

A Word Robbed Of Its Meaning

My Father's twenty-sixth birthday was a special day for him. To celebrate the day, he and some of his army buddies, 130,000 of them from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, invaded Hitler's Europe. It was June 6 1944, D-Day: The day of the greatest military invasion in history.

The beach where my Father's unit landed was code named "Omaha". It was the place where the fiercest fighting and the heaviest casualties occurred. If you saw the movie "Saving Private Ryan", you had a glimpse of the situation that greeted the first waves of soldiers who hit the beach.

The men had been told that when they landed, there would not be any resistance from the Germans. It was expected that the Nazi fortifications would have been obliterated by the massive bombing from the air and the naval bombardment from the many American and British Destroyers and Battleships off the coast of Normandy. Unfortunately, bad weather prevented the bombers from hitting their targets and the large ships were unsuccessful in knocking out the hostile bunkers, machine guns and mortars. The first waves of the First and Twenty-Ninth divisions on Omaha Beach were cut to pieces by the still intact German defenses.

Many landing craft were sunk by mortar and artillery fire from the Nazi fortifications above the beach. President Roosevelt had foreseen this possibility and had suggested that a flotilla of rescue vessels should be assembled. A fleet of about sixty shallow draft Coast Guard cutters was refitted for rescue operations and was patrolling the waters off the landing beaches on D-Day. These boats saved hundreds of soldiers whose landing craft had taken fire and sunk.

My Dad told me about these Coast Guard cutters and the valuable contribution they made in their life-saving mission. He was amazed at the courage of the men on these boats, as they were also taking fire and substantial casualties. He was grateful for the heroic effort they made by standing in the breach to protect the helpless soldiers in the water. He had been an eyewitness to the events. Although I have studied the D-Day invasion, I had never discovered any other source who credited the Coast Guard in this manner.

Then, fifty-three years after D Day, my Dad was with celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles with us in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. We were invited to have dinner with the Smith family, whom we had recently met. After dinner, the conversation somehow turned to the military. My Dad and Mr. Smith began to talk about their wartime experiences.

We found out that Mr. Smith had also participated in the D-Day invasion. He had been a gunner in an LST (Landing Ship-Tank) that was transporting equipment to the Omaha beachhead. When my Dad began to talk about the importance of the support from the Coast Guard ships, Mr. Smith enthusiastically corroborated Dad's account. He had witnessed the same events as Dad.

What was more remarkable was the change that took place in the room. These two old gentlemen had discovered that they had shared a vitally important experience. They had shared participation in one of the most momentous events in history. Before the invasion, they had shared the training, the preparation, the fears and anxieties of knowing that battle was

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immanent. They had apparently been in close proximity during the battle, because they had both witnessed the same events. They had shared the terrible experiences of the day and the elation at the ultimate success of the mission. They undoubtedly shared a thousand other things that probably cannot be captured or quantified or expressed. In an instant, two strangers became friends in a way that would have been impossible had they not shared something vital. In that evening they experienced the bond that develops when people share a common experience. I knew what was happening by the glow of new-found camaraderie on my Father's face.

There is a word that describes that bond among people. When I discovered what that word was and what it meant, I became concerned. Christians use the word casually, and without an understanding of the depth of meaning the word carries. We abuse and misuse the word, and our abuse of it has robbed us of the appreciation of an important characteristic of Christian relationships.

I fear that Christians have made the word that describes this bond a useless word--a word that when read in the Bible no longer connotes the full meaning that it should have. We have robbed this word of its value and importance and even its grammatical purpose! The thing that my Dad and Mr. Smith shared in that evening is called **FELLOWSHIP**. Fellowship is the BOND that is created when people share something in common. But we commonly use the word to describe social gatherings, inane chit-chat or shallow conversation after services. "Fellowship" is a noun, but we have changed it into a verb. We can experience fellowship with each other, but when we say we are "fellowshipping" (conversing is what is meant) we are misusing this important noun! We are depriving ourselves of the understanding of a vital concept!

When we read "fellowship" in the KJV, it is being translated from one of two Greek words having similar meaning. The words are "Koinonia" and "Metochē". Did the writers of the New Testament ever use these words to describe conversation or social gatherings? The answer is emphatically, "NO!". The use of these words is exclusively to describe a sharing in common or a partnership! By misusing the word, Christians rob themselves of the knowledge of the fellowship they ought to be having!

