

The Apostolic Fellowship

by A.W. Tozer

The apostolic fellowship is a sharing together of heart and mind among Christians, centered in the truth of God's Word and the presence of Christ.

Duration: 28:13

Scripture: Acts 2:41-47

Topics: "Apostolic"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of serving others and helping those in need. He acknowledges the high unemployment rate in the United States and expresses concern for the hundreds of thousands of people who are struggling. The preacher encourages the congregation to take action and serve others in the name of God. He mentions various ways to help, such as donating to organizations that support children and missions. The sermon concludes with a reminder to give generously to the benevolent offering, which supports those in need locally and globally.

Transcript

Well, in the book of Acts, chapter two, beginning with verse forty-one, they may that gladly received his word were baptized. And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls, and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

And all that believed were together and had all things common to all men, as every man can eat. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved.

Now, what I want to speak about particularly is found in verse forty-two, the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and more particularly the apostles' fellowship, the apostolic fellowship. Now, this will be a companion sermon to one that I preached some months ago on the communion of saints, and there will be some overlapping of ideas. I want to mention that just so you will not think that the old man is back in his second childhood and is repeating himself and not knowing it.

I usually know when I repeat myself, and I repeat myself sometimes deliberately because it's the only possible way to make ideas stick in our busy minds. So this will be on the apostolic fellowship, and will

include the communion of saints and will also include some truths which I have given before. Now, the church here is called a fellowship.

That's a good word, though it's a word that's been abused tremendously in later times in the last fifty years, the last twenty-five anyway. Every ambitious fellow that wants to start himself something calls it a fellowship. But I want to go back to the New Testament for the word, and notice that it means a sharing together.

It means more than that, it means an intimate sharing together. It means more than that, it means a communion, a communion of heart and mind. Now, this communion of heart and mind among the Christians is taught in the scriptures.

For instance, it says that in the book of Ephesians, that speaks of God the Father, after whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. There's the whole family. And in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, which we've read that and mentioned it a few times recently, there is that unity, the seven unities of the Church of Christ.

But I ask you to notice that before there can be communion, there must be union. And this union of believers is, I say, taught in the scriptures, and it's repeated in the creed. I know some people shy away from creeds.

They say, I don't believe in creeds. I smile when somebody says that I don't like a creed. I take the Bible.

A creed means, I believe, credo. I believe. And every time you stand to testify and say, I believe, you're repeating your creed.

Even though you don't believe it, you still, I mean, even though you don't think it's your creed, it's your creed. And I happen to like the old creeds because they consist of biblical truth carefully put together by some of the holiest and most learned men of the Christian era. And one item in the creed says, I believe in the communion of saints.

Now, I repeat that I don't believe in communication with the dead saints. I believe in the communion of all the saints in heaven and in earth. And they are still in our communion, and we're in their communion.

We're not within communication. That is, you cannot go into a trance and communicate with a deacon that died two years ago in Windsor. But you, if he was a Christian, you can be in full fellowship in communion with him in all that he was and stood for and where he is now.

There is an unbroken spiritual communion. You see, distance divides matter, but it doesn't divide spirit. So that you can be one in spirit with the man who died.

I'm just as much one in spirit with Dr. Sneed now, where he is as I was when he was in Orlando, Florida. When he was in Orlando, Florida, a distance of maybe 900 miles divided him and me. But now that he is in the kingdom of God, nothing divides us because there is no distance to divide.

We are one in the spirit, and so with the whole Church of Christ around the world and in heaven. Now, we sing about the communion of saints also when we sing, As she on earth hath union with God, the three in one, and mystic, sweet communion with them whose grace is one. We sing it, and yet we don't believe it.

You know, I've come to the conclusion, brothers and sisters, that we Protestants, and particularly we evangelicals, in our eagerness to be rid of formality and ritual, we have thrown out a great many gold nuggets along with some stuff that should have been thrown out. And it's mighty nice to remember that we believe in the communion of saints and that the saints of God have union now with all of God's children. That is the true ecumenicity.

The true ecumenicity that they're fighting for, the ecumenicity they're fighting for, the union of all Christians into one great super-church, is not biblical at all. We do not need to unite the Church. The true Church is already united in a mystic, sweet communion that has never been separated.

Now, this fellowship that we're talking about, this apostolic fellowship, can be divided up for us to think about. It can't be divided actually, but to think about it we can divide it. It is a fellowship of truth, and that's where I don't go along with the ecumenical brethren who would submerge all truth in order that we might get together.

