches, it destroys the unity that Jesus desires (Jn 17:20, 21).

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes —

## **Author's Comment:**

I have seen the effects of tribalism in the African churches. I have seen how one man who did the same job and who had higher credentials than others was treated differently because of tribal discrimination. He was given half the pay and none of the privileges of others who did that same job (it was a job within the church).

- b. Teaching and understanding the idea of Christian fellowship can be used to destroy the spirit of tribalism, which can exist in many forms, by different names, in churches all over the world.
- c. The rest of the course will suggest various points of teaching that can be used to promote fellowship and end tribalism in the Church.

## **Insert Your Illustration:**

### **B. Loyalty.**

1. Modern tribalism is a strong social force. Many times it results in a stronger loyalty to the tribe than to the country.
  - a. For example, this is the reality of what has happened in countries like the C.I.S. and what used to be called Yugoslavia. Different people groups who have a higher loyalty to their “people” than to their “country” have separated themselves from the control of the single country.
  - b. With respect to the Church, the problem comes when a Christian has more loyalty to his tribe than to his faith and to his church.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

2. There must be a renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2) with respect to loyalty.
  - a. African Christians must realize that they are new creations and that **all** things have become new (2 Cor 5:17).
  - b. Christians are called to a new loyalty.
    - 1) This does not mean that they can not show loyalty to their family and tribes.
    - 2) It does mean that their new loyalty to Christ must be much greater than their old loyalty to their tribe.
3. Tribal loyalty exists on three levels:
  - a. Loyalty to the family.
  - b. Loyalty to the chief.
  - c. Loyalty to the tribal community.
4. There must be a renewing of the mind on each one of these levels.
  - a. With respect to the family, the loyalty to Christ must be so much greater than the loyalty to the family that Lk 14:26 becomes a reality, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate (place below me) his father, mother, his wife and children, his brother and sisters, yes even his own life - then he can not be my disciple."
    - 1) This is not to say that Christians do not have love, respect, and loyalty for their families. (See Mk 7:10 and 1 Tim 5:8).
    - 2) However, there must be a higher loyalty to Christ and His family.

Notes —

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes –

- b. With respect to the tribal chief and government, the African Christian must be able to say the words of Acts 5:29, “We must obey God rather than men!”
  - 1) This is not to say that Christians do not obey authorities or show respect to rulers (See Rom 13:1-7).
  - 2) However, there is a higher loyalty to Christ and the government of the kingdom of God.
- c. With respect to the tribal community, the African Christian must agree with the priority that is found in Gal 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.”
  - 1) This is not to say that Christians must leave their tribes. It does not mean that Christians can not help their own people.
  - 2) However, there is a higher loyalty to Christ and the Christian community.
- d. Loyalty to tribe and chief do not have to change. The priorities within the idea of loyalty must change. There is a higher loyalty because there is a higher citizenship (Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20).

**Insert Your Illustration:**

**Discussion Point**

Use the previous concepts to discuss the Christian’s response to prioritizing of loyalty concerning family, government, and community.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

## C. The Implications of One Household.

Notes —

1. In Eph 2:19 and Gal 6:10 we can see the repetition of a very important word in the study of Church fellowship. The word household points to the “oneness” of the people of God.
  - a. In Eph 2:11-22 Paul specifies this idea by explaining that there is only **one** (tribe) in Christ.
  - b. This makes the practice of prejudice or discrimination impossible, since there must be at least two groups for it to exist. One group discriminates against another group. If there is only **one** group to begin with, then discrimination is not possible.
  - c. Thus, tribalism is not really possible within the Church because for tribalism to exist it needs at least two tribes. The Gospel has made all tribes into **one** tribe.
2. The **One** body of Christ.
  - a. In Eph 2:14, Paul writes about making both groups **one** by “breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall.”
    - 1) Never in history has there been a stronger tribalism than that which existed between the tribes of Israel and the tribes of the Gentiles.
    - 2) They hated each other. However, in the early Church, they needed to realize that Christ came to break down the wall between them.
    - 3) We too, must allow Christ to break down any walls that divide us. Racial and tribal barriers stand as walls that must be broken.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes –

