

Messages on Philippians

by

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CHAPTER THREE

FELLOWSHIP IN CHRIST

Fellowship is a uniting of hearts, minds, hopes and aims. Without fellowship we may go through a form; we may be orthodox in manner and in faith; but it will be a dry, dead, cold orthodoxy disturbed by frowns, scorns, tumults and tempests. Fellowship is the oil that makes all the fitted parts operate smoothly. Paul seemed to like the word “fellowship” for he used it very often in this little epistle. He realized the necessity of fellowship in Christ if God’s dear people are to, have sweet communion together. Let us consider what it means to the heart and life of the child of God.

In chapter 1:5 Paul speaks of the fellowship in the gospel. This fellowship filled Paul’s heart with joy. It helped him to be a happy preacher. It helped him to be a better preacher. It enabled him to preach with power as he told of the peerless Son of God and of His priceless, precious blood.

Every time he thought of these dear saints he thought of their fellowship — how they stood for the truth he stood for and told him so, how they encouraged him with their prayers and supported him with their money as well as by their words of encouragement. They helped to make it easy for Paul to endure the sufferings and the sorrows that came so frequently into his life.

Their fellowship in the Gospel filled him with confidence concerning their spiritual condition. He knew that backsliders do not show such fellowship. He knew that worldly or quarreling Christians do not spend much time encouraging the preaching of the Gospel. Their fellowship proved to him that they were going on for God, growing in grace and continuing in faith (verses 6 and 7).

Every heart loves fellowship. Paul was no exception, even though he was a famous and noted preacher. Great men have human hearts just as lesser men. Great men desire the sweet fellowship that may be given by the most obscure Christian. No one is independent or self-sufficient. Especially is this true of those who walk with God. The cheering word from another saint, the comforting suggestions, the helpful advice, the gracious handshake, the lovely smile — all help the servant of God on his way over the rough places and enable him to run the race with no weights about his neck.

In chapter 2:1 we read of the fellowship of the Spirit. Our Lord has gone back to glory and has sent another lovely, wonderful, precious Person to live in us, the Holy Spirit of God.

Paul speaks again of this fellowship in the benediction verse (II Corinthians 13:14). He desires that the Corinthian saints shall be blessed by this communion of the Holy Spirit or, in other words, His fellowship. This fellowship has a wonderful effect upon the soul of the saint, as Paul well knew.

Paul had the unusual privilege of conversing with the Lord Jesus after He went to heaven. Stephen did also, and so did John as a prisoner. What an honor these three men had! The Saviour was in glory at the right hand of the Father. The heavens opened in order that they might see. But for the rest of their lives and for ours, we walk along the way with this precious other Person of the Trinity, rejoicing in His fellowship, loving His communion, and with our hearts filled with glorious visions of our blessed Lord as He unfolds to us His marvelous graces and beauties. What a fellowship this is!

God has given us a double fellowship. When Paul began to write to the Corinthians he said, as we read in I Corinthians 1:9, **“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the FELLOWSHIP of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”** When he wrote to the Corinthians in the Second Epistle, he said “. . . **And the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.**” Thus we have a double blessing.

What a privilege and joy it is to walk with this lovely Person, the Holy Spirit, who has come here to dwell with us and in us.

- He leads us to worship.
- He fills our hearts with holy thoughts.
- He makes us of one mind with other believers in adoring the living Christ. He removes strife and vainglory.
- He enables us to have a lowly mind so that we recognize the gifts and graces in our fellow Christians.

The worst of God’s people have some of the best of God’s graces. No saint of God is all bad or all wrong. The Spirit of God enables us to look at our brother through the Shekinah glory; then we can get along with each other without difficulty.

The fellowship of the Spirit enables the mind of Christ to dwell in us.

- He was the Lord of Glory, yet He thirsted.
- He commanded angels and archangels, yet He lay helpless in the manger.
- He communed with the cherubim and the seraphim from His place on the eternal throne, yet He communed with an alien woman on the well curb.
- He could ride upon the clouds, yet He chose to ride upon an ass.
- He could call the dead out of their graves, yet He permitted men to place Him in a grave.

“Let this mind be in you.”

Only the Spirit of God can put it there. We never can bring it about, but we can permit ourselves to be led, taught and filled by this lovely One who has come to serve the Father and the Son here.

Surely if Christ with all His power, place, position, and authority was willing to be submerged under the tide of human ignominy, shame, suffering and death, we, too, can afford to be a door-mat if that is the will of our blessed Lord. The Holy Spirit brings that about in the heart and mind of the one who walks and talks with Him.

This is confirmed in verse 13, where we read that it is God which worketh in you to bring this about. The results are found in verse 14. If the Spirit of God fills the heart and mind, then there will be no murmuring and disputing. Where these unhappy things are present, worship ceases.

- We may continue to go through the form of worship, but certainly the heart will not be in it.
- We may say the words, but they will not be inspired.
- We may frame beautiful sentences, but they will only be the golden casket that contains the corpse of a cold, stiff performance.

