

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." I Corinthians 1:9.

Dr. Henry W. Frost, the outstanding Christian leader and famous missionary statesman, wrote: "The whole problem of life and service has at last reduced itself in my mind to one word -- fellowship." Thus was expressed the mature judgement of one of God's honored and useful servants after seventy years of experience in the things of God. Such a conclusion should be weighed carefully and seriously.

Fellowship with God is the very breath of Christian experience. It is the one thing that must be maintained if the Christian life is to be healthy, and function normally and efficiently. Apart from this fellowship life faces arrested development and spiritual failure. There may be motion and activity even to the point of the spectacular, but apart from fellowship with God the life of the believer will be mechanical and ineffective. Fellowship with Christ is the driving gear of the Christian life.

When God called us by His Spirit, He called us to a realization of a life of fellowship with His Son. God's Word states that the nature of our calling is heavenly; that the hope of our calling is likeness to Christ; and that the purpose of our calling is fellowship with Christ. This, the highest peak of our earthly experience, is the privilege of every child of God. Life at its best through fellowship with Christ is enjoyed by God's children only.

I. The Meaning of Fellowship.

The New Testament word which is translated "fellowship" is a very precious and significant one for the child of God. Without doubt the desire for fellowship is the deep hunger of every soul. No normal human being wants to be alone for very long. When one wants to be alone he either wants to be with God or with Satan. In either case it is fellowship that he is craving. We get great satisfaction from having fellowship with one's fellows that is responsible for all the social organizations.

The word in the Greek New Testament which is translated "fellowship" is "koinonia", and is derived from "koinos," which means common. The word means to have things in common, such as interests and activities. It involves participation and sharing. Fellowship with Christ means a co-partnership. It is a common sharing with Him of all that He has and may acquire. It involves at least three things -- reciprocal knowledge, reciprocal love, and reciprocal endeavor. Real fellowship means knowing each other better, loving each other more, and doing things for each other. We must not lose sight of this reciprocal idea. Fellowship is not a one-way affair. Fellowship carries with it the idea of sharing one's life and love with another. Having fellowship with Christ means sharing in His grace, holiness, wisdom, and power. At the same time we are yielding to Him our minds, bodies, wills, affections, and possessions; in fact, everything that we are and have.

Some, who are not instructed in the Word of God, confuse sonship with fellowship. It must be set forth clearly that one may be a child of God and not be in fellowship with Him, just as in one's earthly family a child may temporarily lose fellowship with his father through disobedience, but he is none the less a member of the family.

Dr. A. J. Gordon said, "Sonship is unchangeable: communion varies. Sonship is absolute: communion is a thing of degrees. The most exalted saint is no more the child of God than the weakest and most imperfect believer. The difference between the two is a difference of fellowship and not a difference of birthright. In sonship we have life, in fellowship we have more abundant life: in the one we get our place as accepted in the Beloved, in the other we get our power as annointed with the Holy Ghost: on the one depends our salvation, and on the other depends our sanctification."

Before there can be true fellowship with Christ, there must be a complete self-surrender to Him. This surrender to Christ brings us into partnership with Him. Christians are partners in the possession of spiritual life, brethren in the divine family, and co-workers with Christ in a glorious enterprise.

The sphere of fellowship is in obedience to the teachings of God's Word. Our fellowship depends upon our doing the will of God. Many of God's children are out of fellowship with Him and are therefore unhappy, because they are not in conformity to the will of God for their lives. When our fellowship with Christ is broken, we are unhappy, our prayers are not answered, and the Lord's work is retarded. Our fellowship with the Lord depends upon our doing the will of God.

II. The Means of Fellowship.

What are the means by which fellowship with Christ is maintained and promoted?

1. Prayer.

Prayer is the converse of the soul with God. Where prayer is neglected, fellowship with God is lacking, or terribly weakened. Our fellowship with our friends is maintained and enriched through frequent contacts with them, so we talk to them and they talk to us. Likewise, prayer promotes fellowship with God. Do you enjoy fellowship with Him through prayer?

2. Bible study.

It is not only important that we talk to God, but it is also vitally important that God talk to us. A one-way telephone conversation would be very uninteresting. Most people like to hear someone talking at the other end of the line. God still speaks through His Word into the ears of faith. Prayer and Bible study complete the circuit in the life of fellowship.

III. The Might of Fellowship.

By the might of fellowship is meant its power in life. Fellowship with Christ is a mighty dynamo which generates great power and sends it out into all the avenues of life.

1. It is the secret of a radiant personality.

Fellowship with Christ produces a fine spiritual glow. If you have lost the radiance of the Christian religion, it is simply because you are out of fellowship with Christ. Looking into the face of Christ is the secret of a radiant life.

2. It is a basic element in ascertaining the will of God.

You must have fellowship with Christ if you are to receive divine guidance. If you are in close touch with Him, He can direct you in the way that you should go, and in the doing of what you ought to do.

3. It is the secret of effective service.

At one of the busiest corners in a great city, two men were working on a telephone pole — one at the top and the other at the bottom. The man at the bottom seemed to know just what the man at the top wanted. First, he would send up one tool, and then another. There was not any noise or shouting, but, very quietly, in the midst of the din of the heavy traffic, they worked in the finest harmony. Finally, the bystander noticed that the man at the bottom had some earphones clamped over his head. He knew that the two men were in constant communion with each other, and that was the secret of their marvelous cooperation. The same principle operates in the spiritual realm. When a Christian has fellowship with Christ, he works effectively with and for the Lord.

4. It is the secret of the overcoming life.

You may have read of Hardly Page, the aviator, who some years ago during his eastern tour descended at Kobar in Arabia. A large rat, doubtless attracted by the smell of food, crept into his plane. When Page took off and got into midair, he discovered the presence of the rat by the sound of the gnawing behind him. He thought of the damage those pitiless teeth might do, and of the disaster that might follow. What should he do? Suddenly the thought flashed into his mind that a rat is not made for high altitudes, but for the ground. He determined to soar. He lifted the nose of the plane until he found breathing difficult, and then the gnawing ceased. Hours later, his plane landed, and he found the dead rat behind the engine.

5. It is the secret of the untroubled heart.

Dr. Ralph Cushman has given us some beautiful and helpful thoughts in this connection in his memorable poem:

"I met God in the morning,
When my day was at its best;
And His presence came like sunrise,
Like a glory in my breast.

All day long the Presence lingered;
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered;
Other ships were sore distressed;
But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to us a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other mornings,
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I, too, had loosed the moorings,
With the Presence left behind.

So I think I know the secret
Learned from many a troubled way:
You must seek Him in the morning
If you want Him through the day."

6. It is the secret of heaven on earth.

Fellowship with Christ is the sublime possibility of every child of God in this sinful world. Provision has been made for the members of God's household. If you are out of fellowship with Christ, you can confess your sins and ask for forgiveness and be cleansed from unrighteousness. Then fellowship will be restored, and life will begin to glow again.

"Is your soul in touch with Jesus?
Do you know his grace divine?
Are you in the Lord abiding
As the branch dwells in the vine?

Is your soul in touch with Jesus?
Is His love your sure retreat?
Have you made a glad surrender?
Is your faith in Him complete?

Is your soul in touch with Jesus?
Is He truly all in all?
Are you joyful in His presence?
And responsive to His call?

Is your soul in touch with Jesus?
Has your will been crucified?
In His will are you rejoicing?
Is He trusted Friend and Guide?

Keep your soul in touch with Jesus,
Keep Him with you everywhere;
Keep your soul in touch with Jesus
By the power of love and prayer."