

The Fellowship

Eph 5:22–27

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as **Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.** ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,** ²⁶ **that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,** ²⁷ **so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.**

- Because Christ **loved** the church
 - He gave Himself up for her
 - His body was broken, His blood was shed, He died, He paid the price
 - He did what we could not ever do for ourselves

- In order that **He might** sanctify her
 - Having cleansed her by the washing of water by the word – the whole message of the gospel

- The church is His beloved bride
 - He took us from a place our imperfection and bondage to sin
 - He paid the price to set us free and wash away our sins
 - He provided the way for us to become His bride

- So that He might **present her to Himself** in splendour,
 - She is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing
 - Because He has cleansed her
 - And continues to cleanse her

- That she might be holy and without blemish
 - On the day of His coming
 - When He returns for His Bride – to present Her to Himself
 - We will be ready for the wedding banquet with Him

- A few weeks ago we started to look at the devotion of the church
 - Devotion is appropriate for a bride in preparation for her bridegroom
 - It is important to note that Christ Himself is preparing us
 - Our devotion is to willingly yield to that
 - We do that as we walk in persistent faith and obedience
 - As we walk in loving devotion

- Jesus has completed the work that made us His

- He continues to work in us to bring us to the fulfilment of that when He comes again for His bride
 - This is the context of who we are in Him
 - This is the context of our devotion
 - This is the context of the church being a fellowship of believers and all that goes with that

Let's move on to consider the second aspect of devotion stressed in the passage we read previously from Acts 2:42-47 in this context.

Ac 2:42-47

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- The second aspect mentioned here is fellowship

Consider this passage:

- The church has been introduced to the world
 - By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
 - By the preaching of the gospel
 - By the way that they now 'show up' as the fellowship

- How they show up in the world and the impact they make
 - Flows out of what they are as a fellowship
 - ❖ The *koinōnia* – is far more than a religious grouping doing religious things
 - ❖ Witnesses
 - And how they are as a fellowship
 - ❖ Empowered
 - ❖ Devoted
 - They now connect with the world that they live in as the church
 - ❖ New relationship to the world
 - ❖ New purpose in the world
 - The life and love of God are visible in them
 - ❖ Personally
 - ❖ And corporately – *koinōnia*

- This is still the way the Holy Spirit want to work in and through us today as God's people

- More is said about the aspect of fellowship in this passage and the parallel passage in Acts 4 than anything else

Ac 4:32–35

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

- In fact, the first big change we see after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:
 - Their devotion to THE fellowship that underlies all they did with and for each other
 - We also see that devotion is not only an individual thing but a corporate thing

- While there is a vital **personal expression of devotion**
 - It is also clear that a vital aspect of what the **Holy Spirit will stir up in the church** is:
 - ❖ That we do these things together
 - ❖ In community and
 - ❖ As community
 - ❖ As the *koinōnia* of God
 - ❖ And that we are devoted to doing them together

- Everything revolves around their activities as the fellowship who are empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit
 - The whole of our life is impacted by being made part of THE fellowship
 - This is a daily reality that finds a daily expression

- We said earlier (previous sermon) that the construct of Acts 2:42 seems to indicate that breaking of bread and prayers are included in ‘fellowship’

- This interpretation of fellowship encompassing:
 - Doctrine, the breaking of bread and the prayers
 - Is, I think, borne out by the way community life is expressed in the verses we read from Acts 2:42-47

- For example: it is quite obvious that for them to be devoted to the apostle’s doctrine
 - They had to be together
 - And not simply physically together
 - They had to be together as the fellowship
 - And ‘in fellowship’ with each other

- Consider too that in many other passages of the New Testament we see a **central theme**
 - about how we live in the world being that:
 - as we live out the teaching of the apostles
 - It will **primarily be expressed in loving each other – in loving our neighbour**

- In some passages ‘neighbour’ seems to refer mainly to our brothers and sisters in Christ
- In other passages the term ‘neighbour’ refers to a wider group of people
- The way our love is expressed does differ somewhat between the way we love the church and the way we love others
- This is because when we are born again:
 - We become the body of Christ
 - The family of God
 - There is a level of devotion toward our brothers and sisters that cannot extend to others
- The moment we are saved
 - We are connected to THE fellowship
 - With an eternal bond that will outlast every other human bond
- We have ‘fellowship’ with believers that we can never have with unbelievers
- This devotion is abundantly evident in the early church
 - Even beyond the account recorded in Acts

Tertullian (160-220) writes of the Romans saying, about the church:

“Look... how they love one another; and how they are ready to die for each other.