Those who believed one thing would submerge it in order to please those who didn't believe it, and vice versa. And pretty soon we would get to a point where we didn't believe anything at all, or where we cautiously and tentatively believed everything. And the man who believes everything is just as bad off as the man who believes nothing.

So there is a fellowship of truth, and the fellowship of God's people is around the truth of God. It's centered in the sacred revelation of the scriptures. And I'd like to say to you now, for Avenue Road Church as far as I have anything to do with it, that we want nothing beyond the scriptures, and we want nothing apart from them.

The Holy Book of God is a gold mine that has never been fully explored, and it contains all we need. It is the apple orchard, the orange grove, it is the herd where all the cattle are, it contains all the riches that we need in heaven and earth, and this book is the center around which all our fellowship moves. And we want nothing beyond the scriptures.

That's why I don't allow or won't permit anybody to come with any visions to me. I had a vision last night, Brother Tozer. Well, that's nice.

I hope you slept well. But as for me, I have the book. It is written in the book.

It is written in the book, and that is enough. Some people used to come to me. I guess I must have been pretty nasty at one time in my life, because people stop certain things.

And maybe it was a kind of divine nastiness, I don't know. But people used to come to me and say, The Lord told me about you, and so and so. And I don't remember exactly how I disposed of them, but it was in a rather preemptory manner.

And they stopped it. They don't do it anymore. My phone line has never been down between me and God.

And if the Lord wants to talk to me, my phone's in order, and God can call me and give me his message, and I don't need somebody to have a dream and come to me and say, Now the Lord told me to tell you thus and thus. The Lord doesn't send messengers from their beds to tell me anything. He comes through the Holy Ghost and the scriptures.

We want nothing beyond the scriptures, and we want nothing less than the scriptures offer. I should like to bear down hard on that. We are not going to take the tradition of men for our norm, and we're not going to allow ourselves to stop short just because others stop short.

We want nothing less than the scriptures offer, and we firmly reject everything contrary to them. Now, it is not only a fellowship of truth, but it is a fellowship of life. We exist by an infusion of another kind of life.

You can join this church, I suppose, if you know the right things to say and you are good enough to keep out of jail. You can join the average church, if nobody knows anything really bad about you and you nod your head at the right time, you can join the average church. But that doesn't make a church, my brother.

That's a mixed multitude. The true church is a fellowship of life. Nobody's in the church except who's been baptized into the church by the life of God in the Holy Ghost.

And so any church, and the whole church, is a fellowship of life. And since you and I can't, we're not big enough inside or in our heads to deal with the whole church, we're going to have to think about this church. So we're thinking about this church as a fellowship of life.

Life comes from God, and it holds the right relations of truth. It's a fellowship of truth first because it's through truth that life comes. And when life comes, then we're baptized into one body.

Now, the difference between, say, a mule in a barn and an automobile in a garage, is the difference between something assembled and something living. The garage contains an organization. It's been all put together with nuts and bolts and all sorts of things.

And it's there, and it'll work a certain way, but it never talks to you. It never has any will of its own. It has no personality, no memory, and it has no imagination, and it hasn't any life, and it can't reproduce itself.

You can't have one automobile marry another and have little automobiles. They don't work that way. There's no life there.

But if you take the animal in the barn or in the field and it's alive, it's alive. It's an organization, too. It holds together by joints and marrow and bones and ligament and skin, but it is more than an organization.

It is an organism of life. It is with a church, just as a mule or a horse is held together by organization, so it's also this organization in the church. But there is life that makes the church a real organism, and we have this fellowship.

We share together the life of Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost, the wonderful life that couldn't stay in the grave but came out of the grave on the third day. We share that. That's ours to share equally, and it's a fellowship of a presence.

We have in the scripture the teaching that Jesus Christ is in the midst of us. Matthew 18, where two or three are gathered, I am there in the midst. John 14, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.

Matthew 28, and lo, I am with you always. Ephesians 2, 22, we are built together in the habitation of God through the Spirit. We accept this, and we believe it.

We believe that there is a presence here. It always amuses me how people come to see the new man or hear the new man. They say they are like a new voice.

So did they in Ephesus, like new voices. They were always busy seeing whatever new thing there was. Well, my brother and sister, we are not met together today in the name of either of these ministers on a platform.

