

“Why the Church” - Week 8

SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2024 - MICHAEL BOWERS



Summary - “Why the Church: Fellowship”

We have been walking through the traits that we expect from our leaders and the members of Rich Fork. Traits do not mean we have perfected any of these, but we strive to believe in and practice them at every opportunity. When we get these traits right, they are evident in our community, believers and non-believers. When we sidestep these, we risk being another group of people, a club with some common interests, instead of the church that Jesus declared would come and stand upon the forces of evil yet still prevail. Here are the traits we have examined thus far: Biblical Preaching, Evangelism & Discipleship, Prayer, Obedient Generosity, The Practices of Baptism & Lord's Supper, and Worship. This week we will look at the trait of Fellowship. This fellowship we are called to be a part of is not a quick hello. It is not an “I'm fine” answer as one walks by and asks “How are you doing?”. True fellowship is creating space to care, and it is walking with our heads up, eyes open, and our hearts prepared for genuine relationships with one another.

Scripture - Romans 12:1-21

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Key Apps, Websites, and Online Tools for Further Study

- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- <https://biblehub.com/>
- <https://www.youversion.com/>
- <https://www.bibleref.com/>
- <https://bible.org/>
- <https://netbible.org/>
- <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/>
- <https://www.gty.org/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>
- <https://carm.org/>
- <https://dwellapp.io/>

Further Scripture Study:

Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Acts 2:42-27; Romans 12:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Galatians 6:1-10; Hebrews 10:24-25

As you study the scripture verses provided for this week, study for right context and right questions...

Right Context:

- The verse itself and key word(s) that stand out in the verse (meanings)
- The verses around the verse, the section of scripture, the chapter, the book, old/new testament, and relation to the rest of scripture
- Author and Date (Who wrote the book and when?)
- Audience (Who is the book written to? Main characters in the story and/or text?)
- Main points and overall purpose of the book
- Historical background, cultural significance, setting, people, rulers, etc.
- Scripture references; let scripture interpret scripture as much as possible

Right Questions:

- What does this passage say?
- What does this passage mean to its original audience?
- What is this passage teaching me about God?
- What does this passage tell us about man?
- What does this passage demand of me? (Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a sin to avoid? How is this applicable to me?)
- How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (What actions must I take in response to this passage?)
- What does this passage prompt me to pray? (For God, for others, for my community, for family, etc.)

Key Thoughts

Before we grow in fellowship with one another, we must remember and grow in the mercies of God through Jesus Christ. Our relationship with God empowers and informs our earthly relationships. The vertical relationship with God directly affects our horizontal relationships with one another (Romans 12:1-2).

God's mercies and gifts toward us, and our relationship to God through Jesus Christ, equip us to love one another. The mercies of God that Paul describes and teaches in Romans 1-11 transforms our worship (spirit and truth). Please see the website below for a full list of these mercies found in Romans 1-11.

<https://spiritualrunning.wordpress.com/2009/10/05/examples-of-god%E2%80%99s-mercy-in-romans-1-11/>

Biblical fellowship puts others above myself (vs. 3). For by the grace given to me... Paul could only state this because of God's mercies toward him. Now, it is crucial to our impact on our community that we love one another through the grace of God.

When we think of others before ourselves, we...

- Think the best of someone, not the worst.
- We do not assume purposeful harm toward us.
- We hand out forgiveness even when it is not asked of us.
- We treat others better than we would treat ourselves.
- We are burdened by a broken or strained relationship.
- We exhibit the fruit of the spirit. (Galatians 5)

We know we think more of ourselves than others when we...

- Never take ownership in relationship tensions or failures.
- It is never our fault; it is always the other person('s) fault.
- We are quick to speak, quick to anger, and slow to listen because we have already formulated our response regardless of their reaction.
- We forget that the call to fellowship is one to another. (It's a two-way street.)
- We rarely apologize.
- We act no different in confrontation and difficulties.