The fellowship that Christians should experience is a relationship, not an activity. It causes people to be joined together. It is a bond forged among individuals who have participated in common endeavors and goals, shared trials, similar experiences. This bond is not easily broken. It is a foundation of friendship. It engenders trust and loyalty. Fellowship is the cause of enhanced understanding among the members of the fellowship, by the sharing of a common experience. In fellowship there is a high level of sympathy, of empathy, of mercy and forgiveness. In fellowship there is a great trust because those in the fellowship are qualified to know and understand each other. They have walked in each other's shoes. Fellowship is a root of deep affection.

See how much we lose when we infer "social contact" when we read "fellowship" in the Bible! Social contact and conversation are maintenance tools for preserving fellowship, but they cannot build a deep fellowship such as the one Christians experience. When we substitute "conversation"

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for "fellowship" the true meaning is lost. Lets explore the meaning we should be deriving from the scriptures that deal with fellowship!

First, with whom do Christians have fellowship? With whom do we have something in common, or with whom have we shared deep and meaningful experiences? Who are our partners? Because we previously have not understood fellowship correctly, some of the answers to this question may be surprising.

Naturally, we have fellowship with other Christians. Christians share in common the experience and the role of components of the body of Christ. In this, we are partners.

ROM 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

EPH 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

1CO 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. 2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. 3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. 4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; 9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; 10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: 11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. 12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 20 But now are they many members, yet but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. 22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the

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body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. 25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

All Christians share in the partnership, participation in of the Body of Christ. Each person is an integral functioning unit of Christ's body. Each individual has something to contribute. Each one is operating for the good of the body in general. Every member is important and contributes something vital. We share interdependence with each other. Christians share the experience of being part of the body of Christ. Without the contribution, the fellowship of each member, the Body of Christ can be no healthier than a human body deprived of a liver or kidneys.

Christians share the holy spirit. This is a resource that flows like water from God to each of his children.

PRO 1:23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. (see also Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:17-18)

ROM 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

This spirit imparts fruits and gifts.

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

1CO 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

This spirit causes Christians to become alike in aspects of character development. As we bear the fruit of the spirit, we begin to share these common traits.

Christians share common goals. Their primary goal was stated by Christ:

MAT 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Christians also share the goal of spreading the gospel:

PHI 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, 5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first

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day until now;

Christians share common beliefs. In the early 1990s, I was a member of a church which made a 180 degree turn in doctrines. In a very short time, the doctrinal changes shredded the fellowship. Those of us who wanted to hold on to what we felt was true, the former doctrines, could feel the common ground eroding from under our feet. We no longer had much in common with those who embraced the changes. We no longer felt welcome or trusted. In the end, many had to leave that fellowship. I'd like to point out that there is no amount of conversation or social contact (the things we like to call fellowship) that could have repaired the breach in fellowship that resulted from the doctrinal changes. The Bible makes this principle clear, there is no fellowship when there is no agreement in faith:

2Cor 6:14 Do not keep company with those who have not faith: for what is there in common between righteousness and evil, or between light and dark? 15 And what agreement is there between Christ and the Evil One? or what part has one who has faith with one who has not? (Bible In Basic English)

Christians share common problems and conflicts with the world as a natural consequence of obeying God.

JOH 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Christians share common suffering which allows us to comfort and help each other.

1CO 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

2Co 1.3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all encouragement, 4 who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are consoled by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our encouragement is abundant through Christ. 6 If we are being afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your encouragement, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our encouragement. (New Revised Standard Version, with my paraphrase)

Christians share a calling from God and the hope of that calling.

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EPH 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

Our fellowship extends far beyond our fellow Christians, however. Incredibly, the Bible teaches us that we have fellowship with Jesus Christ—that we were called to this fellowship with Him.

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

How could that be? This scripture is saying that we have something in common, some partnership with our Creator. What could we possibly have in common with Him? In truth, we share many important things with our Lord and Master and Maker. First, both we and Christ have experienced life in human flesh. Christ has completely shared the human experience with His creatures. In that He has done this, He is entitled to claim fellowship with us. God did this deliberately so that the fellowship relationship could be had with mankind. God wanted to share this experience with us. Christ has experienced everything we have, from elation to suffering:

HEB 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus lived the complete human experience. Joy, grief, anxiety, worry, hope and fear, He felt it all. He knew what it was to have the loyalty and friendship of men and He knew betrayal. He was no stranger to fatigue and muscle pain from a hard day's work. I believe He was subject to illness from time to time. In the fellowship of human flesh, Jesus learned to have empathy and compassion. Christ was made perfect, complete when He shared human life with us.