We are met in the name of another who is present and unseen. But if we are sensitive enough in the Holy Ghost, we can feel his presence here. We can know he is here by theology, and we can feel him here by mystic divine communion.

So we know that he is present, and we believe it. And we want to try to have it in conscious experience, not only to know it theologically, but to have it in conscious experience, to feel that he is mine, so that when we come into the house of God, there is a hushed feeling, a sense that he is with us there. And that, then, is the fellowship of a presence.

The Lord is in his holy temple, and God is among us and is with us. This is so important that I don't know anything more important than this, that when a group of Christians meet together, they do not meet as a bunch of politicians. When they meet together, they share certain things too.

They share certain political opinions, and they share the desire to have certain men elected. They share a desire to have certain laws passed or rescinded. And I do not speak against them, and you have to have politicians to keep the world rolling, I suppose, although I really don't know whether that's so or not, but we'll not discuss that now.

But anyhow, politicians do meet, and they have reasons for meeting, and they share certain things. And all right, we don't say a word against them, we just say we know what they share. Or suppose that they love literature, people meet, literary groups meet together, as they used to in the Lions Club back in London, when Samuel Johnson and Boswell and many of the others used to meet.

They shared one thing, they shared literature and art and philosophy, and they sat and talked for hours until the early morning hours, discussing what was dear to them. So we have baseball or hockey club fans who meet and talk, and it's all right, let them talk. They have something that they share among them, and it's good.

But we have something that we share among ourselves which is infinitely better, and that is the presence of the Unseen Lord, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Divine Son, and that Outbeing, the One God, the Far Almighty, and Jesus Christ, the Only Son, and also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. So we have this communal worship, this worship together as a community, and that community of worship is only as perfect as the private worship is back home. If you take 100 people or 1,000 people who do not pray during the week and bring them together and have them attempt a fellowship of worship, they may approximate it, but they won't have much success, for you're not better because you're in church, you're only as good as you were when you came to church.

And so if 100 or 1,000 people meet together who haven't prayed all week, and their psychology is a secular psychology, and their thoughts are worldly, they'll have an awful hard time getting their thoughts sold in. I sometimes smile with appreciation at a song that says, Come, O my soul and sacred lady, and sing thy great Creator's praise, and then one part of it says, Call home thy thoughts that are overbroad.

Our thoughts are like stray cats, they just rove everywhere.

But when we realize that we're met in the fellowship of worship, our thoughts should be around the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And you'd quit sermon tasting, brother and mister, and quit testing soul over fire numbers, and begin to concentrate on the unseen wonderful presence, and worship him. It would step up the good and beauty of your Sunday worship so amazingly, because that's why we're here.

We're met to worship the Lord. But also it's a fellowship of love, and I'm going to pass that over lightly, because it's love felt toward each other, and a love felt toward God first of all, and of course toward lost men. And then it's a fellowship of service.

I'm also going to skip that thought because of time considerations, and merely say that we're not met merely to enjoy ourselves, not even spiritually to enjoy ourselves. We are met in order that we might recharge our batteries in order to serve. Now Jesus Christ was anointed of God by the Holy Ghost, and he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.

He went about doing good after he was anointed, and the anointing then was given him to enable him to go about doing good. And this we also must do, for as he was, so are we in this world. And we are here to serve.

Now we're here to serve. How much service have we rendered? Now I don't mean how many sandwiches have you buttered for the group that meets the task. I mean how much service have you rendered to the poor world.

I don't mean how many cups of coffee have you poured for people who shouldn't drink it now because they can't sleep. I mean, I drink it incidentally and sleep, but I'm not against coffee, I'm just mentioning. But I'm just wondering how much service you've rendered the poor people.

There is a series of articles running in the Toronto Times. A certain man, he is a reporter, and he's out on what you call skid row, we call it that in Chicago, and I suppose it's that here. Well, he's going about young men hunting jobs.

And I didn't know there were so many people looking for jobs. I didn't know it. I know there are five million out of work in the United States.

I understand that there are something like 400,000 here, and it's a terrible thing. I tell you, Brethren, God has given us, and when he's given us, we ought to do something. To see that we serve.

To serve in the name of the Lord. A cup of water given in the master's name will not go unrewarded. The dollar sent to care or save the Children Federation will not go unrewarded.