- b. In Eph 2:16, Paul writes about the result of Christ breaking down these walls.
    - 1) The result is that there is **one** body.
    - 2) Again, consider the truth of the following words: **Tribalism** (discrimination and prejudice) **needs at least two groups to exist. It is not possible in the one body of Christ. You can not discriminate against yourself.**
    - 3) Consider how the principle of Eph 5:28, 29 can apply to this truth.
  - c. Study Eph 4:4-6. Note how Paul repeats and emphasizes the idea of “oneness.”
  - d. Study 1 Cor 10:16, 17.
    - 1) Note how Paul repeats and emphasizes the idea of “oneness.”
    - 2) The word “since” in vs. 17 introduces the reason why there can not be tribalism in the church. It is because all Christians partake of **one** bread. There is only **one** cross.
    - 3) Thus, the emphasis for Christians is the thing which is in common and shared. It is not the things that are different and divided.
3. The **one** family of God.
- a. We must include the idea of being born again.
    - 1) Tribalism is a result of the fleshly birth. You are born into a tribe that hates another tribe. Thus, you hate the other tribe.
    - 2) Fellowship in the Church is a result of the spiritual birth. Christians are born into the same family.
      - a) A Batusi is born a Batusi. A Bahutu is born a Bahutu. They are born into tribalism.
      - b) A Batusi is born again as a Christian. A Bahutu is born again as a Christian. They are born again into fellowship.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

## Discussion Point

Notes —

Discuss and answer questions related to the concept of “oneness.”

### D. The Lord’s Supper.

1. Study 1 Cor 11:17-34. A specific study and understanding of this passage can be used very effectively to promote fellowship in the midst of the threat of tribalism (or any other form of prejudice and discrimination).
  - a. In the New Testament Church, the Lord’s Supper was often served in the context of the “agape love feast.”
    - 1) However, in Corinth the atmosphere of fellowship and love was replaced by division and selfishness.
    - 2) P. Theissen, in his book The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity, writes the following words about the situation in Corinth:

“The Lord’s Supper, instead of providing the basis for the unity of the body of Christ, is in danger of becoming the occasion for demonstrating social differences.”<sup>12</sup>
    - 3) The basis for these differences is not unlike the basis for the differences amongst tribes that leads to tribalism.
      - a) There was a divisive effect in how the Corinthians looked at their leaders.
        - (1) Study the implications of 1 Cor 11:18, 19, 1 Cor 1:12, and 3:3-5.
        - (2) Africans might call Apollos, Cephas, and Paul “chiefs.”

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes –

b) There were economic divisions.

(1) Consider 1 Cor 1:26; 7:20-24; and 12:13. Some of the Corinthian believers were slaves or ex-slaves and not many were of noble birth. Many were probably very poor.

(2) Consider Rom 16:23 and Acts 18:8. At the same time, some of the Corinthian believers were probably very rich. Gaius had the economic means to host the whole church. Erastus was the city treasurer. Crispus was the leader of the synagogue.

(3) Tribalism can be a result of economic divisions.

c) There were religious divisions.

(1) The Corinthian church included both Jews and Gentiles.

(2) Tribalism can be the result of different religious beliefs.

b. In the midst of social differences, Paul focused on the Lord's Supper as a way to teach about unity. Contemporary Christians can do the same thing. Tribalism in the Church can be destroyed through the teaching and practice of the Lord's Supper.

## Discussion Point

Discuss how the issues of division are still related from the 1st century until today.

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

2. Review 1 Cor 11:17-22. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their type of Lord's Supper (vs. 17, 22).

Notes —

- a. In the social clubs of that time, there were organized feasts where the members of the club came together to eat. Food was allotted to each member according to social status. At the feast, certain members ate more food and better food than other members.
- b. The same thing was happening at the Corinthian love feasts where the Lord's Supper was served. The wealthier Christians were eating and drinking until they were full, while the poorer Christians had nothing (review 1 Cor 11:17-22 with vs. 33, 34).
- c. The Lord's Supper became a manifestation of inequality instead of a celebration of unity.
  - 1) Therefore, when they met together it was not to eat the Lord's Supper. Their form of the Lord's Supper actually negated the real Lord's Supper. It was a contradiction.
  - 2) Study the following diagram to see how Paul described this contradiction in his writing of 1 Cor 11:17-22.