- Our devotion to each other – to THE fellowship, in all its aspects – is a central expression of our devotion to God
- Martyn Lloyd-Jones has this exhortation as part of the series he preached on the passage from Acts we read:

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren (*quoting 1 John 3:14*). Is the Bible the most important book in the world for you? Do the children of God come first before everybody else, no matter who? May God give us honesty as we examine ourselves. That is

Christianity. That is the church. That is the life that is life indeed. That is the way to live. It is the only teaching that can prepare us to die gloriously.”²

Now, the word that is translated as ‘fellowship’ is *koinōnia*, which is about ‘having in common’ (same root word), ‘community’ and ‘communion’

“The fellowship: (κοινωνία - *koinōnia*) here translated “common life” From κοινός, *common* A relation between individuals which involves a **common interest** and a mutual, active participation in that interest **and** in each other. The word answers to the Latin *communio*, from *communis*, *common*. Hence, sometimes rendered *communion*, as 1 Cor. 10:16; 2 Cor. 13:14. *Fellowship* is the most common rendering.”³

How is this *koinōnia* expressed?

1. Together (v44)

- Physically in each other’s presence
- Wanted to be together
 - A heart commitment – devotion to THE fellowship
 - Not simply a commitment to having fellowship with other believers
 - This was a commitment to the people who were part of the fellowship
- Went way beyond the reliance we have on ‘organised meetings’ to ensure time together in today’s church
- They spent time with each other and:
 - A “common life” or “community life” developed
 - Their lives became intertwined
 - ‘Daily’
- They were one body and gave expression to that
 - By being together and
 - Being actively involved in in each other’s wellbeing
 - AND spiritual growth

² Lloyd-Jones, M. (2000). [The Fellowship](#). In *Authentic Christianity* (1st U.S. ed., Vol. 1, p. 145). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

³ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 456–457). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

- We see them living interdependently
 - Devoted to ensuring that this connection with each other was given time and effort to establish and maintain
 - We see them giving expression to this in activities together that focused on
 - Jesus – His person and His work
 - The cross and what that meant
 - The preaching of the gospel
2. Together (v46) – in one accord (also in Acts 1:14, 4:32). This meant:
- Of one mind – one heart and soul
 - A deep unity that came from the time they spent together and the way they spent that time
 - Sharing fellowship meant being in unity
 - And express their ‘being in common’ – a community
 - A common focus on the person and work of Jesus
 - A common understanding of
 - ❖ the common ground and
 - ❖ common purpose they shared in Jesus
 - ❖ That they were called to build what He was building – together
3. Their ‘meeting together’ had two dimensions
- Regularly going to the temple (together) – for prayers (plural) and ‘teaching’
 - A bit more formal
 - Probably at set times
 - In each other’s homes (together)
 - More informal and more spontaneous
4. This all flowed over in a generosity of heart toward each other
- They were willing to share everything they had
 - All ‘things’ in common / selling belonging / distributing (v44-45, 4:32)
 - ❖ Not focussed on their own needs but were aware of each other’s needs and devoted to seeing that there were no needy among them
 - ❖ Willing to do whatever they could to take meet those needs as and when they arose
 - ❖ No one had any need among them

