

ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER THE CHURCH'S FELLOWSHIP

The Christian life begins with surrender to Christ. This surrender is expressed through worship. While Christian worship must at times be private and individual, it must also be within the *community* of other believers. Without a believer being actively planted in a church community and regularly committed to its corporate worship, they will never be able to fully grow as a disciple of Christ.

1. If we are truly walking with the Christ we have surrendered to, we can be assured that His blood has cleansed us from sin. But what does this First John 1:7 state will be the evidence that a person has surrendered to Christ?
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There are several hallmarks of Christian maturity. These include: compassion for others, humility, and the ability to forgive (Col. 3:12-13).

2. What role does church fellowship play in developing these Christian hallmarks?
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Assembling together to worship God, be instructed in the Word, celebrate the ordinance of Holy Communion, and encourage one another in fellowship requires a heart that is compassionate, humble and forgiving (Col. 3:12-14).

3. Which requires more humility? To encourage or be encouraged?

4. Who do think needs the most encouragement in a church?

5. Based on Hebrews 10:25, how are believers told to fellowship?

What Is Fellowship?

Fellowship is not merely *socialising*. Biblical fellowship is spending time with others for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to Christ. The Bible presents Christian fellowship as ‘triangular’ (a believer connected to another believer *through* Christ) (1Jn. 1:3).

6. In Acts 2:42 what are some of the things associated with Christian fellowship?

7. What does Galatians 2:9 tell us about how seriously the Early Church regarded fellowship?

8. Read Romans 12:9-21. Which of these New Testament instructions relate particularly to Christian fellowship and why?

Discipline As An Aspect of Fellowship

Christian fellowship requires *encouragement*. But this kind of encouragement is not merely telling someone how well they have done, or how much they are appreciated, it is encouraging another believer to glorify Christ (1Thess. 5:11). However, there are times, when urging a brother or sister in Christ to be fully devoted to Christ means that you may have to *admonish* (“gently reprove and caution”) them. This is the instruction in Colossians 3:16.

To be a disciple of Christ requires connection with a church community where discipline will be gently and lovingly ministered. But for some Christians who have not yet fully surrendered to Christ the process of discipline is most unwelcome. For some of these undisciplined would-be followers of Christ, correction / admonishing / exhorting / rebuking / reproof - is received as an attack. When it happens to these folks they often feel ‘hurt’ and will usually leave that church highly critical about how they have been so hurt by the church. To be sure, there are occasions when church leaders can be harmful, but generally church leaders who are committed to disciplining will have the ‘hurt’ of their admonishing misinterpreted as ‘harm’.

9. How could First Timothy 5:19-20 be applied without someone feeling harmed? Discuss.

Church leaders are required to be able to *rebuke* (Titus 1:9). This takes courage and humility. But the health of a church’s fellowship is not measured by how much those in the congregation like each other - it is measured by how much a church conforms its fellowship to the New Testament’s teaching about it.

10. What do you think would be the mood of a church fellowship where First Thessalonians 2:12 was applied to it?

Unity of Fellowship

11. In what ways is unity different to unison?

12. Based on First Peter 3:8, what must a fellowship of believers work at? What does this tell you about what might 'naturally' occur in any church?

The New Testament prescribes for the church to be of the same mind (1Cor. 1:10) - united in thinking - but this does not mean that we will not see things differently. Church disagreements maybe about doctrine. Thank God that He has organised for his church to be denominated around certain doctrinal emphases that we can actually agree on! But even when we associate around particular sets of doctrines, we might still disagree on matters of *decisions*.

13. A friend from another church is telling you about the problems they are having at their church over some decisions their pastor has made. They ask you for advice. What you advise them?

Godly fellowship must be united fellowship. United fellowship can only be achieved if there is *submission*. Submission is only ever required where there is *disagreement*. Rather than seeing disagreements within a church fellowship as a cause for disunity, perhaps it should be seen as a great opportunity for developing genuine fellowship.

14. In what ways can we encourage one another within our church?

Amen.