

# Fellowship 1976

by Ian G. North

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of fellowship in the Christian life, highlighting its role in communicating the gospel, assurance, enthusiasm, and unity among believers.*

**Duration:** 53:56

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:1

**Topics:** "Fellowship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, specifically chapter 4, verses 1-6. The preacher emphasizes the importance of walking worthy of the vocation we are called to, with humility, patience, and love, in order to maintain unity and peace. The preacher compares God to a conductor orchestrating a symphony of harmony and unity in the universe. The preacher also discusses the potential breakdowns in fellowship, such as dishonesty, deceitful handling of the word of God, and poorly defined goals, and highlights the significance of fellowship in communicating enthusiasm and achievement.

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## Transcript

I wonder if we might just bow together for a moment of prayer. Our God and Father, we marvel at the gift of your love in Christ. And not only that, but we marvel at the fact that we were able to grasp that gift, that you opened our understanding so that we could grasp it and realize that gift in our own hearts.

And we praise you tonight that you have poured your love, supernatural love, love that crosses natural alienation into our hearts, so that we love not with a human love, but we love with your love. And we love one another, and by this we know that we are the children of God, because we love one another. Father, we pray now that your spirit will be poured out on us, even as we consider your word this evening.

Melt our hearts, give us a deep sense of the tenderness, the warmth, the reality of your love and of our oneness in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray, amen. Please turn with me to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4, reading verses 1 through 6. I'm going to read it first from the King James translation and then make reference to another modern translation.

Verse 1, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who

is above all and through all and in you all. In the new international version, verse 3 reads, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

I want to speak tonight about fellowship, because I believe that if there is one thing that people in the world are hungering for, it's fellowship. And many don't know where to find it. And there are lonely, lonely people all around us.

And not only out there in the world, but even within the framework of the Christian church, there are many, many people who don't know what fellowship is. And yet, as I read my Bible, fellowship is one of the most significant words in the New Testament. I want to speak first about the priority of fellowship, and then the place of fellowship, and the problems of fellowship, and, if time permits, the preservation of fellowship.

First of all, the priority of fellowship, the importance of fellowship. The word in the New Testament is koinonia. This is the word commonly translated as fellowship in the New Testament.

Koinonia means joint participation in something. That is, something which is common to all of us, which creates a unity or a social unit, a fellowship. Koinonia, fellowship, the importance of fellowship.

It's very clear in the Bible why fellowship is so terribly important, dear friends. And I want to say tonight that if there is some Christian here who does not enjoy or really know what fellowship is all about, you're really missing out on what is the richness and the fullness of salvation in Christ, because it's this that Christ has brought us into. And you have in the Scriptures, particularly in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, you have the whole beautiful metaphor of the body presented, the body of Christ.

And a book has been written by Ray Stedman called The Body Life of the Church. We are a body, and we are to function as a body functions, and we are all members, one of another. We belong to each other.

As somebody said, everyone who belongs to Christ belongs to everyone who belongs to Christ. That is the common denominator. That is the fellowship.

That is koinonia. Now the importance, the importance, the priority of fellowship. Let us see the priority of fellowship from five points of view.

First, fellowship communicates the gospel. Fellowship communicates the gospel. John chapter 17.

This wonderful chapter, John 17, portrays Jesus Christ at prayer. This was his great prayer. And how wonderful that by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is recorded for us here, and we can read a prayer which Jesus Christ actually prayed.

Notice the theme of the prayer runs through it, and I think the most common theme of this prayer in John chapter 17 is found there in verse 20:21. My prayer is not for them alone. That is not only for my chosen disciples here and now.

He says, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. And what is his prayer? Here it is, that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe, so that the world may believe that you sent me.

Fellowship communicates the gospel. That's what Jesus is praying here, that they may be one so that the world may believe. What is the inference? The inference is that if we are not one, then the world won't listen to our message.

See? Because the world is looking for the secret of oneness, of that perfect order. There are all kinds of substitutes. There are the utopias that man has created.

There's the utopia, finally, of communism, where ultimately the perfect state will emerge in which there will be one class. You see, the substitute, man's hope, emerging in different ways, looking for that perfect unity, that perfect society. And if the church of Jesus Christ does not exhibit that society, if the church of Jesus Christ does not display that perfect oneness, that fellowship, then the world will not believe.

The world will not believe our gospel. Let's face it. No wonder it was an agony in the heart of Christ to pray that prayer.