- Spontaneous rather than organised initially
 - ❖ Not coming from a central fund
 - ❖ Simply sharing with each other
 - Later on they brought the proceeds from selling possessions to the apostles to distribute as needs arose
 - ❖ Did not negate the interdependence and one on one generosity toward each other
 - Were devoted to each other's wellbeing and spiritual growth
 - Came from spending times together
 - really getting to know each other
 - Caring for each other
 - Being in each other's homes
 - ❖ Practiced hospitality
 - Ensuring that there was true fellowship in their conversation
 - They continually demonstrated
 - Their love for each other
 - And their devotion to the fellowship
5. This was all characterised by:
- A daily commitment
 - Glad hearts
 - Generous hearts
 - Praise to God
6. We also see that there was an impact / an overflow to wider community
- Favour
 - Sharing the gospel (people were being saved)
7. So, the activities we see them regularly involved with include those specifically highlighted in Acts 2:42:
- They are listening to and discuss 'doctrine' – the teaching of the apostles
 - Either in person or as repeated by others
 - Learn with and from each other in their times together
 - Doing theology as a community activity
 - learn and grow together (doctrine)

- Break bread
 - Keep the cross central (as fact and as effective). It happened and it did achieve what God said it did
 - Reaffirm and grow in their faith
 - Remember the truth and power of the gospel
 - That the central tenants of our doctrine are true
 - This is happening quite spontaneously as they meet in each other's homes
 - It seemed to include the sharing of a meal together in the early stages of the church
 - Pray together
 - Communion with God
 - Born from our dependency and trust in Him
 - An act of love and faith toward God
 - Participating with God in what He wants to accomplish
 - Seemed to be happening at the set times in the temple
 - And also whenever they were together in each other's homes
8. Everyone took initiative with this aspect of being THE fellowship – their 'togetherness'
- How should that look for us as Urban Springs?
 - This is our context for being devoted to THE fellowship
 - Our way to connect and give expression to all that goes with THE fellowship

These are all part of our devotion to God – our love for Him

This kind of devotion:

- Is costly
 - But that does not discourage or deter us
- requires discipline but it is still our delight
 - because we love God and want to do what pleases Him
- It is our delight as His sons and daughters
 - it is a joy to serve Him
 - and to worship Him in spirit and truth with the sacrifices of obedience that are a pleasing aroma before Him

What to do if I find that my devotion is lacking:

- Be honest with God about this
 - About the fact that my devotion is lacking
 - About the fact that it should be there
 - Agree with Him
- Do not harden my heart
 - Do not resist or ignore the Holy Spirit in one way or another
- Don't respond in condemnation or guilt
 - Don't get into legalistic obligation
 - This is about devotion not legalistic duty
 - Where the Holy Spirit is at work there is liberty
- Ask Him to change this in me
 - Spend time in prayer listening to His instruction
 - Go to the Bible – apostle's doctrine about the person and work of Jesus
 - For example, on this topic of devotion to the fellowship read passages like:

1 Jn 3:16–18

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.

Heb 10:24–25

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- Work with Him in the changes He brings – by the Holy Spirit
 - The Holy Spirit will stir this up
 - The Holy Spirit will empower me
 - Work with Him to cultivate my devotion
 - Work with Him as He seeks to perfect me in love and mature my faith
- Give expression to this – take action
 - There is a discipline of devotion
 - Wanting to is not the same thing as feeling like it
 - The spirit is willing even though the flesh is weak
 - Find the action we can take that is empowered by the Holy Spirit
 - I can live by the Spirit and am no longer bound by the flesh.
- Find the appropriate personal and corporate expressions
- Find His wisdom in this
- Remain in liberty not legalism
- Be renewed in my mind
- Develop new habits around
 - Apostles teaching
 - THE fellowship
 - The breaking of bread
 - Prayers
- Enjoy the opportunities He gives me to delight in
 - The discipline of devotion
 - Loving obedience

So let us set our hearts on loving God in the disciplines of devotion:

- Devoted to God
 - Expressing our love for Him
 - This is where it starts
- Devoted to the teaching of the apostles
 - Studying and applying the Word of God
 - Personally and corporately
- Devoted to one another
 - To THE fellowship
 - To active involvement in each other's wellbeing and spiritual growth
 - To caring for each other – looking out for the interests of others and not only our own (Phil 2:3-4)
 - Consider how this expression flows into our attitude and actions toward all believers
- Devoted to meeting together
 - 'Organised' meetings and spontaneously
 - To learn together
 - For the breaking of bread
 - and to build each other up
- Devoted to prayer
 - Making prayer something that saturates every aspect of our personal and corporate life