Verses	The Contradiction	Comments
18	Come TOGETHER as a CHURCH    DIVISIONS	The ideas of the "church" and "together" are not consistent with the idea of "divisions"
20,21	LORD's supper    OWN supper	Selfishness negates the Spirit of the celebration
21	HUNGRY    DRUNK	Inequality negates the essence of the celebration
17	BETTER    WORSE	The tragic reality

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes –

- 3) Whether it be in Corinth, Africa, or anywhere in the world; disunity, selfishness, and inequality are not consistent with the celebration of the cross that brought unity, selflessness, and equality.
3. What is an “unworthy manner” (vs. 27)?
    - a. “Unworthy is the translation of the Greek word “anaxios” (“an” and “axios”).
      - 1) “Axios” means to bring up the other end of the scale or to bring into equality. Equality is the central idea.
      - 2) “An” means “not.”
      - 3) Thus, the term “anaxios” or “unworthy” means “not equal” or “unbalanced.”
    - b. To take the Lord’s Supper in an “unworthy manner” is to take it in a manner of inequality. It represents those who were taking the Lord’s Supper with an attitude or action of prejudice or discrimination.
      - 1) C.K. Barrett, in his book A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, writes:

“To eat and drink unworthily is to contradict both the purpose of Christ’s self offering, and the spirit in which it was made.”<sup>13</sup>
      - 2) The death of Christ (which is what the Lord’s Supper is supposed to celebrate) brought unity, equality, and the destruction of discrimination (Eph 3:6).

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

- 3) The spirit of his death was one of sacrifice, love, and self denial.
- a) Some of the Corinthian Christians were celebrating the Lord's Supper in a way that was completely contradictory to this spirit.
    - (1) Instead of sacrifice they were filling themselves, while others went hungry.
    - (2) Instead of love, they were showing apathy towards their brothers.
    - (3) Instead of self denial, they were denying others.
  - b) To take the Lord's Supper with these attitudes and actions was to sin against the body and blood of Christ. It was to despise the work of the cross and to undervalue your own redemption.

Notes —

## Author's Illustration:

Taking the Lord's supper in a selfish and prejudice way would be like having a remembrance supper "in honor" of Dr. Martin Luther King (who gave his life for the cause of equal rights for blacks) and making all the blacks sit in the back.

The supper **for** Martin Luther King would be **against** him (see 1 Cor 11:17).

It would actually be an insult or sin against his shed blood (see 1 Cor 11:27).

The supper would be **unworthy** of Dr. King and would actually be a mockery of him (see 1 Cor 11:27).

## Insert Your Illustration:

# CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Notes –

- c) Tribalism and the Lord's Supper do not mix. Tribalism is **unworthy** of the Lord's Supper.
  - 1) The prejudice of tribalism is the result of selfish pride. The Lord's Supper is the result of selfless humility (Phil 2:3-8).
  - 2) The prejudice of tribalism is the result of insecurity. The Lord's Supper is a result of security (Jn 13:1-3).
4. What is "not judging the body rightly" (vs. 29)?
- a. The general context is 1 Cor 10:17 where the "body" is the Church or the believers.
  - b. The immediate context relates to the actions of different members of the church or the "body."
    - 1) To not judge the "body" rightly is to pre-judge (prejudice) the members of the church incorrectly.
    - 2) It is to act in discrimination against another equal member of the "body" through one's actions or attitudes.
    - 3) The result is judgment (see vs. 29, 30).
  - c. The actions and attitudes of tribalism do not judge the body rightly. The result is the same today as it was 2000 years ago. The result is judgment.

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## 5. Summary and conclusion about Christian fellowship and tribalism.

Notes —

### a. Summary.

- 1) Paul states the abuse of the Lord's Supper in vs. 17-22.
- 2) He magnifies the abuse by putting it in the light of the true practice of the Lord's Supper (vs. 23-26).
- 3) He defines the implications and consequences of the abuse (vs. 27-32).
- 4) He gives instructions to end the abuse (vs. 33, 34).
- 5) These instructions can be paraphrased for African Christians who practice tribalism, "If anyone is of a different tribe, let him leave his prejudices at home, so that you may not come together for judgment."

### b. Conclusion.

- 1) Many people feel that there is no solution to the problems of tribalism in Africa. The political governments of the various African countries have not provided an alternative to tribalism.
- 2) Christianity is the only alternative. The divisions of tribalism must be replaced by the unity of the cross. The only way that this can happen is through the fellowship of the Church.
- 3) Likewise, the unity of the cross applies to the other forms of prejudice and discrimination that are practiced around the world. Christianity and the true fellowship of the church represent a global solution to these problems.

### **Discussion Point**

Discuss any comments or questions related to our study of Christian fellowship and tribalism.

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Notes –

## Church Fellowship: Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Michael P. Green, ed. Illustrations for Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), p.225.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Martin, The Family and the Fellowship (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>David Watson, Called and Committed (Wheaton, Ill: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1982), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Howard Snyder, The Community of the King (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 74.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>6</sup>Watson, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>9</sup>Jerry Horner, Living in the Family (Lamp Press, 1982), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Row Publishers, 1954), pp. 110, 112.

<sup>11</sup>Watson, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup>P. Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup>C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 272, 273.