



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 10 Issue 12

April 3, 2011

Biblical Fellowship, Part 2

In the church fellowship is a familiar concept, and yet a gravely misunderstood one. We speak much about it. Most if not all of us have heard about the beauty of “fellowship.”

Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”

In fact, if you were to do a survey of the churches, it wouldn’t take long to find one which had a place designated as “fellowship hall.” And yet in spite of our familiarity, biblical fellowship is conspicuously absent from many churches.

Now don’t get me wrong. I don’t mean by this that most churches are cold. It’s just that what is going on in some of the “warmest” churches is a far cry from genuine, biblical fellowship. The things that our world/society identifies as marks of a loving and supportive atmosphere are the

very things that are mistaken for genuine fellowship:

- A warm handshake at the door.
- An embrace.
- A genuine smile.
- An unconditional acceptance.
- A secure atmosphere.

While these things may accompany a setting in which biblical fellowship is occurring, they must NOT be confused with biblical fellowship. Lest we settle for a cheap imitation, it is imperative that we NOT ONLY understand what biblical fellowship is, BUT ALSO dedicate ourselves to participate in it.

Last time we began looking at the definition of biblical fellowship. We saw that biblical fellowship (*Koinonia*) is:

- First and foremost the family or community into which every Christian is brought on account of their common salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (1 John 1:1-10).
- And flowing from this, and just as important, it is the consequent mutual love for and devotion to one another which is cultivated as you and I invest in each other's salvation (Acts 2:41-47).

Last time I made the statement that while our redemption is individual, our salvation is not. This raised a couple of eye brows and so let me explain this further. Those of you who have taken the Systematic Theology class offered through our LOGOS Institute know that salvation involves far more than just justification. It includes ten elements:

1. Effectual calling through regeneration,
2. Faith and repentance,
3. Justification,
4. Adoptions,
5. Definitive Sanctification,
6. Progressive Sanctification,
7. Perseverance of the Saints,
8. Glorification.

The first seven; from effectual calling through Justification, Adoption, and Definitive Sanctification, are individual. In fact, these first seven elements typically are what we are referring to when we speak of "redemption" or "conversion." It is the next two in the "Order of Salvation" which is worked out over the course of our lives and which involves a community; progressive sanctification and perseverance of the saints. It is at these two points that we are called to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12b).

It is in this context that we say salvation (progressive sanctification/perseverance) is NOT individual, BUT corporate. Here is where the “one anothers” of the Bible come into play as we are called to...

- Encourage one another.
- Bear one another’s burdens.
- Pray for one another.
- Be kind to one another.
- Unto the growth and maturation of the body of Christ.

And thus it is in these two realms that our salvation is NOT individual BUT corporate.

The Necessity of Biblical Fellowship in Relation to God

Now, we are going to look at another aspect of biblical fellowship, its necessity!

Genesis 1:26-27, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

This is an incredible statement. All other forms of God’s creation, animate and inanimate, were made after “their kind” (cf. Genesis 1:11, 12, 24 & 25). But not so with man! He was made in the image of God and so is unique! Of all of creation God WILLED that man’s distinguishing identity be that of God’s own image or likeness!

Now whatever else this may imply, we would expect that man’s uniqueness as an image bearer would have an effect on his relationship with God as a creature. As man is unique we would expect that his relationship with God also would be unique. And that is exactly what we find.

Genesis 3:8, “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

There are two very important phrases in this passage. The first is that God was “walking in the garden” **הָלַךְ** (*hālak*); though this is an anthropomorphism, nevertheless as ascribed to God it is rather significant. The word for “walking” in the Bible is important. Generally speaking it describes movement in general and so can refer to the “creeping” of a snake (Genesis 3:14), the “prowling” of foxes (Lamentations 5:18), the “sailing” of ships (Genesis 7:18), the “flowing” of water (Genesis 2:14), or the “walking” of men (Exodus 14:29).

