

35 - Koinonia - True Fellowship

by Ben Torrey

Koinonia is a deep, committed relationship with each other and with God, involving spiritual, emotional, and material sharing, and is a powerful motivation for evangelism and a means of appropriating the power of the blood of Christ.

Duration: 8:56

Scripture: Acts 2:41

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sharing our lives and resources with one another as a way to carry out evangelism. The motivation for this is that our joy may be made complete. The speaker refers to 1 John 1, which highlights the fellowship we can have with God and with one another through sharing and caring for each other. The speaker suggests that if we truly had this deep fellowship, our proclamation of the gospel and the church itself would be more powerful. The sermon encourages reaching out to the lost not only with words and prayers, but also with practical help and love.

Transcript

Good evening, this is Ben Torrey with you again, sharing some thoughts about what it means to be in relationship with each other in Christ. You may remember that I began this short series with some comments on what I call New Commandment love, then spoke more extensively about unity within the body of Christ. Last week I spoke about forgiveness.

This evening I would like to discuss a term that is used widely in the Greek Bible. It is the Greek word koinonia. When I say the Greek Bible, of course I mean the Greek original of the New Testament, but I also mean the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint.

Briefly, the Septuagint was the Greek version of the Bible used by Greek-speaking Jews and Christians all over the world at the time of Christ. There are numerous quotes from the Old Testament in the New that are clearly quotations of the Septuagint. The name of this translation means the 70 and refers to the legend that it was translated from Hebrew into Greek by 70 scholars in 70 days.

When we want to understand an important Greek word in the New Testament, it is very helpful to see how it is used in the Septuagint. In the case of the word koinonia, this is quite important. Let's begin this exploration of our word and its meaning with a passage in First John, chapter 1, verses 3 and 4. What we

have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

These things we write so that our joy may be made complete. The word fellowship is the translation of the Greek word koinonia. It has to do with the relationship that we have with each other and with God.

Notice the sequence in this passage, that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son. This fellowship begins at our human level with each other, then moves on to our relationship with the Father and the Son. I'll come back to that later.

Let us turn now to another New Testament passage where we see the word koinonia translated a different way. Acts 2, 41 to 45. So then, those who had received his word were baptized and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.

And they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all as anyone might have need. In this passage koinonia is translated as common, in that they had all things in common. It is the same word as fellowship in the earlier passage, but here in this context we see that it has a bit more impact.

The way we use fellowship these days has really drained the word of a lot of its meaning. Often we think of fellowship as having a good time together, of sharing some refreshments perhaps at a fellowship hour after church. A fellowship hour after church would be much closer in sense to the New Testament meaning of the word if along with a cup of coffee we spent the time finding out who needed a place to live, who needed help paying off a debt or needed a new suit for a job interview and so forth.

Then having found out what the needs were we started making arrangements to take the person into our home, give him a new suit, get several people together to pay off his debt and so forth. In other words fellowship in the New Testament has to do with a deep, deep level of commitment to one another in very practical terms, sharing all that we have. Now when we can go back through the various places that this word is used throughout the Old and New Testaments we will see that it might better be translated as partnership or committed permanent fully equal relationship.

It is the word that is used to refer to those who are married, to the relationship between biological brothers and sisters, business partners and even gang members. In all these relationships there is a deep commitment of time and resources. There is a sense of equality and in many cases a lifelong bond.

All of this shows us that koinonia is a really strong word that refers to a very deep bond. Paul in his writings uses the word to refer to the deep commitment that the members of the community of faith have to one another. He speaks of how members of the churches that he started especially in Philippi share their lives and their livelihoods with him and with each other.

This was not just a spiritual sharing but a very practical material one. All through the New Testament we see that our sharing with our brothers and sisters in the Lord is a deep commitment spiritually, emotionally and materially. I'm talking about sharing our homes, our lives, our clothes, our bank accounts with each other as there is need.

Now let's go back to 1st John 1. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. These things we write so that our joy may be made complete. This passage provides both a very strong motive for evangelism and a very powerful way to carry it out.

As we prepare for the opening of North Korea and the proclamation of the gospel there, this passage provides, I believe, one of the most important ways to be successful. What is the motivation we see here? That our joy may be made complete. Did you ever think that you should preach the gospel so that you would be happier? That's why John did it.

So how did this evangelism complete his joy? By bringing people into koinonia with him and, this is the key, through him with God the Father and the Son. We encourage people to seek deep fellowship with God but do we lead them into it by first bringing them into this deep koinonia fellowship with us? Do we reach out to the lost not just with our words and our prayers but also with our lives and our property? Do we reach out with practical help and when we do does it make our joy complete? John is talking about getting a whole lot of new best friends. That's what filled him with joy.

It's love that we're talking about folks, loving and being loved in return. This leads to loving the Lord and experiencing his love. I'm going to wrap up this evening with a couple verses just a bit further down, 6 and 7. If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. To walk in this context means to go about our daily business, to live our lives. If we live our lives in the light and in fellowship with Christ, all things are open, nothing is hidden.

This then brings us into committed relationship with each other and we experience being cleaned up from our sin-filled dirty past lives. We often hear talk about the power of the blood of Christ but not much about how we appropriate that power. We do it through koinonia.

If people were brought into this type of relationship with the members of the church, they would have people walking with them day by day through all their difficulties, temptations and fallings to help them get back up and carry them forward. Imagine how powerful the proclamation of the gospel and the church itself would be if we really had this type of koinonia with each other. Good night.

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