How it must have grieved him in the upper room when he was about to tell them about his forthcoming death, to hear those disciples quarreling among themselves. It says in the scriptures there was a strife among them concerning which of them was the greatest in the upper room, in that sacred moment. And so the prayer of Christ is that there might be true fellowship in order that the gospel might be credible to the world.

Secondly, the priority of fellowship is seen because fellowship communicates assurance. Assurance. First epistle of John chapter 3 and verse 14.

First John 3 14. We know. It's good to know something.

And this letter is the letter of assurance. I think the word no appears in one form or another in this brief letter of five chapters. The word no appears in one form or another 40 times.

It is the letter of assurance. And here he says, we know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers.

The surest sign that a person has passed from spiritual stagnation and death into spiritual vitality, reality, and life is that that person discovers that he has a distinct affinity for other people who love Jesus Christ. A friend of ours said to me the other day that he is finding now that he is not so uncomfortable among Christians as he used to be. Well, that's a sign of progress.

And the reason why he's feeling more at home among believers is because he has received the germ of new life in Christ. He has now become a participant in the common denominator of Christ. And he's finding that affinity with other believers.

There is no such thing in the New Testament as solitary religion. Christianity brings us together. And fellowship communicates assurance to my heart.

I know that I've passed from death into life because I love my brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the witness of the spirit to my own heart. Thirdly, we see the priority of fellowship because fellowship communicates, to use an ordinary but very significant word, enthusiasm.

And it comes from two Greek words in theos. And it is a reference to the fact that a Christian is a God-intoxicated person. He's drunk with the new wine of the kingdom.

That's why they said on the day of Pentecost, these men are drunk. And of course, Peter said they're not drunk. It's only nine o'clock in the morning.

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, you see. This is the new wine of the kingdom of God. So fellowship communicates enthusiasm.

We see this referred to in Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1 verse 27. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

Contending, striving together for the faith of the gospel. The strength that comes from being together in the ministry of the gospel. Isn't it interesting that although the apostle Paul was such a tremendous spiritual giant, and you sometimes think of Paul as the great pioneer striding out there ahead of all the men of his day in solitary grandeur blazing a trail for Christ.

And yet when you read the acts of the apostles and the letters of the apostle Paul, you very rarely find Paul alone. Very rarely. He's always with some other Christian.

And if he's not, if he happens to be alone, he's waiting for another Christian to come. And he's restless until he is joined by another. Because when we're together, that engenders enthusiasm.

I remember hearing of a pastor who became concerned about a member of his church who had fallen off from attendance and one cold winter's night, the pastor went around to the house and visited this member and he was invited in and they sat in front of a coal fire. And the pastor brought the subject forward and said, well, I'm very sorry that you haven't been attending the church worship services. Well, the man said, I figure I can worship God just as well as the people in the church.

And I'm just as good as they are. And I can worship God anywhere. I don't really need to go to church.

And without saying anything, the pastor picked up a pair of tongs and took one of the coals out of that glowing fire and put it quietly down on the hearth in front of the fire. The man wondered what was going on and they sat quiet for a while. And before long that coal grew dim and dull and black.

And then it crumbled down into a little heap of ashes and a wisp of smoke. Then the man understood the parable. If you take that coal out of the fire and set it by itself, it will lose its glow.

Fellowship communicates enthusiasm. We need each other. Not only that, but fellowship also communicates achievement.

If you turn back to the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, chapter four, verse nine, two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. Fellowship communicates achievement. Do you know Jesus always sent his disciples out? How did he send them? Two by two.

You don't have to be a brilliant mathematician to realize that if Jesus had sent his disciples out one by one in different directions, he would have covered twice as much territory geographically in his mission. But he sacrificed extensive coverage for a principle, the yoke principle of fellowship in service because fellowship conserves and engenders enthusiasm. You need another fellow, a yoke fellow in the gospel.

We need each other. Fellowship communicates achievement. And then the importance of fellowship because fellowship communicates continuity.

Fellowship communicates continuity. Second Timothy, chapter two, verse two, Paul writing to Timothy, and as you know, this letter, Second Timothy, is the last piece of writing from the hand of the apostle Paul. And Paul knows that he has not very much time left.

He says, the time of my departure is at hand. He's going to be brought before Nero, that bloodthirsty emperor, and he knows his time is short. He says, the time of my departure is at hand.