Yet the idea goes beyond this. For in a society where transportation occurred primarily on foot, the concept of “walking” was full of rich meaning. And so, for example, it is the word used to

describe apostasy, “going after” or literally “walking after” a strange god (Exodus 32:1; Jeremiah 5:23; 7:24; 11:8; Psalm 1:1). In contrast, it also is the word used to describe the faithful child of God. He is the one who “follows God,” or literally “walks with God” (1 Kings. 3:14; Psalm 119:1ff; Micah 6:8). In fact, it was used of the godly Enoch who is said to have “walked with God,” Genesis 5:22; Hebrews 11:5.

We use the term in a similar way as we ask each other, “How is your walk going?” By this we don’t mean our morning stroll in the garden, but the current genuineness/quality of our relationship with God. Thus we note that in the Bible, “walking” is not the just the means of getting from point “A” to point “B,” rather, it was an activity in which close and intimate communion took place. That is what is oft-times is denoted by the term.

Hosea 11:1, 3a, 4, “When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son... It was I who taught Ephraim to WALK, I took them in My arms... I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; and I bent down and fed them.”

The idea here behind Israel’s “learning to walk” was their learning to “walk with God!” In this context, notice what would become one of the most important commands to the Old Testament Jew.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

In Old Testament times, God exhorted His people to make full use of their time as they walked from point “A” to point “B.” What ought the faithful Israelite to do as they walked to market, went into the fields and worked, travelled to the Temple? They were to Invest in their son, daughter, or companion. We see this it in living color in Luke.

Luke 24:13-15, “And behold, two of them were going [walking] that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and *began* traveling with them.”

Following the crucifixion of Christ, two grief-stricken disciples walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus. And what did they do as they walked? They engaged in fellowship. In fact, it continued even when a “stranger” joined them on their journey! Notice what they said when their eyes were opened and they recognized the Lord.

Luke 24:32b, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

In the mind of a Jew to walk with someone was to commune with them. Accordingly when we come to Genesis 3 and read of God “walking in the garden” we understand by this that He was moving about in such a way as to invite deep and abiding fellowship. Now in light of this, we see the significance of Adam and Eve’s response.

Genesis 3:8, “And the man and his wife hid themselves.”

This implies that this WASN’T the normal reaction. Clearly, Adam and Eve had never done this before. In fact, because they didn’t come out to fellowship with God as He walked, we read in the next verse.

Genesis 3:9, “Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

God proclaimed this NOT because He didn’t know where they were. RATHER, He called out to Adam and Eve because they weren’t where they were supposed to be, walking beside Him on the road! From this we conclude that an aspect of being an image bearer is the enjoying of a deep and abiding fellowship with God. Man was created and formed for this purpose: to walk with God, to have fellowship with the Lord! Thus, it is no surprise to see as we did last time that when a man is restored to a pre-fall relationship with God through the cross, the Bible depicts this as a restored relationship of fellowship and communion.

1 John 1:3, “What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 1:9, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And so, when we look at fellowship in the Bible in relationship to God, we see an amazing truth: IT IS A NECESSITY! Man was created to fellowship with God! Thus, the man who lacks this fellowship can never be complete or whole!

Now this truth raises an important consideration: Many of the struggles we encounter in our walks with God are the result of a neglected or errant fellowship with the Lord. When a person becomes a Christian he enters into fellowship with God, a fellowship that is relational.

John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee [which speaks of an intimate love relationship], the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

And so while we can never be “out of fellowship with God” — the branches cannot be cut off from the vine without dying — yet the relational aspect of our fellowship with God can be either good or bad. Now when the quality of the relational fellowship we have with God is bad, what happens? Do we lose our salvation? NO! But like Adam and Eve, we have the tendency to hide ourselves from God and struggle with a consequent *lack of joy* in our salvation!

1 John 1:4, “And these things [the call of salvation] we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”

Consider the prayer of David after repenting of his sin with Bathsheba:

Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation...”