The dollar given to the mission cause, not only to spread the gospel, but to feed some poor kids who are displaced and whose parents maybe have been murdered in the terrible political upheavals throughout the world. I don't want to die knowing that I haven't helped anybody while I live. And it isn't enough, and I can't hide behind the fact that I preach sermons that have helped people.

Sermons that have helped people will not bring any reward in the day of the Lord's judgment if I have been able to help in another way and have not been able to do it, and have not been willing to do it. A colored brother down in the city of Chicago, a great preacher. He is an ignorant man, but a great preacher.

He used to say that there's no use to try to preach the gospel to a man who's hungry. He said, if he's hungry, give him a poke chop. He said, don't talk to Jesus about a man when all he can think of is a poke chop.

He said, give him a poke chop first and then talk to him about Jesus. That was wisdom, my brother, that was wisdom. And I believe in it, and I believe that you and I are called not only to help in a spiritual way, but to help also.

And it says at the bottom of page three here in our bulletin, a benevolent offering will be received following the communion service. That benevolent offering is for people who need help throughout the city and throughout the world. Let's give to it.

Let's not draw a careless quarter in, but let's see that we're serving with what we have. And it's the fellowship of the new creation, and I'm nearly finished. The fellowship of the new creation.

I believe in this. Listen to Hebrews 6. It says that we're partakers of the heavenly gift, and we've tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been enlightened, and partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come. It says in Hebrews 12 that ye are come unto Mount Zion, unto this of the living God.

Not ye will come when ye die, but you are now come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, judge of all, and to the spirits of just men, made perfect unto Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel. Now that, my friends, that is what ye and I are come unto. We have entered into this kingdom by the spirit we've entered into the kingdom.

Our bodies haven't got in there in the kingdom of Adam. They're still here subject to decay and sickness and accidents and dying. But our spirits are in there, and we are come unto Mount Zion.

And if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Now that's our communion. Old Terstegen says it about these priests of God, and I believe in the priesthood of believers.

I didn't get it from the Baptist, nor the Plymouth Brethren. I got it from the New Testament. I believe in the priesthood of believers.

The race of God's anointed priest shall never pass away. Before his glorious face they stand and serve him night and day. Though reason rave and unbelief flow on a mighty flood, there are and shall be to send a hidden priest of God.

His chosen soul, earthly dross consumed in sacred fire, to God's own heart their hearts ascend in flame of deep desire. The indents of their worship fills his temple's holiest place. Their song with wonder fills the heaven, a glad new song of grace.

Such a communion as this will have little place for the old creation. And the more we enjoy this communion of the new creation, the less we'll have for the old creation. If the old creation accepts you as one of them, pats your back, you're pretty sure you're not in the new creation yet, or you're not all the way in.

Those who live in the new creation and those in whom the spirit of God dwells, they're so different from the old creation that the old creation can't forgive them. You know, the church in any given period may be known by whether the world slaps you on the back, slaps you in the face. It depends, you know, upon where you're slapped.

If the world slaps you on the back, it's pretty sure that they recognize you as one of the bunch. But if they strike you in the face as they did Jesus and Paul, then it also may show that you don't belong to them and they can't overlook it. Now, this fellowship is a sacred and a serious fellowship, and it won't have too much interest for the worldly-minded, really.

It won't have too much interest for the lovers of money and the lovers of pleasure. And it won't have too much interest for the merely social religionists who belong to churches and as they belong to some club, come because they like the hymns, they like the fellowship of social things. No, you can't expect people to like a church like this.

But oh, how wonderful it is to have a fellowship where Christ is. Close your eyes and know you don't have to shout, he's here. To know that you don't have to look for truth, you have truth.

To know that you worship, truly worship, because you have truth in life and a presence. And then serve, not that you might be saved, but because you are saved and enjoy the new creation. Each one of us, each one of us will have to answer to God in searching judgment how we've helped or hindered the fellowship, the apostolic fellowship.

I pray that we may grow in union and communion until tears won't be unusual, and occasioned quiet, amen, won't be considered fanatical. I pray that we may grow in grace and in the intensity of our inner lives until we tune into the presence of Jesus Christ as easily and with as little effort as you tune into a radio station when you turn a knob. Don't you think that's what we're seeking, amen? Oh yes, not interested in anything else, not in, I couldn't be interested in anything else, this is it.

And when we receive communion around the table together in a sweet, mystic, but real way, we take of his body and drink of his blood and share in the whole.

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