

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE

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**LESSON 38 • FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE OF THE SAME FAITH**

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3

When God made man, it was the climax of His creative work. Man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), made so that he could become like God, with a developed sense of right and wrong.

But even so, there was something lacking: man was alone, and in His mercy God recognised that Adam needed company. So He also created woman, giving as the reason:

"It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

What is fellowship?

Adam and Eve were made for each other and were meant to give help and support to each other (see Genesis 2:18). When Eve was brought to him, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (2:23), and the inspired writer adds that husband and wife should therefore cleave (or be joined) together (2:24).

This was fellowship - sharing all that God had given, enjoying one another's company, and appreciating together all God's blessings. When the Lord God came into the garden in the cool of the day, the relationship was enlarged - they were at one with God. In the Garden of Eden, man, woman and God were in perfect harmony.

But the harmony did not last. When sin entered the world, the fellowship was broken. God is holy, He cannot accept sin, nor can sinners exist in His holy presence. There was a division created as soon as God's law was broken (read Genesis 3 again). When God came walking in the garden that day, Adam and Eve "knew that they were naked" (3:7).

The fellowship was broken. It affected their human relationship (Adam blamed Eve for what had happened), and it ended their close contact with God. They could now only come into His presence in the way He provided. They had to leave the Garden, and life became a struggle.

But fellowship remains the same experience, even though the circumstances in which we now seek it are very different. When we have fellowship with one another, it means that we are able to share the blessings of God with others who believe as we do, and hope for the same salvation. That fellowship can exist even between people who have never met, for example, because they have written to one another and shared their lives in that way. It can exist with people who worship together, and with people who live and work together - provided they have the same Christian beliefs.

All over the world, men and women share fellowship together when they belong to the family of God. Fellowship is not the same as just getting on well with someone - it is a spiritual relationship which depends upon sharing the same faith in God.

Fellowship means sharing. Bible fellowship means sharing beliefs, hopes and worship together with fellow-believers

Spirit and Truth

On one of his journeys in Israel, Jesus went through Samaria - a part of the country occupied by people who were disliked by the Jews. Jesus had no such prejudices and, chancing to sit by a well, he spoke to a Samaritan woman. She soon discovered that Jesus was no ordinary Jew, and when she asked him which of the two sacred sites he thought more important - the one on Mount Gerizim near where they were talking, or the one in Jerusalem - Jesus gave an answer which she must have found surprising. He said that neither mountain mattered, and then added:

"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23).

About 40 years after that conversation, both Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim would have been unavailable as places of worship. The Roman armies swept through the land of Israel in AD 70 and destroyed its religious places. Those Jews who survived the wars, and who did not escape, were taken into captivity and sold as slaves. So if their religion was to depend upon temples and holy sites, they would have had to give it up. Jesus said that true worship has nothing to do with buildings and shrines; instead it has to do with belief, sincerity, and truth.

"Spirit and truth" in the quotation above, is a very important combination. Some people today claim to have, or be led by, the spirit. But when you talk to them, you soon realise that they do not know what the Bible teaches. Perhaps they believe in going to heaven at death, when the Bible clearly teaches that the true Christian hope is the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. Or they might believe that Jesus Christ is part of a Three-in-One godhead, when the Bible teaches that he is the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, by the power, or Spirit, of God. People who claim to have the spirit, and are lacking in Bible truth, must be wrong.

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It follows that true worshippers today will not be impressed by large churches or places of worship, or by a very large and enthusiastic membership. The true church is not about buildings but people; and it does not matter how many there are. What really matters is what they believe, and how they worship God. It is good to have the right spirit in worship, but it is equally important to believe the right things and to do what is right with God.

"Be ye separate"

The New Testament commands the followers of Jesus Christ to live apart from the world. This does not mean leaving the world - that would be impossible - but, rather, to live differently from the world and its godless ways. Abraham dwelt among the Canaanites, but kept himself apart from them. He is described as "a stranger and pilgrim" (Hebrews 11:13), for he had his hopes and beliefs set upon God and His promises, in the same way, Jesus prayed for his followers that they would be kept by God from the evil in the world, adding:

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent them into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:16-18).