In chapter 3:10 Paul speaks of the fellowship of his sufferings. Paul opens the inner recesses of his heart and soul to tell us of the spring, the fountain, the source of His marvelous life of devotion to God.

Paul wanted to be like Christ, not only in his life, but in his suffering as well.

- He was willing to take his place by the side of the Lord Jesus and receive the same treatment that He received.
- He was willing to stand with Christ at Calvary and let them nail him to a cross also.

In fact, he seemed to count it his highest joy to be conformed even to the death of the One he loved so well and with whom he had such precious fellowship. He said, **“For me to live is Christ.”**

He wanted to lose his own identity. He desired to be entirely wrapped up in his lovely Lord, even if it meant death.

- He wanted to be with Christ as they crowned Him with thorns, and have the thorns on his own brow.
- He wanted to be with Christ as they lashed His back, and receive the lashes on his own back.
- He wanted to be with the Saviour as they bound His hands and feet, and have them bind his own hands and feet with cruel Roman chains.

He was so much in love with Christ Jesus his Lord that he wished to be identified with Him in every movement, every punishment, every detail of suffering.

He wanted to be like Jesus.

We sometimes sing, “I would be like Jesus,” but:

- We are not thinking of His rejection, the sneers and jeers that were hurled at Him
- We are not thinking of His experience with no place to lay His head, the long night hours on the mountainside, the false accusations brought against Him.
- We are not thinking of His arrest and of the treatment He received from the traitor Judas, and from His best friend, Peter.

When we sing, “I would be like Jesus” we are not thinking of the mob that mocked Him, spit upon Him, struck Him in the side, tore the hair from His face, and then nailed Him to Calvary; but Paul was. He wanted to have the same attitude toward life and death that Jesus had. He wanted to have the same attitude toward suffering and sorrow and loss that Jesus had.

Paul wanted to experience everything that Jesus experienced in regard to His friends, His enemies, Satan and God the Father. Paul wanted to feel toward sinners as the Saviour felt when He cried out, “**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,**” or when in the midst of anguish He said, “**Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**”

Fellowship means union and communion. Fellowship is a deep, sweet attachment. Fellowship means a giving and taking of a loving heart. Paul wanted to know the fullness, the depth, the breadth and the length and height of the sufferings of his adorable Lord.

In chapter 4 Paul brings before us the sweet fellowship of trust in the living, loving God. He very wisely and graciously avoids a direct scolding of the two quarrelsome women mentioned in verse 2. But he tells us through the chapter how blessed it is to trust in our Lord individually and collectively, which will make it impossible for such a quarrel to continue.

Notice in verse 4 that he calls upon us to rejoice, and repeats it. One will not rejoice in the Lord if he is doubting Him. Only when there is perfect trust do we have fellowship with one another and fellowship with God. If a shadow comes so that the trust is removed, then the quarrel begins.

In verse 5 he admonishes us not to ride a hobby, because that is not trust, nor to command God’s people, for neither is that trust. God did not send us to enforce His Word but only to preach it. He did not send us to stress one subject and try to make everybody else believe as we believe. If our trust is in the Word of God, the Son of God and the Spirit of God, then we will be sweetly moderate and graciously kind to all men. We will realize that our blessed Lord is standing near, watching, listening and waiting to take the task out of our hands and handle it Himself.

It is only when we trust that we are careful for nothing. Worry and trust do not go together. They are antagonistic. They are opposed. When we trust we do not worry, and when we worry we do not trust. How sweet it is to tell the story of our problems to the living Lord, then trust Him to take care of them. If this problem happens to be a church problem, then God’s dear people will have sweet fellowship together as they leave the solution with the God of heaven. If, however, some seek to enforce it themselves, there is discord instead of concord.

In verse 8 we are exhorted to trust our fellow Christians. We are to think upon the beautiful traits in their lives and not be obsessed with their faults. We are to be possessed with their virtues, not their vices. We should not misjudge them nor gossip about them. We should trust them and trust our Father, the Shepherd of the sheep, and the Teacher of the Word, all three to deal blessedly with each Christian heart.

We should trust in regard to temporal things, as Paul tells us in verses 11, 12 and 13. Leave the finances with God. Trust Him to move the hearts of His people to do for us and provide for us because we are His children. Like Paul, trust Him to supply the needs of others, as we read in verse 19. Such trust will spread to others, as it did on the ship when Paul proclaimed, **“Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God.”**

Those who live lives of sweet, simple trust are a blessing to the Church. They are peacemakers. They enrich the hearts of the people. They are dependable. They help both sides. They love to lift the burdens and dry the tears. What a sweet fellowship is produced when we trust our Lord to take care of His people and trust rather than suspect one another.

Philippians is a book of fellowship. Let us seek grace from heaven to enrich our fellowship so that we shall have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but shall have a great abundance of fellowship with the fruits of righteousness, the children of light and that precious One who is the Light of the world.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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