So he writes to Timothy, gives him some urgent advice. Why? Because Timothy has been his beloved fellow laborer over a period of a number of years. And in this particular letter, Second Timothy, chapter two, verse two, he says, the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

You see the continuity. Fellowship ensures that the work that God has given me to do will be reproduced in another and another, and we will become those who lay the foundations of many generations. So fellowship ensures the continuity of the ministry that God has entrusted to us.

Oh, the importance of fellowship. Now secondly, the place of fellowship. How do you create this fellowship? Where do you find this kind of oneness? Oh, beloved friends, I wish we might just pause for a moment and think about the wonder of this oneness in Jesus Christ.

This is Paul's great purpose. This is God's great purpose defined by Paul. As we see it, you know, in Ephesians chapter one, where he talks about God's eternal purpose.

God's eternal purpose. What is it? Ephesians chapter one, verse ten, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he, God, might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth, even in him. This is God's great scheme of things, to gather everything together in one glorious unity, one harmony.

How wonderful it is to attend a great concert with a famous orchestra and to see how the conductor, by the movement of the hand, orchestrates every instrument into a perfect unity and harmony of music. God is the great conductor of the universe, and it is God's purpose that all the spheres in space, all the animate and inanimate things of his creation, all of mankind, all that he has made, be brought into a perfect glorious harmony, a symphony of song and praise to his glory and his beauty and power. This is God's purpose, and God has begun this work in you and me by breaking down the middle wall of partition, by breaking down every natural alienation, alienations of race, alienations of language, alienations of social status, economic status, alienations of education.

God has broken it all down and made us one in Christ. There is neither male nor female, there is neither bond nor free, but we are all one in Christ Jesus, a beautiful, perfect harmony in Christ. Now, how do we know this? How do we experience this tremendous sense of belonging to each other, of fellowship? There's a sweet, sweet spirit in this place.

We sing, and there is. What is the secret of it? What is the place of such fellowship? Firstly, the place of such fellowship is cleansing through Calvary. That's where it begins, cleansing through Calvary.

That's where the oneness begins. Ephesians chapter 2, verses 16 through 18. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 16.

Verse 15, halfway through and then on into 16. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God.

Both of who? Both the Jew and the Gentile. If you want to think of alienation, you think of the Jew and the Gentile of the first century, where they had no dealings. There was a total chasm, religiously, emotionally, traditionally.

But God made both Jew and Gentile one. How? One new man. He did not make the Jews into Gentiles, and he did not make the Gentiles into Jews.

He made one new man. And he did it through the cross by which he put to death there his hostility. Through the cross, through the cleansing of Calvary.

Look, everything and anything that brings alienation is not of God. It's not of God. It's of the devil.

Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. May the Spirit of God show us tonight in our own hearts those areas of alienation where we feel a discomfort, an antagonism, a bitterness, a resentment towards another. Cleansing.

Sin needs to be cleansed through Calvary, the place of cleansing. Not only is Calvary the place of fellowship, but communion in the Spirit is the place of fellowship. Communion in the Spirit.

And one of the wonderful benedictions that the Apostle Paul used was in the last chapter of 2nd Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 14, where in that beautiful last verse of 2nd Corinthians, he says, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you. Now, the word communion is koinonia. Communion, the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you.

The fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you. Communion in the Spirit. Paul is referring to this also when he writes his letter to the Philippians.

And there was a beauty about that Philippian fellowship that thrilled the heart of Paul, but there was one thing that grieved him and he had a concern about it, and it was the fact that there were a couple of people in the church who were at odds with each other, and Paul was concerned about this, and he writes here in Philippians, chapter 2, if there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, or if there be any joint participation in the Spirit, fulfill ye my joy that ye be like-minded. See, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is prevailing and dominating, there will be fellowship.

If the Holy Spirit is not dominating and controlling, there will not be fellowship. There may be superficial fellowship. We may find points of interest.

We may find affinity on certain levels, maybe a golfing interest or a football interest or an interest in art or music, and there'll be fellowship on that level, but there will not be fellowship on the supernatural level. Fellowship in the Spirit. Communion in the Spirit.

Not only cleansing through Calvary, not only communion in the Spirit, but also commitment to the truth. These are the aspects that make up true fellowship. Commitment to the truth.

In John's second letter, the little tiny epistle, one chapter, second John, second John, I don't need to say chapter 1, there's only one chapter, verse 7. Many deceivers who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ

has come in the flesh have gone out into the world. Now, he's referring to a certain heresy that was prevalent in that day, which was a kind of Gnosticism, and it was a teaching that, yes, Jesus Christ was a kind of God, a demigod, and that he had not really come in the flesh, it was only an appearance of the flesh, and it was a dangerous doctrine. And so John says these deceivers have gone into the world.

Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. And notice what he says, watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you will be fully rewarded. And in relation to these deceivers, he says in verse 10, if anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, that is the true teaching of Christ, do not take him into your house.

Do not take him into your house or welcome him, says the apostle John. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. And one is reminded of the final message given by Stuart Briscoe, maranatha, anathema, anathema, if any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.

It is a reference to those who have met with Christ, they have confronted the claims of Christ, but now they have taken and distorted and perverted the truth of Christ, and they are now antichrist, and they are the deceivers that have gone out into the world. There can be no fellowship, dear friends. Again, you might on a superficial level have some kind of common interest with such people, but there can be no supernatural fellowship with such people.

There cannot. There must be commitment to the truth. And then also, I believe that for there to be a depth of fellowship, there must be not only cleansing through calvary, not only communion in the spirit, not only commitment to the truth, but also common goals, common objectives.

In Acts chapter 5, we see these apostles, and they were faced with a great deal of opposition and difficulty and conflict, but they stuck together, they kept at it, because they were moving together in perfect harmony, perfect unity. Acts chapter 5, verse 32, we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him. Everything was brought against them to smash, to destroy, to subvert the unity of the spirit, the oneness of the structure of the temple of God, but they held together.

And I have heard from those who have been, and I have read of those who have been under the fires of the terrific pressure that the monolithic communist structure brings against the church of Christ in communist nations. I've heard that you find a depth of fellowship among those Christians because of their common commitment to the mission that God has given them, a fearlessness in their witness, a commitment to common goals. And dear friends, you know, I believe that God is preparing us even more as a church to enlarge our vision, to reach out yet more, and I believe God is going to place before us as a church goals that we've never dreamed of.

I believe God is going to give to individuals here a new concept altogether of the relevance of their life to the great commission of Christ to go into all the world. What? Me go into all the world? Us as a church reach out to the whole world? Yes. Common goals.

And this will bring a new dimension to our spiritual life as a church. Fellowship. The place of fellowship.

But I'd like to also mention not only the priority and the place, but also the problems of fellowship or what you might call hindrances to fellowship, what it is that breaks into and destroys fellowship. Now we have here in this wonderful church, a tremendous sense of fellowship. Of course, you don't feel the same sense

or depth of fellowship with everyone.

You probably have your own inner circle of closer fellowship, and that is perfectly normal. There were the 70 disciples. There were the 12.

Within the 12, there were the three, Peter, James, and John, and even within them, Jesus had a special relationship with John. We have those relationships. That's there.

But God has created here at First Baptist Church a true fellowship. But it needs to be deepened. It needs to be strengthened.

And we need to be on our guard, because if Satan would do anything, it would be to destroy the fellowship of the church, to create undercurrents of division, undercurrents of rebellion, undercurrents of criticism and antagonism. And Satan would do it if he could. Hindrances to fellowship.

What it is that can break your fellowship? Some of you are in teams or you're in organizations. You are in Christian groups. You're in a youth group that works as a team, as a fellowship.

Or you're in the choir and you move, you work, you train together to serve the Lord as a team in a fellowship like that. Now what is it that can threaten the fellowship? I believe there are several things that can come in as problems to fellowship. Firstly, self-will.

Now how does self-will show itself in the context of a fellowship? This is how self-will appears. If you don't do it my way, count me out. Now when that begins to come into a fellowship, that's a problem.

If you don't do it my way, count me out. Self-will. And you may be very sincere.

You may think that your way is absolutely identical with God's way. I don't know that anybody can say that. There's some little flaw somewhere.

There's some point for give and take. And that's why the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4 verse 5, gives a beautiful piece of advice in this context of establishing fellowship. In Philippians 4 verse 5 he says, let your gentleness be evident to all the Lord is near.

And in King James translation, let your moderation, I think it is. Matthew Arnold translates it, sweet reasonableness. That's a good translation.

Let your sweet reasonableness be evident to all the Lord is at hand. This is no time for me to stick my heels in and demand my own way and establish my self-will. No.

That will break fellowship, dear friends. It must never be that. Our Indian brothers, incidentally, maybe I can mention this.

I'm sure Dr. Stanley would be happy for me to do so. That next Sunday, sharing in the service with Dr. Stanley will be one of India's most outstanding evangelists and a mighty man of God. And he will be here with us and he's going to speak also on the chapel hour.