Truly much of the worry, grief, bitterness, discontent, anger, and lack of joy that we often encounter in our walks are NOT because of external situations.

- A bitter providence.
- Lack or want.
- Persecution.
- A harsh or unfair work environment.
- A difficult individual.

BUT because we have neglected or forsaken the fellowship for which we have been created and redeemed! And thus, we could be in a pit, in jail, in the chaos and mess of a natural disaster, yet if Christ be near, our joy will be full!

Recall Mary and Martha of John 11. Mary and Martha were confronted with the same struggles. Martha responded with worry, yet Mary with joy for she sat at Christ’s feet! Remember Stephen of Acts 7. Though he was about to be martyred for his faith, nevertheless as he gazed into heaven he beheld his Savior; and He was filled with joy! Though, Paul (Philippians 3:8-9) he sat in a prison with the prospect of death looming over him, nevertheless he was filled with unspeakable joy on account of Christ! And even though Job (Job 42:106) lost his wealth, family, and health, nevertheless he was filled with joy when he saw the Lord! If we are going to be all that God calls us to be in Christ, it is imperative that we NOT settle for an imitation— the love of an individual, a close friend, a parent, or a spouse— BUT that...

- God remain our first love.
- Our walks with God continue to be our chief priority.

This truth should also cause us to look at the non-Christian through the eyes of God! Much of the rebellion of the non-believer, though against God and therefore heinous, is a vain attempt at fellowship. While they don’t want Christ, nevertheless they continue to have a desire for the fellowship which only He can provide.

Years ago there was a weekly T.V. show called *Cheers* which was set in a bar. Listen to the words of the theme song:

Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they’re always glad you came. You want to be where you can see troubles are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name.

This song expresses a longing for a fellowship which every man needs and yet can only be enjoyed in a saving relationship with Christ. Yet because man is in rebellion and so is running from God, he manufactures what we would call a cheap imitation ~ Elks Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Bowling Leagues, the local bar. Bruce Larson put it this way:

The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His Church. It's an imitation dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality. But it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is also unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or want to.

The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers. (Larson, 1965, p. 110)

How should we respond to this? Ought we to look at the plight of fallen man with contempt? NO! With Christ, we must see non-believers as they really are.

Matthew 9:36, "And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd."

We must see the multitudes as God sees them. And with hearts moved with compassion, we must bring the only answer for their bereft souls: The Gospel, The Good News. Cultural Engagement requires a point of contact/commonality which is discovered through dialogue.

This morning we've seen a key theme upon which to engage, the non-Christian's need for genuine fellowship with God. Knowing this need, we are able to steer the conversation to this point where we then are able to share of the glorious news of the person and work of Christ who died to create a fellowship which will never end!

The Necessity of Fellowship in Relation to Man

Genesis 1:27, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Once again we read of the creation of man, based on this passage we might be tempted to conclude that the creation of the man and the woman was simultaneous. Yet like the books of the Bible which detail the history of the nation of Israel (we have two different works which describe the same history: Samuel/Kings and Chronicles) or the four gospels each of which describe the person and work of Christ, so GENESIS gives us two descriptions of man's creation. We've seen the first. Notice now the second, it is more detailed.

Genesis 2:7, 15, 18, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being... Then the Lord

God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it... Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him'... So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man."

Such are the specifics concerning the creation of Adam and Eve. Now in this context there is an important statement which has bearing on our study today. Notice the phrase, "it is not good for man to be alone!"

Genesis 2:15, "it is not good."

Notice that until now, everything has been "good" (cf. Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, 2:9). And yet, in the midst of this "goodness"//paradise we read of the first malediction, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:15). The idea behind "alone" is that of "separateness" or "isolation." For example, it is used in Isaiah speaking of the judgment of God against Israel.

Isaiah 27:10, "For the fortified city is isolated, a homestead forlorn and forsaken like the desert..."

In other words, the northern kingdom would be so pulverized that the bustling nation would now contain isolated and so weak cities.