The world was regarded by Jesus and his apostles (see 1 John 2:16) as an evil and wicked place. It is full of people who have no desire for the things of God, and who make life hard for true Christians to do as God commands. Notice that this can apply equally to religious and irreligious people. All who oppose the truth about God are liable to lead true believers astray from God.

God's dwelling place

Christadelphians are sometimes asked 'Where is your church?', and people expect to see a fine building which will impress them and convince them that this is the true church of God. It is hard for such people to appreciate that God wants people more than buildings, but this was the position in the days of Jesus and of the apostles too. There were fine buildings then in which some went to worship - especially the Temple at Jerusalem which took 40 years to build and to beautify. But Jesus said that the Temple was a den of thieves and robbers; he told his followers to come after him, not to stay with the priests.

Jesus never built a church building. His last supper was held with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, and there the apostles met to worship for some time afterwards (see Acts 1:13; 1:2). The services of the apostles in the early church took place in homes (see Colossians 4:15) or hired rooms (Acts 28:23-31). For they understood the vital truth that they were God's dwelling place - He wanted to live in them and with them every day of their lives.

The apostle Paul might have been talking of a building when he told the Corinthian believers that his work in Corinth, where he spent 18 months, had resulted in the laying of a foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10). What he meant was, he had laid the foundation of Jesus Christ by teaching them the truth about the Son of God, who died for them and was raised by God to everlasting life. Now, said Paul, they were to build upon that foundation in the way that they lived and believed (3:12-15), then he added:

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (verse 16, see also Ephesians 2:19-22).

The Breaking of Bread

The bread and wine are a reminder of the body (the bread) and the blood (the wine) of Jesus that were given and shed for our sins upon the cross.

There is nothing magical or mystical about them; for example, the bread does not change - as some people wrongly believe - into the actual body of the Lord Jesus. They are to remind believers of the great work done by Jesus on their behalf, and only baptized believers are to share this service of remembrance. As Jesus said to his disciples,

"This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

The breaking of bread is the centre of true Christian fellowship. Believers make every effort to meet together each week, where they are able, to remember their Lord and his great salvation. They need regular contact if they are to grow together in love, and in truth. As the apostle said:

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25).

Worshipping together or apart

The example of the first century believers is one Christadelphians still follow. Every week, when there are several members living in the same area, they meet to worship God. They call their assemblies 'ecclesias' (a word which means 'congregations') to remind them that churches are about people not buildings. They meet for instruction in God's Word, the Bible, to preach the gospel (these are meetings specially provided for non-members) and every week they meet to remember Jesus in the way he has appointed, by sharing bread and wine in the 'Breaking of Bread' service.

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Like the first century believers, there are no priests or pastors to lead the services because the Lord Jesus is our High Priest. The believing men share the duties of the service. One presides - he arranges the hymns and readings and prayers, and calls upon others to help with these duties. Another will have prepared a short talk to encourage the congregation - the exhortation. When the minds of those present have been suitably prepared to remember Jesus, the emblems of bread and wine are shared together - just as Jesus did at the Last Supper long ago. (Read Luke 22:14-30.)

When no other believers live nearby, it is necessary for these same things to be done as opportunity allows. The chance to teach children and adults about the gospel will come in family life, or in other circumstances. Bible reading and prayer will become an everyday activity, and on Sundays the Lord should be remembered in bread and wine, at a private breaking of bread service, in fellowship with all Christadelphians who will be doing the same thing all over the world. In time, it may please God to call other believers in that area and thus allow the development of a new ecclesia of worshippers.

Summary

1. Christian or Bible Fellowship means sharing beliefs, hopes and worship with those who believe and hope for the same things, and who worship God in the correct, Scriptural, manner.
2. Bible fellowship means we have to be separate from those who do not share our beliefs.
3. Because it is not good for a man or woman to be alone, we should seek fellowship with fellow-believers as often as possible.
4. We must always seek fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus through prayer, meditation and Bible reading.
5. The closest fellowship with God, the Lord Jesus and our fellow-believers is when we share the bread and wine at the Breaking of Bread service.
6. There will be perfect fellowship with God in His Kingdom on earth.

Chapters to read: 1 John 1; Romans 14 - 15:7; 1 Corinthians 10

Learn by heart: 2 Corinthians 6:16

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."