Augustine Silens of India. Don't miss next Sunday morning and pray much for it. And with him is another brother from India, Prakash, his name.

And I took them around to several missionary conferences and churches to speak. And for Prakash, it was his first time in America. And when we came to an intersection, there was this inverted triangle with the word yield.

And he read that and started laughing. He said, why did they put that there? He couldn't understand what that had to do with traffic regulations. Well, then he understood.

Of course, I explained it means you have to give way to someone coming on that highway. But every time we see that notice, he would say yield. And he took it as a word from God to his own heart.

Yield. This is one thing that we as Christians find hard to do, to yield. Yieldingness, sweet reasonableness, self-will will destroy fellowship.

Then also self-seeking will destroy fellowship. Now, what is self-seeking in the context of fellowship? Self-seeking is using the other person or using the fellowship for my own personal advantage. See, that's self-seeking.

To use the fellowship or use that other person who has been committed to you in fellowship, to use that person for my own personal gain. Or how we need to search our own hearts. So subtly, so easily, personal ambition, personal gain can come into a fellowship situation and you can find yourself cultivating fellowship to gain some other end.

Personal gain, personal gain. Watch it. I think we see this in its ultimate form in Judas Iscariot.

I can see Judas there with a big grin on his face when all the crowd are saying, come on, let's make Jesus king. And they've just fed the 5,000 and Judas already has stars in his eyes. He can see himself sitting there as Christ's vice regent in the kingdom.

You see, he joined up with Jesus Christ, but when he saw it going down the drain from the human point of view, he got out with what he could. You see, he was in it for self-seeking purposes. If there's anybody who has joined First Baptist Church for self-seeking gain, and sometimes people join a church for business purposes or for political purposes, or if you join this fellowship for some purpose that involves your own advantage in some way, apart from what we heard of last Sunday night, seeking those heavenly things for some personal gain, it will destroy the fellowship.

It's a hindrance. It will break the fellowship. Thirdly, dishonesty will break fellowship.

Dishonesty. It's been my privilege to work with other men in a team relationship. I value team work immensely, but it has its difficulties because it involves yielding.

You can't stand on your own as in married life. A single person sometimes goes through a time of great adjustment in marriage because it involves yielding. And I know what it is to work in a close commitment with other brothers in a team.

But if dishonesty comes into that relationship, dishonesty will destroy confidence and destroy fellowship. It can happen so easily. It happened, for example, in the case of Samuel.

Here was Samuel and David. I'm sorry, Samuel and Saul. Samuel the prophet had appointed Saul.

If you look back at 1 Samuel chapter 15, you find these men who had been called into a wonderful relationship. Here is Samuel, the prophet of God. Here is Saul, the administrator, the king.

And they're working as a team. Samuel, the prophet of God, and Saul, responsible for civil administration. And they're working together as a team.

But then dishonesty comes in, and what happens? There's a total fragmentation. 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse 13. Samuel came to Saul.

Saul said to him, Blessed be thou of the Lord. It's wonderful to see you, Samuel. We can renew our old fellowship.

I've performed the commandment of the Lord. But you see, it was a lie. It was a lie.

And if in a fellowship we are not honest with each other, we'll destroy confidence. It'll collapse. What was Saul doing? He wanted to impress this Samuel.

In the context of a fellowship, it's easy for us to impress the other members of the group. And to do it, we exaggerate what we have done. And we say, yes, we've done this, we've done that.

But it's a lie. What does this bleating of sheep in my ears mean, said Samuel? You see, it was a disobedience on the part of this man Saul. And the result, tragically, verse 35 of that same chapter, Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death.

Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul a total break of fellowship. You see, no more confidence possible. Dear friends, root out dishonesty.

Root out exaggerations from your heart and life. It's terrible in Christian circles to see people trying to impress others by exaggerating the work that they have done or the results of their ministry. It is an affront to the glory of God.

And God said, I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another. When a man begins by dishonesty to take glory to himself, the judgment of God and the curse of God will be on that life. The apostle Paul says, we have renounced dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.

Fourthly, there can be a breakdown in fellowship because of poorly defined goals. And I won't linger long on this, but I believe that in some fellowships and some churches where there has been a tremendous amount of enthusiasm engendered and inspiration and a lot of exhortation and people are really enthused and they're all ready to go, before long it all goes down like a balloon that's been pricked. And there's a great sense of letdown and disappointment and frustration because there have been no clearly defined goals set before that fellowship.