We are each uniquely gifted, however we should never consider ourselves better than one another, but rather better equipped to serve one another (vs. 4-8). For our community to believe in the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, they must see and hear it from followers of Jesus. For our community to believe in the Gospel that can become their eternal salvation, they must see the Gospel lived out in the day-to-day.

Key Thoughts

When we each use the gifts God has given us, we are all better for it. We grow in grace and mercy through the empowered equipping of other followers of Jesus:

1. We belong to one another. (vs. 4-6)
2. We are gifted for one another. (vs. 6-8)
3. We love one another. (vs. 9)
4. We love with devotion to one another. (vs. 10)
5. We outdo showing honor to one another. (vs. 10a)
6. We motivate one another. (vs. 11-12)
7. We share with one another. (vs. 13)
8. We rejoice with one another. (vs. 15)
9. We weep with one another. (vs. 15)
10. We live in harmony with one another. (vs. 16)

Honor is to give value and serious consideration to the other person. And not only do we honor, but we outdo one another. When we honor one another, we genuinely care more for the other person than we do ourselves. Gossip is the enemy of honor. Unforgiveness is the enemy of honor.

Rejoicing with one another and weeping with one another require us to be in people's lives, up close, personal, in close fellowship. We are not designed to hurt alone. Sympathy comes naturally, but so does pride. It is easier to walk through the valley with another believer in pain and brokenness than it is to stand in the valley and watch them ascend to the top of the mountain and not experience bitterness.

The most significant barrier to harmony is pride. In Stuart Scott's and Andrew Jin's book 31 Ways to be A One-Another Christian, they write, "Living in harmony and having a unified mind with common thoughts and direction does not mean that a believer must think precisely the same thoughts as another believer or think exactly the same way about everything—that would be impossible and absurd. Instead, believers are to think the same way about one another. For example, they are to think well of one another, seek to love, encourage, etc. Again, we believe in the best of each other, not the worst."

In biblical fellowship we are not to repay evil with evil or seek to avenge ourselves when we have been wronged; vengeance belongs to the Lord. We are to live, as much as we can, in fellowship with one another; loving one another, caring for one another, and offering this even to those we would consider our enemies. We don't respond to evil with more evil, but rather with good (vs. 17-21).

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil." (Proverbs 3:6-7)

Reflect & Respond

The biblical definition for the word fellowship found in Acts 2:42 is...

- 1.fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse
 - a.the share which one has in anything, participation
 - b.intercourse, fellowship, intimacy
 - i.the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office)
 - c.a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship

According to this definition, how is your fellowship with the Lord (Romans 12:1-2)? Are you purposing time in your life to regularly fellowship with Christ through the study of His word, prayer, worship, fasting, etc.?

Where do you have fellowship in your life with other believers? Where are you experiencing true community and joint participation with others who follow Christ?

The opposite of fellowship is isolation. Isolation from one another is not biblical and often leads to temptation and sinful behaviors. The enemy loves to isolate us (Eve in the garden, David not going to war, Isaiah in the cave, Jesus in the wilderness, Judas after betraying Christ...). When, where, why and how do you isolate yourself from biblical fellowship and community? Do you recognize when this happens and the battles that you face when you are isolating? Who do you have to help pull you out of isolation?

How well are you doing at treating others as more important than yourself (spouse, children, friends, co-workers, neighbors, enemies, etc.)? Where are you perhaps thinking too highly of yourself? (see lists from page 2 of this disciple guide).

Where and within what relationships do you work to outdo one another in honoring one another? If you are doing this well, what does it look like? Where and with whom do you still need to grow in this area?

Pride in our own lives can quickly destroy fellowship with others. Spend some serious time in prayer asking God, through His Word and His Holy Spirit, to reveal areas of your life where pride is ruining fellowship. Aim to make this right with a humble and repentant heart where possible.

As we work through this series, please know that you have [FREE access](#) to the book Twelve Traits: Embracing God's Design for the Church, by David Platt, which this series is taken from. You can find and download this short book for free at the link below and we encourage you to read through this with us throughout the series.

https://radical-net-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/images/20220308095847/12Traits_Web.pdf