Lamentations continues this description, but this time of Judah.

Lamentations 1:1, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations!... She weeps bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; she has none to comfort her among all her lovers."

"Aloneness" is being comfortless, bereft, abandoned, and vulnerable! In fact we see it in the teaching of the ceremonial law on leprosy. Leviticus talks about the leper who has been abandoned by his community, bereft from all human fellowship as alone (Leviticus 13:46). From all of this we conclude that to be "alone" is to be separated from human care, bereft of support and aid, and so without comfort or help. In essence, it is to be without fellowship! It is in this context that God said, "It is not good for man to be alone!" Now notice God's solution for this state of Adam's aloneness/lack of fellowship.

Genesis 2:18, "...I will make him a helper suitable for him"

God's answer for Adam's isolation in this text was the creation of a "helpmate" someone who would correspond to him (vv. 21-25)! Now it is at this point it is easy to fall into error. For example, some in their desire to exalt monogamy and so the sanctity and beauty of marriage teach from this passage that the answer for man's "aloneness" (which again simply is a lack of fellowship) is marriage! Now, while monogamy is the biblical teaching (one man, one woman, once for all) and the sanctity and beauty of marriage ought to be upheld, yet to take this verse and demand that marriage is God's answer for man's "aloneness" is to

- Misinterpret the passage.
- Unnecessarily bind the first half of this verse (Adam's aloneness) with the second half (the creation of Woman).

When we do this, we create a rather large problem. If marriage is God's answer for "aloneness" (lack of fellowship), then we would expect God's unchanging word to mandate marriage for ALL in Christ! Yet, we do not have this mandate. Rather we find in Scripture the opposite.

- Marriage is a temporary institution irrelevant and unneeded in heaven, Matthew 22:30.
- There are many in the present state whom God in His providence doesn't want married (1 Corinthians 7:7-9)!

And so, if marriage was God's answer for man's lack of fellowship, we would expect to see marriage mandated in this age, which we don't. But what do we see? What is mandated? Against the backdrop of Adam's "aloneness" God created...

- An individual that would correspond to Adam.
- A relationship that transcends this age and continues into the age to come!
- A Fellowship — which in fact is mandated in Scripture...

Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

Calvin, commenting on this verse, wrote this:

The commencement, therefore, involves a general principle, that man was formed to be a social animal... [And] although God pronounced, concerning Adam, that it would not be profitable for him to be alone, yet I do not restrict the declaration to his person alone, but rather regard it as a common law of man's vocation, so that every one ought to receive it as said to himself, that solitude is not good..." (Calvin, 1974, p. Genesis 128)

It is not good for Adam, the representative of mankind- to be isolated, bereft of fellowship, and so alone! It is not good for any to be isolated, bereft of fellowship, and so alone! From this we conclude that God has created man with a need for others, a need for fellowship!

So what difference ought this to make in our lives? It should make us recognize that each and every Christian has a need for the fellowship of the body of Christ. It should be no Surprise to read in Scripture.

Hebrews 3:13, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Ecclesiastes 4:9, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up."

Mark 6:7, "And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs..."

Have you noticed that you never find Paul alone in his ministry? Whether it was...

- Barnabas
- Mark
- Timothy
- Silas
- Tertius
- Onesimus
- Sosthenes
- Luke
- Tychicus

Paul was always ministering side-by-side with someone else! And when he wasn't, it was not on account of choice but necessity! In fact, not only does every Christian have a need for the body of Christ, but God has engifted every Christian such that the body of Christ needs them!

1 Corinthians 12:7, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Ephesians 4:16, "From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

If you don't do your part in the fellowship of this body, as a church our growth in Christ will be stunted!

1 Corinthians 12:18, 22b, "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired... [In fact] the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary."

Truly God has created each and every one of us with a need for the body of Christ uniquely gifted each and everyone of you for the building up of the body of Christ.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows:

<http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 3, 2011. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.