And people have become frustrated. It is no use pumping up somebody's enthusiasm and showing them what their spiritual gifts are and getting them excited about serving God unless we provide the means for them to find full expression for the gift that God has given them. I believe the church of Jesus Christ exists to help people discover their spiritual gift and not only that, but to channel those gifts into useful service.

And so you have the church as a ministering body moving out for God along commonly defined goals. And this makes for fellowship, but let there be a breakdown of those goals and there'll be a waste of time, a

waste of energy, a waste of fellowship. There will be dissatisfaction and there will be frustration and the fellowship will disintegrate.

Fellowship is praying together, planning together, and performing together. I believe every local church is God's headquarters for world evangelization and as a church we should be praying together, planning together, and performing together, moving for God. May God lead us as a church into all that he has for us as a church.

And I would say probably there are many others. I would mention just one other. If there comes a loss of consideration and love, then of course there will be a breakdown of the fellowship.

The fellowship will only hold as a truly spiritual fellowship as long as there is true, genuine love expressed in gentleness and consideration for one another. And that's why the apostle Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 2, bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. If we don't bear each other's burden, we are not fulfilling the law of Christ.

That's all. And there can be no true fellowship. There'll be a break in fellowship.

These are some of the hindrances to fellowship. God is speaking to our hearts. Praise him for what he has done, what he has created here in our hearts and lives.

But listen tonight. Is there something, is there something, anything, anything in your heart preventing fellowship with another believer tonight? Anything? Can you think of one other believer, whether here in this church, maybe present or absent, or maybe in another church? Can you think of one other believer and you cannot go to that believer with a smile and with love and you cannot express your sense of oneness with that believer? Can you think of one other person like that? Can you? If so, there is sin. There is sin in your heart, in that person's heart, possibly.

Jesus Christ did not wait for us sinners to get everything right towards him before he took the initiative. He came, the scriptures say, while we were yet what? Sinners. He came, God commended his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

That's supernatural love. That's God love. God's love always takes the initiative.

And if God's love is not free to take the initiative in and through your life, it means that there is a hindrance in your heart, in your life, that needs to be dealt with and removed by confession, perhaps by restitution, by cleansing. And when that's removed, the floodgates are open. The love of God flows like a river.

It happened some years ago in India that a number of Christian leaders, missionaries, and national Christians met together in the city of Akola in North India to pray together about establishing an organization for the promotion of revival and evangelism in India. And they were to form an organization called the Evangelical Fellowship of India. Well, of course, in any organization you have to chalk out the organizational structure, the offices of the organization, the doctrinal statement.

And when it got down to the doctrinal statement, they were progressing along, and then they came to one point of doctrine, and a missionary made a suggestion as to how that particular doctrinal statement might be formulated. And when he finished, a missionary on the other side of that group, and there were about 120 present in that meeting from all parts of India, another missionary stood up and he angrily took issue with his fellow missionary over the formulation of that doctrinal point. And the other missionary stood his

ground, and this other one became very angry and spoke angry words about the brother, insinuating certain things about him because of his difference of doctrinal status.

A little later in that conference, Norman Burns, an old missionary from Africa who had been in the revival movement that came to his part of Africa, shared with the group. And he shared with the group the truth that had dominated in that great movement of the spirit, and that was the truth that if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship. We have fellowship.

That fellowship was the great mark of that revival movement in Africa, and that was created and it was preserved by walking in the light with each other in perfect honesty, perfect transparency, perfect humility. And he shared this testimony, and the hearts of those who were present were melted and broken down before God as they hungered and thirsted for the moving of the spirit of God in their own midst and in their nation of India. And when he had finished, there was a kind of sound of somebody shaking and sobbing, and a gentleman stood up, and it was none other than that missionary who had taken strong issue with his brother.

And with deep emotion and tears running down his cheeks, he crossed over the church and went to his missionary brother and begged his forgiveness for his angry words and his hostile attitude. And he asked his fellow, please forgive me, please forgive me. And they embraced, they embraced, and there was fellowship.

And do you know what happened? The Holy Spirit came moving into that place, and that was the beginning of a great moving of God's spirit in India. And it began in that place when an old seasoned servant of God unlocked the key to spiritual blessing, followed by the obedience of one man who began to walk in the light with his brother. It can happen to you tonight as you put away those hindrances to fellowship, put them away, and let God have his way in your heart.

Let God have his way in your heart. Let's pray together.

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