

Fellowship II (2)

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Date: 26 July 2015

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[0:00] Amen. Remember that kids say the darndest things?

A teacher in a Catholic school asked the kids to write a letter to God.! Here are some of the letters. Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed each other right in the church. Is that okay?

Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you've already got? That's a thought. Dear God, I think the staple is one of your greatest inventions.

That's got to be a little boy. Dear God, I think about you sometimes even when I'm not praying. Dear God, I bet it's very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world when there are only four people in our family and I can never do it.

Dear God, please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There's nothing good in there now. Dear God, if we come back as something, please don't let me be Jennifer Horton.

[1:29] I hate her. There are only 47 more of these. Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms.

It works with my brother. Okay, well. Kids say the darndest things. We think the darndest things. And you know, it's funny. When you turn on an iPad, it goes sideways. Then you've got to... It's sort of like the silly putty thing you used to have to work with. Okay, so I've got it straight so I don't have to look sideways. All right.

So, who's my timekeeper today? Anybody have a watch that can tell me? Okay. Twelve minutes.

Let me know. All right. You may have to yell because I may not be paying much attention to you.

Okay. All right. I had a conversation with a 40-year-old man a number of years ago. He said things like, you know, I'm just suddenly feeling lonesome.

[2:37] My wife seems to care more about her career than about me. The kids are getting ready to go to college. I don't have any friends and I don't know what to do about it.

Well, at my age at that time, I didn't know about midlife crisis that most men go through something like this. But I said to him, have you talked with your pastor or your brothers and sisters in the church about that?

And he said something that I could not believe. He said, are you kidding? Those are the last people I would talk with about my problems. You know, that's kind of an indictment on us, isn't it?

It says in Acts 2.42, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. We talked about that.

To the fellowship, that's what we're talking about today.

To the breaking of bread and to the prayers. What is a local church for these days? So we're going to talk about fellowship.

[3:36] Raymond, I listened to his sermon on the website this week. Raymond gave a great sermon on fellowship last Sunday. And I'm going to follow up on that.

They devoted themselves to the fellowship. We'll talk about how fellowship was back in Bible days. We'll talk about how it is today. And we'll talk about how it applies to the Church of the Holy Trinity. That's our roadmap. So let's begin. Fellowship back in Bible days. Now, to do that, we've got to do a word study. I see the eyes glazing over.

Word study. Whoa. But this is a really easy word study. First of all, the word fellowship itself. In the dictionary, it says, A community of like feelings and interests.

C, communion. Okay, so I go back to communion. Communion. Calm, which means with. Union, which means oneness.

[4:35] Communion. In communion, we stick to each other like glue for support. And then we go back to the word study in the other languages. In Greek, that word is pronounced koinonia.

You've probably seen that around. Koinonia. Which actually means sharing closely together. And finally, the root of the whole thing is a Hebrew word, kabura.

You've got to say khabura. Which means a deeply committed religious society. I've said this before, but it's summed up in the three musketeers.

One for all and all for one. Sometimes in parishes, I think it's every man for himself. But fellowship is to be we together for one another.

That's what was going on in the biblical church. Now, I had the privilege of being in two armed services. I was a Marine on active duty and reserves for about 10 years.

[5:39] And then in the Air Force for about 17 years. They are totally different organizations. And you'll understand what I'm talking about after I share about this. With Marines, it is we are one and it's a lifetime thing.

Now, I have not put on a Marine uniform since 1974. But if I say I was in the Marines, all the other Marines say Semper Fi.

I mean, it's just a lifetime thing. Now, after that, I was in the Air Force. Now, I love the Air Force. Air Force is a totally different corporation. It's kind of working for a corporation.

You come to work, you do the thing, you go home. And people live in silos in the Air Force. You've got the missile community and the bomber community and the fighter community and the ground puke community.

And they don't really think too much about each other. You kind of do your thing. So, the Marine Corps is more of an organism. And the Air Force is more of an organization.

[6:43] Not that one's better than the other. They just function differently. The church, the local church, actually needs to be more like the Marine Corps as it rolls along down the road.

And that whole thing depends on fellowship. Now, we put ourselves back into the Bible days. As you'll remember, on that morning, that Pentecost, there were 120 believers gathered together. And by the time the day was over, there were 3,120 believers. And the 120 had a job to do. It's like, how many of us are here?

I don't know. But suppose we added 300 today. Not people who came over from the Methodist church. But people who had no clue who Jesus was.

We would have a job, wouldn't we? Okay, so we already said the 120 had to teach, first of all, about Jesus. The apostles' teaching, which came to be called the New Testament.

[7:48] Had to teach them the Word. Had to teach them doctrine. The second thing they had to teach them was to how they would share their life together as a church.

The apostles had to think about what it was like when they followed Jesus around for that three years. You see, Jesus didn't just teach them.

