

- Words are vehicles of thought. As long as we have a common understanding of words then things work out great. But what happens when we don't understand words as meaning the same thing? If you were to go to England and ask for some chips you'd probably be surprised when you were brought some french fries. Here in the South, the word 'coke' stands for basically any kind of carbonated soda there is, so there must be some fur specifications sometimes. The same thing is true in the religious world. Sometimes people use the same word, but they have completely different meanings.
- There are a couple of old school phrases that are still said from time to time. Phrases such as, "Speak where the Bible speaks and silent where the Bible is silent", or "We call Bible things by Bible names, and we do Bible things in Bible ways." That second phrase certainly applies to this discussion because it is important that we have a common understanding of what certain words actually mean if we want to work well together and accomplish great things for the Kingdom of God. If there is a misunderstanding of a word then there can easily be mass chaos. Let me use this as an example: 3 preachers quote **Mark 16:16** and all say it is true, but they all mean different things by the word 'baptism'. Another example could be from **Acts 2:42**. These 3 preachers all agree that fellowship was present, but they all have vastly different understandings of what fellowship is and that causes problems. So let's examine this word 'fellowship' this morning and see if we can come to a common understanding of what fellowship is, how we can have fellowship, and then consider what might be some of the adverse consequences of misunderstanding Biblical fellowship.

### **3 Questions to Answer to Help Understand Biblical Fellowship**

#### **I. What is Biblical fellowship?**

- A. *Koinonia*- fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, and contact.
  - 1. Appears 19 times in the New Testament.
  - 2. 13 times it is translated as 'fellowship', but it is also translated 'participation, communion, and sharing.'
- B. 'Fellowship' is used 4 times in **I John 1**.
  - 1. John is writing this letter to warn against false teachings of gnosticism.
  - 2. Constant theme throughout the letter is how to abide in God.
  - 3. Makes perfect sense that he would begin this letter by speaking of the fellowship the readers can have with the Apostles and God.
- C. Fellowship is not restricted by time, space, and distance.
  - 1. Fellowship is not a physical action.
  - 2. Physical actions are an outgrowth and byproduct of fellowship.
  - 3. These disciples could be in fellowship with the Apostles even if the Apostles were not physically with them.
  - 4. We, too, can have fellowship with the Apostles even 2,000 years later.
  - 5. Fellowship is based upon the blood of Christ (**I John 1:2,7**) and the bond that creates among all the saved.

#### **II. How can we have fellowship with God and one another?**

- A. We can have fellowship if the Word is our standard. (**I John 1:1-4**)
  - 1. "*what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes....what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also*" (**I John 1:1,3**)
  - 2. In order to have fellowship the listener had to agree to rely on what the Apostles and seen and heard as the truth. John was writing to fight the Gnostic teaching that denied Jesus' full humanity and divinity. The standard first had to be agreed upon before true understanding and fellowship could be founded.
  - 3. John makes his purpose of writing this letter well known. He wanted these disciples to be in fellowship with God. (**I John 2:1,2; 5:13**)
  - 4. We, today, must agree upon a standard before we can be in fellowship. The Word of God is our standard and we must not hold to any other type of standard. We must come to agreement on what is truth before anything else.
  - 5. If we can agree on the Bible as the standard then we can have fellowship. This doesn't mean that we will always agree 100% on every single issue when we consider maturity levels and knowledge at different times in our lives. The first century Christians didn't agree on every single issue that was difficult to understand, but they had love and patience and they continued to study and work through those things. That is fellowship.

- B. We can have fellowship if we walk by the Word. **(I John 1:5-7)**
  - 1. God is light and those who want to be a part of Him must be light as well. There is no darkness in the light.
  - 2. Being light means that those who desire fellowship with God must be holy as He is holy and walk righteously. **(I John 2:3-5; 4:7,8; 5:1-3; II John 9)**
  - 3. We cannot have fellowship with those that do not hold to the Word and Walk by the Word. **(II John 10,11)**
  - 4. Fellowship with God requires walking in the Light of His Word.
- C. We can have fellowship if we walk by the Word in humility. **(I John 1:8ff)**
  - 1. If we think that we are always right and refuse to even consider that we might be wrong then God is not with us and we do not have fellowship.
  - 2. There will always be those subjects that will not have unanimous agreement (head coverings, second serving of the Lord's Supper, etc), but how do we approach those subjects?
  - 3. If love and patience are present then fellowship can continue, but if we are stubborn and unwilling to listen to another's view of the text then we cannot say that we are united and willing to work together.
  - 4. All who are in Christ should have the humble spirit that even He possessed. **(James 4:7-10; 5:16)**
  - 5. Through humility, love, and patience, fellowship can be present and abound.

### III. What happens when fellowship is misunderstood?

- A. When fellowship is misunderstood, church discipline is misunderstood.
  - 1. When fellowship is misunderstood then emphasis is lost on the necessity to walk in the Light of God.
  - 2. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for continuing to accept the man who had his stepmom. **(I Cor. 5)**
  - 3. They needed to remove him from their midst. **(I Cor. 5:2)**
  - 4. Because their fellowship was broken they were to not even eat with him again until he had repented of his sins and began to walk in the light again. **(I Cor. 5:11)**
  - 5. Paul told the Thessalonians to do the same as well. **(II Thess. 3:14)**
- B. When fellowship is misunderstood, unscriptural things are done in its name.
  - 1. Fellowship halls are built because fellowship is thought to be of a physical nature. The physical relationship is an outgrowth of our spiritual fellowship not the fellowship itself.
  - 2. Lines are drawn on difficult issues and splits occur because there is no patience or love present.
  - 3. We look for fellowship in all the wrong places and miss out not just on fellowship with others but we also miss out on the beautiful fellowship with God.
- C. When fellowship is misunderstood, fellowship isn't achieved.
  - 1. When we have a faulty view of what fellowship is then we can't have true biblical fellowship.
  - 2. If we think that fellowship is nothing but ball teams and meals then we can't have true spiritual fellowship because it is founded on something other than the Word of God.
  - 3. If we think we must agree on everything issue then we aren't going to have fellowship because there are many difficult issues that will more than likely never be 100% agreed upon among disciples.

Fellowship is a wonderful thing! It is great to be united in effort and desire for our God, but we must put forth the effort to do those things necessary for fellowship to be possible. May God help us to use His Word as our standard, walk by that standard, and be able to admit when we might have it wrong.