HEB 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: 2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. 3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. 4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. 5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. 6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. 7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; 8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; 10 Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

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No only has Christ shared our kind of life in the flesh, but we share vicariously the life and death of Christ.

HEB 3:14 For we are made partakers [koinonos] of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

In this verse, the word translated "Partaker" is a derivative of the word translated "Fellowship". It means that God has brought us into the fellowship of Christ's life. This means that we must share in the kind of suffering that Christ endured on earth.

PE 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye **are partakers [koinonos]** of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

In this life, Christians are participating in the same sufferings Christ endured. We are sharing *vicariously* in His crucifixion and death, in order that we may in actual fact, participate in His resurrection and glory.

GAL 2:20 **I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live;** yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

ROM 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, **we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:** 6 Knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with him,** that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Christians ought to be sharing the way of life that Christ pioneered.

1JO 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Christ, by His example, showed us how we should live, how we should walk. We should study Him and become more and more like Him.

Another important thing that we share with Christ is that we have a common enemy, with whom we have constant warfare. It is Satan, the adversary. We fight the same battles today that Christ fought with Satan. In His battle with the Adversary, Christ won.

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MAT 4:9 And [Satan] saith unto him [Christ] all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

James tells us that we can win this battle too:

JAM 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

It is apparent that we have an impressive basis of commonality for our fellowship relationship with Jesus Christ. A further surprise is that we even have fellowship with God, the Father.

1JO 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: **and truly our fellowship is with the Father**, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

What partnership, what things could we possibly share in common with God, the Father? One important thing is that He made us in His own image. In general, man looks like God. We share the same shape and appearance. Additionally, as one studies the Bible and God's plan for man, it becomes clear that in making mankind, God is reproducing HIS KIND! We are His offspring, His family members. It is God's intent to make man the same kind of being that He is, inhabiting His spiritual realm.

When Christ taught the disciples to pray, He admonished them to pray to the Father, "...Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat 6:10). When we say this, we are consenting to God's will and plan for the redemption of mankind. We are subordinating our will and our plans to the will and plans of the Father. When we can do this truly and sincerely, we are sharing in, becoming partners in the will of the Father.

We are in fellowship with the Father and each other when we obey Him, accept His standards of conduct and enact them in our life.

1JO1.7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

When we obey God we are sharing His patterns of thought and behavior. God has actually shared His thoughts, His motivations and His MIND by sharing His holy spirit with us.

1JO 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

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1CO 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

By giving humans His spirit, God shares His spiritual DNA, allowing us to inherit His character. When God gives us His spirit, we begin to acquire His characteristics. We begin, under the guidance and leading of the spirit, to think as God does. We are members of the fellowship of those who, to one degree or another, think as God does.

So we see that Christians have fellowship with each other, with Christ and even with the Father. What should be the result, the benefit from this relationship? From what we have learned, we could say that this fellowship is bound together by a deep and abiding affection. God loves deeply and is committed to those to whom He is bound in fellowship. They are also committed to Him and His goals, His will and His way of life. God trusts those who are in His fellowship. He bestows on them His highest regard and warmth of friendship. He desires that the relationship would not only be maintained, but grow in strength and closeness. Just like my Dad and Mr. Smith, God regards us as old war buddies, having fought the same enemy. We are God's friends:

JOH 15:15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

We have seen that our fellowship with Christ allows him to have empathy with our circumstances. He understands us completely. Our knowledge of this fellowship should embolden us as we approach the Father, with Jesus Christ at his right hand to explain our request to Him.

HEB 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are [fellowship], yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

This knowledge of what fellowship truly is, and the knowledge of our fellowship with Christ and the Father should enhance our faith. It should make us more confident in the results of our prayers. It should make us more confident in the good will of God toward us. It should make us more confident of our value to God. It should make us more confident that there will be positive outcome in our lives.

Christians need to have a better understanding of the concept of fellowship. Fellowship is the basis for our relationship with each other and with Christ and the Father. We should not use the word to describe social gatherings and conversation. The meaning is much, much deeper. Christians must use the truth of these concepts and ideas to strengthen Christian relationships with each other and with God.