He turned them into a tight organization. Kind of a civilian Marine Corps. They were together. They had power. They moved things.

Well, the 120 had to build these 3,000 into a tight-knit community. As we've already said, a lot of these people left after a week and went back all over the Mediterranean to their homes.

And they probably started churches. They had to learn fast what it meant to be a community.

Because Jesus had left them a commandment, right?

[8:53] He said, Go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Teaching them to obey all I have commanded you. And I'll be with you until the end of time. And then he sent the Holy Spirit to equip them to do this mission.

It took something like a three-musketeers motto to accomplish what they accomplished. Because of this tight bond, the Holy Spirit could act.

And in 300 years, Christianity dominated the Mediterranean world. Went from a few believers to a worldwide movement.

That's what it was in Bible times. But you might say that was now. And this is then. That was then. And this is now. What happens next? What about today?

[9:50] How does Christian fellowship work in the 21st century? Do you know that baby boomers predominate in this world today?

Baby boomers are those who were born between 1945 and 1965. I am not a baby boomer. You know, I was a staff sergeant in the diaper brigade in World War II.

But I live with a baby boomer. I know how these things work. And she has worn off those baby boomer edges. But when we think of baby boomer society, such words as nihilistic come to mind, narcissistic, extreme individualism, my way or the highway.

That pretty much describes, in general, our community leaders today. How in the world do you maintain a loyal parish where all are committed to Jesus and to one another when we've got the secular world pounding us with its me first, and if I have time, we'll get to you?

How do you do it? It broke my heart one day, years ago, when a parishioner came out of church, shaking hands. And, you know, most people say, very nice sermon, Father.

[11:14] He came to me and he said, I need to tell you we're going to Asabatabata Church because we're not getting fed here. They've got programs over there for everybody. You know, I had heard about church shopping before, but this really hit me.

It's a commercial mentality. I'm going where I can get the best deal and, you know, take care of my kids. Was that three minutes left?

Three minutes left? And so I was saying, so I went on, but you said, okay. Okay. So, how do you get a Bible church in the 21st century?

Well, I think we go back to the cross. You've got the vertical and you've got the horizontal. The vertical is the Roman road, right?

For I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Contains all things necessary for salvation to the Jew and to the Greek first. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But God chose his love for us and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[12:24] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. And if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

That's the vertical approach. It may be about me, but it's really about God saving me. It's only until we get to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ that we can fill out the horizontal.

That's where we are today in the 21st century. We're helping people come to a saving relationship with Christ and then deal with each other. That 2 Corinthians 5, 17.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is what we're about. But it's hard. A noted Christian author once said, the best of human relationships are really based on the barter of mutual needs, interests, causes, giving, and forgiving.

[13:39] We are so immersed in the dominant subservience principle of church membership that we seldom find a harmonious parish. Boom. Do you have any emotional baggage?

Boy, I do. I've been working on this for about 71 years. You know, I had good parents, but boy, it was tough growing up as the fifth of six children.

I mean, let me tell you, let me cry on your shoulder. It's tough. It's really tough. It was really kind of neat. But we carry stuff from childhood, don't we? We get really defensive when we don't need to. We come down hard on people. Some of us want to dominate. Some of us want to walk around with a kick-me sign on our back. And we all try to become a parish. It's only when the Holy Spirit flows into us to help us deal with the junk that we can become a harmonious parish.

So we need to continually ask the Holy Spirit to baptize us in power, to get rid of the junk which stops us from being harmonious. So point three, how can we be that harmonious local church where true fellowship is the norm?

[14:58] Five quick things. Daily prayer for each other in this body. There is a roster here, I noticed, with all the names on it. And Mary Ellen and I have divided your names onto days.

And so each day we pray for a fifth of this congregation. You need to be in prayer for each other, to know each other, to care. That begins a harmonious life together when we continually bring each other to the Lord in prayer.

Second, to deal honestly with our dominant subservience problems. If I'm dominant, if I'm a domineering person, how do I ratchet that back? If I'm a subservient person, how do I stand up?

How do I work that in a parish family? And third, pray to be a giver and not just a taker. Okay?

Fourth, give each other the benefit of the doubt.

There should be a sign on our living room wall that says, everybody has a right to be stupid sometimes. Especially in the parish. And finally, ask the Holy Spirit to transform us as church members.

[16:09] Listen to this, what happened in this church in Jerusalem. Verses 46 and 47 of Acts 2. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. Let us pray. Lord God, we want more than anything to please you.

we know you group us together in parish families to help us grow, to rub off the rough edges, to teach us how to witness, to bring people to your Son, Jesus Christ.

Meld us, Lord, more and more, day by day, into a harmonious church membership. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Amen. That was 13, was that 12 minutes? Yeah. Okay.